



DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

What is developmental editing?

Your writing, especially if you expect it to be a long term project, like a novel or a non-fiction book, is not the best it can be until it has been edited. If you write perfectly already, in a way that is exactly suited to the needs of the reader, then you don't need a developmental editor. (If you think that's you, good luck, but you're probably fooling yourself.)

Developmental editing is in many ways the most important type of editing. If you skip a copy edit or proofread, you'll get Amazon reviews that say, "How did this book make it past an editor?" or, "This author seriously needed a good editor; I could barely finish the book." If you skip a developmental edit though, you might not get Amazon reviews at all, because readers may become so frustrated or disinterested by problems in the story that they'll put it down. Worst case scenario? They do review it, but so negatively that no-one else will buy it.

You've worked hard on your book, but like any other skill you have to learn your trade. Or perhaps you have got a great idea for a book – fiction or non-fiction – but you don't know where to start. That blank piece of paper can be very intimidating, whether you are writing your life story, your thesis, or a wonderful idea for a new novel. Give it the care, attention, and investment it deserves, and get yourself a developmental editor to help you make your work the best it can be.

The job of a developmental editor is to help you to make your book better. Developmental editors are like coaches. They look at what you wrote - or are planning to write - and work with you to determine what needs improvement. That could be anything from ideas to storytelling to organisation to sentences and words. Don't think of a developmental editor as a person who corrects the text. Think of them as a person who stands-in the for the reader, identifies what is not working well, and suggests solutions: a partner in the development of your book.

Why would you need a developmental editor?

If you're already working with a publisher, you have an editor there as your main contact. Decades ago, that editor would work closely with you to help you develop the manuscript. But editors in publishing rarely have the time for such detailed help these days. They expect you to deliver a publishable manuscript, and that is basically all down to you. Ask your editor if they'll spend time coaching you on the manuscript or if you should get an outside editor; they'll often encourage you to hire a developmental editor on your own.

These days, with the advent of amazing self-publishing opportunities such as those offered by Amazon or Lulu, working with an editor is a must. Just about every type of

writing can benefit from developmental editing. Here are some types of writing that developmental editors often work with:

- Novels
- Short stories
- Novellas and novelettes
- Nonfiction books
- Articles
- Dissertations (providing your university allows this).

What can I expect from my developmental editor?

Well, what do you want? Developmental editing involves feedback on the big picture of a novel, non-fiction book, or other writing piece. A developmental editor will critique structural elements like the plot, characters, theme, and organisation of ideas as well as issues such as:

- Your book's genre. What type of story are you writing? What elements do readers expect from that type of story? Are those elements present in interesting and innovative ways?
- Your book's structure. Is there a beginning, middle and end? Does the story include all the elements of storytelling, starting with an causal incident and building to a climax and resolution? For a non-fiction book, have you communicated your point clearly, and organised the ideas in a logical flow, building from the start of the book to the end?
- Your book's characters. Do you have too many characters, or too few? What are their goals? Do they make interesting choices to achieve those goals? Do those choices show strong characterisation and move the plot forward? Do they feel 'real'? Do they leap off the page and stay in your imagination afterwards, or are they two-dimensional?
- Your book's theme. What is this book really about? Why did you choose to write it, and what makes it important to you? What do you want readers to take away from it? How can you make that theme more powerful and impactful throughout the story?
- Your book's point of view. What point of view are you using in your book? Is it an effective choice for your story? Is it consistent throughout the book?
- Your readers' expectations. Will your book satisfy your readers? Will it stand out on the shelves as a book that brings something new and exciting to its genre?
- Are you using graphics, images and factual elements appropriately?
- How do you motivate yourself to get started, or to keep going?

This is not a complete list. If it's a problem associated with getting the manuscript to be done and to be excellent, the developmental editor can help with it.

A developmental editor will give you holistic feedback about your entire book that will guide you through re-writing your next draft. They'll tell you where your book's structure is strong and where it needs more work. They'll also give you suggestions for how to think about making those changes. It's up to you what specific changes you want to make in your story – it's advice, not a commandment.

What's your weakness?

You know your writing has flaws. Maybe you're repetitive. Maybe you need help telling stories well. Your sentences might run on and on, or maybe, like one author I worked with, in describing a scene set at night, the word "darkness" appeared in every other sentence. Often we can't see our own weaknesses. That's where the developmental editor can help. It's a lot better to get them in at the start than to find out what those weaknesses are after your book is in print.

What is developmental editing NOT?

It's NOT beta Reading

Beta readers aren't usually professional editors. Instead, they're regular readers, the kinds of people whom you'd like to buy your book after it's published. Beta readers are volunteers who will read your next-to-final draft of your manuscript. They'll tell you how your intended audience might respond to your book. Beta readers will probably give you substantive feedback on whether they like the characters or whether the plot twists make sense. Some beta readers might also pick up on typos as they go. But the chances are, it will be to their own particular preferences – and just because your work doesn't meet those preferences doesn't mean it isn't any good. Think about your own group of friends. In all probability their taste in books differs widely. I'm the only person I know who has read JRR Tolkien's third master work 'The Silmarillion' twice. I love fantasy, but I rarely like Sci-Fi. Go figure. By the way, that's for personal reading, not for editing work. Beta readers are not a substitute for professional editing.

It's NOT ghost writing

A ghost writer is someone who is hired to write a book for another person. Often, the person has a great idea for a book and knows all the content they want to include. They may not be a writer themselves though, and so they hire an experienced writer to turn their ideas into a publishable book. This is often the way autobiographies are written. Ghost writing and developmental editing both involve a big picture look at the organisation and structure of a book. But a developmental editor won't write your book for you. Instead, they'll give you the feedback and help you need to write it yourself and to build your craft on the way.

When should you get developmental editing?

To be used to best effect, a developmental editor needs to be involved early in your writing process. There's not much point asking for a developmental edit when you consider your book to be ready to go to the publishing stage. If you're going to be doing what may be substantive re-writes, you don't want that to take place after you have spent hours toiling over a hot keyboard. Your developmental editor will give you high-level feedback on the shape of your story. It's best to do this before you get too deep into fine tuning details, like polishing your words, sentences, or grammar. This is particularly important if you're writing your first book. Either get the developmental editor involved at the outset, or at the latest, after the first draft. Your editor will give you invaluable feedback about story structure, genre, and the shape of your book, and you'll get the most out of your editing process by getting that feedback early on.

If you're an experienced writer who has written many books, a developmental edit would probably make more sense after the first or second draft. You may already be familiar with some of the most substantive changes you want to make between the first and second drafts, and after you have done all that you can with your story, your editor will help you take your book to the next level.

How much will it cost?

Well, that is the really big question, isn't it? As an editor, I particularly want to work with authors who can't afford the prices that some companies charge. In addition, I will offer you the complete package – developmental, copy editing and proofreading in one great deal. I found one company online that suggested that the price for the developmental edit alone for a 50,000 word manuscript, would be somewhere in the region of \$5,000 and \$20,000. The cost of the copy edit and proofread would be on top of that! Well, I'm sorry, but I don't think that there are many people out there who can afford that sort of money and, to be honest, it isn't really the sort of market for me. As I have said elsewhere, I particularly want to encourage new writers who have brilliant ideas inside them, who I can help to bring that to fruition. The price that you will pay me will be, I guarantee:

- One that you will find affordable;
- One that you will be happy to pay for the results you will get;
- One that is based on what you need. So, if you need the lightest of touches on your work, you will pay less than someone who needs the full 'a la carte' menu.