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When You Need the Very Best

Your Guide to Ghostwriting, Editing, and Proofreading

Since the days when monks wrote on parchment, people have needed documents to be written. You may require a full-length book, a business white paper, or text on your company website. Perhaps your book or report must be written from scratch, or you may have existing text that needs improvement. You may be an accomplished writer who needs a second set of eyes on your document. But in every case, you want your words to be the very best they can be. You need to find a professional who can help you.

Here's a quick guide to ghostwriting, editing, and proofreading that can help you to determine whom you need to hire and what you can expect.

Ghostwriter

When you don't have the time or the expertise to write your book or report, you can hire a ghostwriter. This skilled professional collaborates with you to bring your ideas to the printed page. The ghostwriter will write the book based on your input, and depending upon the agreement you will retain full copyright. The book may be sold or offered under your name alone, or you may choose to credit your ghostwriter.

When hiring a ghostwriter, look for someone who has a **track record of success**. Don't rely on vague assertions. A professional ghostwriter will be able to provide links to specific books on Amazon or Barnes & Noble, and explain his or her role in creating the book. For example, I ghostwrote the introduction to the phenomenally successful business management book *Best Practices in Talent Management* by Louis Carter. That's what I did and I'm proud to provide a link to the book on Amazon.

Ghostwriters are usually hired on the basis of a **word count**. For example, if you were to hire a ghostwriter to write a book about how to start a law firm, you would need to specify the word count. Non-fiction books, such as self-help books and memoirs, can be nearly any length above 25,000 words. E-books can be as few as 10,000 words. For fiction, a short novel is generally between 50,000 and 80,000 words. A full-length novel is above 80,000 words.

Specifying the number of pages can be difficult, because the page count will vary depending upon size of the text, margins, and chapter breaks. However, for a typical document in 12-point Times New Roman with one-inch margins, you can expect to get about 500 words per page. So a

document of 200 typewritten pages would be about 100,000 words. But when hiring a ghostwriter, it is always better to agree on a word count. It is measurable and there is no ambiguity.

A ghostwriter may give a price estimate based on a flat rate for the project, or based on a price per word (say, ten cents per word, which is average). Good ghostwriters do not get involved with graphics or cover art; writing is a highly specialized occupation and most good writers just write.

Editor

You hire an editor when you have a complete or nearly complete book or report. The editor reads the entire document and helps you to organize and present your thoughts as effectively as possible. The editor may suggest adding material or deleting passages that aren't effective. In this process it pays to have an open mind, because many authors are sensitive about their work and it can be difficult to be objective. You want an editor who is easy to work with. You do not want an editor who is bossy and won't explain why he or she favors certain changes. It's your book and your name on the cover!

Editors can be paid a flat rate for the project, or can be paid by the hour. A good editor will gladly give you an estimate in advance. Then, as the work progresses, you should review the results and only when you know you are in agreement should you continue. There should never be any surprises. Ask your editor to use the "track changes" feature on your word processing application.

A **full edit** means that the editor works in partnership with the author to develop and shape the text and the content

A **copy edit** means that the editor will look at every aspect of your document. Does it make sense? Is it readable? A copy editor may re-write sections or suggest major changes. The "five Cs" summarize the copy editor's job: Make the copy clear, correct, concise, comprehensible, and consistent. Copy editors may also provide formatting services.

A **line edit** is when the editor ensures that every sentence reads properly, but will not address larger issues of theme or continuity.

When deciding questions of grammar and punctuation, I use the *Chicago Manual of Style*. It is a highly regarded industry standard. But there are others, and you may specify to your editor which style you want to follow. No matter which style you choose, the key is *consistency*. For example, if you choose to write out numbers below ten (one, two, three, as opposed to 1, 2, 3), this should be done consistently throughout the document. But in cases where there is some ambiguity, the bottom line is always readability: does it make sense?

At the end of the process you can expect a polished document. But if the work is substantial (say, over 5,000 words), minor mistakes may remain. This is because no matter how skilled, human beings tend to read what they *expect* to read, and will miss mistakes. Quality documents, such as published books, professional websites, and business reports, are often read by several different people.

A professional editor will always work closely with you to preserve *your* voice and *your* personal vision. Your story is unique, and whether your style is chatty or hard-boiled or academic, your editor should always be in tune with your expressive voice.

Proofreader

When you have a finished book or document, you hire a proofreader to check for mistakes of grammar and spelling, to fact check, and to correct typographical errors. A proofreader will not interject his or her editorial opinion about the content of your work.

Do not think that proofreaders are not highly skilled. A good proofreader will know correct punctuation (when to place a semicolon instead of a comma, for example). A good proofreader will have a thorough knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar (when to say “ensure” rather than “insure,” or “farther” rather than “further”). In addition, if your document is industry-specific, such as a financial advisor website, your proofreader must be familiar with the technical language. These details are very important to any professional document. One needless mistake on your business website or in your book may cause a reader to go elsewhere.

Like editors, proofreaders can be hired on a per-word basis or by the project. You should get a firm estimate in advance. Unlike editing, which can be highly subjective, proofreading is more straightforward and therefore it’s easy to give an accurate estimate.

A word about typos

Your professional proofreader will make every effort to correct every typo—spelling, punctuation, capitalization, quotes, apostrophes, dashes, and spacing. But I always tell my clients that no human being, no matter how much you pay them, can catch every typo, even seemingly obvious ones. You need multiple sets of eyes. In offices where I work on key documents we always have at least four people sign off on each page of text. And person number four always finds mistakes! If your document or book needs to be perfect, you owe it to yourself to have it proofed by at least two people other than yourself.

What You Can Expect

The most important thing to remember when hiring a ghostwriter, editor, or proofreader, is that the job will go much more smoothly if you are very clear in your instructions and expectations. Agree on the word count. Do not ask an editor to “add something if you think it needs it.” The fact is that any document of any length can be expanded into a book. And any book can be made into a longer book.

An editor is like a taxi driver. You get in the cab and the meter starts running. When you arrive at your destination you pay the agreed-upon price. If you say, “Can you drive me another ten miles?” that’s fine, but the cabbie will keep the meter running. It’s only fair.

Choose a provider who has a flawless working knowledge of American and/or U.K English. You get exactly what you pay for. Countless clients have hired cut-rate editors and writers only to receive poor-quality work that is riddled with elementary mistakes. Then they have to hire a professional to do the work again, and the job ends up costing more than if they had hired the pro in the first place.

Remember that your website or report or book may be read by thousands of people. It's your reputation and your name on the cover. It's worth it to make sure that every word is perfect. I invite you to contact me to discuss how I can help you bring your project to completion.

When you hire an editor or proofreader to work on your document or manuscript, there is one ironclad rule:

No one can edit a pdf file.

You must provide the editor or proofreader with a text document such as a Word document. The less formatting in the document, the better.

The ONLY exception to this is when you have a finished product ready to print and you need a proofreader to proof it for minor typos or production mistakes prior to publication.

One final note about formatting for publication

Today, books can be released in various formats: as e-books, print-on-demand (POD), as pdfs, or other formats. Generally, the fee that you pay to an editor or ghostwriter does **NOT** include final formatting for publication. This is because there are dozens of elements that need to be coordinated, including headers, page numbers, margins, section breaks, indexes, and tables of content.

When the editing or proofreading job is complete, most editors will deliver to you a standard letter-sized Word document with one-inch margins. All the internal features, such as headlines and subheads, will be in place. Their job is done. If and when you need your document formatted for publication, then this is a separate job with a separate fee. You can negotiate this with your editor.