Are You Ready for a Proofreader?

As an author this question can be hard to answer. There are many factors that go into deciding whether a proofreader is right for you at this moment, but here I'll try to demystify some of the confusion that lies around this question, and help point you in the right direction.

The main points to consider when answering this are intention, budget, and time restraints.

Overview of the publishing process

Broadly, there are three key areas in the publishing process: text, book design/production, and sales/marketing. In a traditional publishing house, the timeline for these three areas will overlap, but as a self-publishing author you may need to focus on one area at a time (or hire professionals for each, if your budget allows).

For the purposes of this quick guide, we'll focus on the first area, the text, which can be broken down into:

- Creation (writing your first draft)
- Editing and feedback (from beta readers and critique partners)
- Development (from professional manuscript critiques and developmental editors)
- Layout (using a typesetter)
- Polishing (using a proofreader).

Intention

This is probably the biggest factor in deciding what services you need for your project. Broadly, intentions fall into four categories: traditional publishing, self-publishing (big goals), self-publishing (small release), and personal.

Traditional publishing

For many authors, seeing their book in Waterstones or the shelves of their local libraries is the ultimate goal, and traditional publishing is often the approach people take (though this is becoming less popular as self-publishing services grow in popularity).

The traditional publishing houses will do most of the work for you with regards to book design/production and sales/marketing, and will likely have in-house editors who will take much of the work from development onwards.

But that's not to say an editor (especially a developmental editor if you are a first-time author) isn't necessary. They will be able to highlight elements of your book that will take it from the slush pile of a literary agent to the printers at a publishing house.

Conor Powell
EDITING

Self-publishing (with big goals)

As I mentioned earlier, as a self-publishing author you will have to cover all three areas of the publishing process, which can become very expensive, meaning a big budget which allows you to hire professionals will (often) help.

If your goal is to sell thousands of copies through multiple formats (ebook, paperback, hardback) then investment in making your book as good as it can be will help massively. Some areas of this work you can do yourself, if you're willing to learn, but it is not advisable to proofread your own work; once familiar with text, our eyes struggle to see what is there, instead favouring what they *expect* to be there.

As a self-publisher with big goals, a proofreader will be crucial in making your work shine.

Self-publishing (with small goals)

Not everybody plans to become a best-seller; some authors are perfectly content with their book just being available. If you don't see your book as a new source of income, then you may not need all of the services a self-publishing author with big goals might. Beta readers will still be a useful source of advice, and you may wish to hire professional editors from there too.

Authors creating limited release books, such as year books, members-only releases, and family souvenirs may also fall into this category.

For many authors in this area, the text is more important than the artwork, and the services they render will reflect that. The two key professional services for these authors will likely be developmental editors and proofreaders, but hiring a typesetter to manage layout and enlisting the help of a printer will likely be on the list too.

Personal

Writing can be a cathartic exercise for many, and often they will be the only person to read their work. Even so, some authors in the area may wish to hire a professional to help give their personal projects a real shine.

Authors writing for personal or cathartic reasons may hire a proofreader to help bring their projects to the next level.

Budget

Hiring a skilled professional isn't cheap, and the services of an editor are no exception. Budget is a huge limiting factor for many authors, and can often be a reason some will opt for traditional publishing over self.

That said, with the right knowledge, even a relatively small budget can yield great results – especially if the author is willing to put in the hours themselves.

Breaking the critique partner/beta reader period into round with an edit in between can often help go a long way to ironing out issues with plot, pacing, and characters, reducing the need for a

developmental editor (perhaps replaced with a somewhat cheaper professional manuscript critique). But, as mentioned before, proofreading your own work is never a good idea as even the keenest eyes will miss some silly mistakes.

Ultimately, the lower the author's budget, the more innovative they may have to be in publishing their book. The cost of printing can be reduced by distributing ebooks with no/a limited run of paperbacks, and services such as Amazon's Kindle Create have free software for formatting such a book.

A word of warning: read customer reviews and be sure to check for credentials before agreeing to a service. The old saying is true – especially in the editing world – you get what you pay for. Unfortunately, the publishing industry is no different to any other; there are people looking to make a lot from doing little, and as a self-publishing author it is down to you to do your homework.

Time restraints

Everybody wants their work to be completed as quickly as a possible, and with the advent of Print on Demand (POD) services, many self-publishing authors create tight deadlines for themselves.

Unfortunately, there is no way around the fact that editing takes time. The average reading speed for editors of all kind – developmental; copyeditor; proofreader – vary from project to project, dependant on the level of amendment required. An eight hour day of heavy editing can see several chapters completed, but even with this it is unlikely an editor will return a 100,000 word novel in 5 days.

Many of us freelancers take on multiple clients at a time, and fitting an urgent edit or tight deadline into our schedules can be next to impossible. For this reason, many will charge a premium for tight deadlines or out of hours edits.

It can be worth contacting an editor several weeks before they are needed on a project to ensure they can hit your deadline. If not, you may be paying a premium for speedy turnarounds.

Remember: editors need rest too, and an overworked or rushed editor can be as prone to mistakes as the rest of us!

With the information given here in mind, hopefully now you can decide whether you are ready for a proofreader, or if maybe your book needs a bit more time before being professionally polished.

If you're ready for a proofreader, or if you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me by email, the form on my website, or, for enquiries with tighter deadlines, by phone.

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EDITING