

## Copyediting, Developmental Editing, Literary Editing

Allow me 500 words on the difference between these three types of editing.

Copyediting is often associated with a particular style manual—such as the *Chicago Manual of Style*, my favorite. When a copyedit is what the client needs, they're looking to ensure consistency in spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization. The copy edit could also flag objectively incorrect statements, ambiguous meanings, and contextual inconsistencies. You might think of the copy editor as an intensely close proofreader, approaching the manuscript with a jeweler's eyeglass (a *loupe*, by the way).

Every kind of writing meant for public consumption depends upon copy editors. They're the last people whose eyes should be on the work before it goes into production.

Developmental editing is larger scale editing that can substantially alter the shape and content of the work. It may involve extensive rewriting and reorganization. The intention of the developmental editor is not to approach the manuscript with a jeweler's eyeglass, but with an eye toward its overall structure and sense. Ideally, developmental editing is done before the copyediting begins.

There can be some overlap between the two types of editing; both copy editors and literary editors will point out various kinds of repetition, in diction, syntax, sentence structure. And both kinds of

editors may call attention to what might be called *writers' tics*—habits that call attention to themselves and pull the reader away from the campaign at hand. Both kinds of editors should be capable of flagging glaring mistakes and perhaps suggest ways the author may improve sentences. Both kinds of editors will call attention to confusing or

overly complex passages, inconsistencies in clothing, setting, chronology.

But a copy editor is the one who fixes comma splices or who makes sure that we spell “Okay” and “tee shirt” and consistently throughout the text.

I think of Literary Editing as a third kind of editing. A case study on the foraging sphere of the Western Lowland Gorilla might need a developmental editor, but it probably doesn’t need a Literary Editor.

Like developmental editing, literary editing has to do with the content and form of the manuscript, but the Literary Editor is also concerned with the features (or elements) of fiction, such as point of view, plot development, structure, characterization, voice and style, language, sentence structure & variation, speaker tags and holes in the plot. In poetry, the literary editor’s attentions are on poetic devices, structure, language, image, enjambment.

It is important for the client to understand what kind of editor they need. Not every editor is effective at all three kinds of editing. I have dozens of editors on my staff at *Polyphony Lit* who are amazing copy editors, but most young writers and poets are in greater need of developmental and literary editors, than they are copy editors. And there are some great developmental and literary editors (as well as great poets and writers) don’t care as much about spelling and punctuation as they do about poetic devices and features of fiction.