

## [Working with Your Editor: What to Expect When Your Book Is in Copyediting](#)

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Guest post by Amanda Frost and Anastasia Wraight, Project Editors, Michigan State University Press

Especially for new authors, it's natural to feel a little intimidated by the prospect of having your work copyedited. Copyeditors offer rewriting suggestions, and they pose queries and notes that may sound like they're questioning the author's expertise. Their work can feel intrusive. But the copyeditor's real responsibility is to serve as one of the last readers before your book goes to press. They ask questions to help make sure what you have to say comes across clearly. They clean up typos, punctuation, citations, and any inconsistencies so that these don't distract from your work. They want you and your book to be successful.

In order to make the copyediting of your book run smoothly, there are a number of things you will want to know and do. Generally, publishing a book differs from preparing a dissertation or an article. Most importantly, you will not receive advice or feedback for refining or further exploring your ideas from your copyeditor; there will not be multiple rounds of writing and revision. Any developmental editing will have been taken care of at this point. Your book is considered complete when it goes to the copyeditor. Although your production coordinator and copyeditor will be aiming to reconcile any inconsistencies, correct grammatical or punctuation errors, and fix typos and misspellings that may have slipped in during the writing, your copyeditor will not make or suggest major revisions to your book.

### **Copyediting Your Manuscript**

Although your manuscript should be considered final, you will be able to review it twice before it is published, once during copyediting and once during proofreading. During copyediting, you will be reviewing the copyeditor's corrections of your manuscript; during proofreading, you will be reviewing the typeset pages of your book. During copyediting, you will be working with Word files (or, rarely, another word-processing program). While you are working with the copyedited manuscript, you will have a degree of freedom to make some changes and corrections to your manuscript. However, once your book has been typeset, you will not be able to make significant changes beyond correcting typos, misspellings, and the occasional misstated fact. At this stage, you are seeing what your book will look like when it is printed (either in a PDF file or, sometimes, on paper). Proofreading is not the time to rethink major aspects of your book or to polish your prose. This is why it is important to complete your manuscript before you submit it to your publisher. And why it is best to reread your *entire* manuscript during copyediting, paying attention to *everything* that you've written as well as the copyeditor's suggested changes. While copyeditors are experts in applying the rules of punctuation, grammar, and citations, they may not be experts in your field. If your book uses languages other than English, they may not be able to read these passages, so you will need to use extra care when reviewing these passages during editing.

**...it is best to reread your *entire* manuscript during copyediting, paying attention to *everything* that you've written as well as the copyeditor's suggested changes.**

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Keep in mind, too, your book may be copyedited by a freelance copyeditor who does not work full-time at the press. Most presses use freelancers as well as in-house production coordinators (also called production or project editors) to move a book through production. Although production coordinators may copyedit some of their book projects, due to the number of books that they manage—which can be up to forty—they cannot copyedit all of them. Therefore, one part of their job is to hire, advise, and supervise the work of freelance copyeditors. A production coordinator will make sure that copyeditors' work conforms to the standards of the press as well as the press's chosen stylebook. They will also make sure that copyeditors (and authors) are working on schedule. They are available to answer questions and address technical issues involving the editing process. Production coordinators likewise oversee the correction of proofs, proofread cover copy and indexes, and keep track of a book's various parts (text, images, indexes, etc.) to ensure that no part is left out.

### **Posing Questions and Offering Suggestions**

When copyeditors ask questions, it is important to remember that they are not questioning your knowledge or trying to challenge you. Because they may not be experts in your field, they may be approaching your work from the perspective of a general reader. With that in mind, while you're reviewing the copyediting, consider what may be behind a question or a comment. Maybe the point is that you're using too much jargon in a book that is meant for students or a general readership. Maybe you've mentioned a concept that is important to your field of study but is unknown to those outside of it. Maybe the copyeditor is suggesting different wording because the sentence construction is making a passage hard to follow. Maybe you're taking for granted that your reader will know something that seems obvious to you as the expert but may be less familiar to someone without your level of knowledge. Copyeditors are very rarely questioning you as an academic and an expert. Their primary goal is to help make sure your voice comes across to as many readers as possible.

It's also important to note that you don't have to agree with and accept everything your copyeditor suggests. Think of the copyediting process as part of a conversation. Copyeditors' questions, notes, corrections, and suggestions are meant to help you see your work from your readers' perspective. It's your voice they want to shine, not theirs. Their real purpose is to help you put your best foot forward in the publishing world. Consider the why behind questions and suggestions, but don't be afraid to say no.

### **Editing Citations**

Interestingly, most copyediting corrections involve citation and citation styles. The following are

things to keep in mind as you provide references:

- URLs change frequently so pasting them into your manuscript with no other identifying information will not help readers check your sources.
- When writing your book, please keep detailed notes for yourself on where you find your sources and what sources you use. Copyeditors may not be able to track down incomplete citations and sources, so you may be asked to provide more information for incomplete citations.
- Make sure citations follow the standards of your field; citations copied from a citation generator may not reflect these.

Finally, computer problems hit at the worst times; back up all of your manuscript files and proof pages as you are working toward sending your book out into the world.

The goal of the production process, especially copyediting, is to assist you in communicating your ideas clearly to readers and scholars. Copyediting is a major part of the production process, which includes a series of steps to pull together the final book that will be on shelves. The copyediting step is followed by typesetting, cover design, proofreading, and getting the book printed and shipped. We hope these points about copyediting help to make the publication process a little easier.

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