



THE FOUR STAGES OF EDITING AND PROOFREADING

Editing and proofreading are different steps in the process of revising a text. Editing can involve major changes to content, structure and language, but proofreading focuses only on textual errors and inconsistencies. Often a text will go through several stages of editing before it is proofread. The table below shows the theoretical stages in the editing process; theoretical because, in practice, one or more of these steps may be combined.

Stage	Type of editing	What it involves
Step 1:	Content editing	Revising an early draft of a text, often making significant changes to the content and moving, adding or deleting entire sections (also known as developmental or substantive editing).
Step 2:	Line editing	Revising the use of language to communicate story ideas or arguments as effectively as possible. This might involve changing words, phrases and sentences and restructuring paragraphs to improve the flow of the text or picking up continuity errors.
Step 3:	Copy editing	Polishing the re-written text, looking at individual sentences to ensure correct grammar, clear syntax and stylistic consistency, often following the rules of a specific style guide such as APA or MLA or a 'house style'.
Step 4:	Proofreading	Carefully checking for any remaining errors such as misspelled words, misplaced punctuation and word repetition. In print publishing, proofreaders are also responsible for checking the formatting (e.g. page numbers and line spacing).

Do I need to go through every stage?

It depends on the type and length of text. You don't need to strictly follow the division of tasks shown above, but a good piece of writing will nearly always go through a similar process of revising, editing and proofreading, albeit perhaps incorporated into fewer steps. There is often more overlap between the steps. My editorial services, for example, can combine copy editing and proofreading into a single stage (sometimes called proof-editing), where grammar, syntax and style are addressed at the same time as minor spelling and punctuation errors. However, if significant re-writes are required, it is often recommended that a final proofread be undertaken, because new typographical errors can be introduced during the earlier processes.