



Fiction  
Feedback

## **Critiques, Edits & Proofreads: What they are and when you should have them**

**A critique** takes a broad view of your story or novel and highlights major strengths and weaknesses and makes outline suggestions for improvement. It's a good starting point.

**Structural or developmental editing** looks at all the strengths and weaknesses and helps you make changes. It's in-depth and hands-on. It looks at the nuts and bolts of how the MS is working as a novel – structure, narrative arc, characterisation, plot, storylines, pace and writing style. Allow for editing to at least two drafts and a lot of time as you will probably be redrafting.

Next is **line- and copy-editing**. This is where we examine the prose word by word. Yes, we pick up problems with spelling, grammar and punctuation, and ensure all-important consistency, but you'll also be encouraged to test that every word is doing its job to the utmost. So we'll look at vocabulary choices, naturalistic dialogue, facts, logic, repetition, minor glitches in characterisation or plot, anachronisms and verisimilitude. Do you quote a TV show of 1963 and mention its host? We check it was broadcast then, and that the host is the right one. Do you write about watching events at the bottom of an unlit garden from an English home at 5 p.m. in January? We tactfully mention that might not be feasible. Do you use one expression of amazement no matter which character is speaking? We suggest you create different expressions for each character. Allow for two copy-edits.

Once you've checked the final copy-editing amends, you shouldn't really be making any further revisions. But just in case you do, and most particularly to pick up any oversights or inconsistencies, the novel needs to go through a final **proofread** before publication, preferably by a different pair of eyes. At Fiction Feedback, whenever possible we use a different proof-reader from the editor.

### **What process when?**

A critique is best when you're not very experienced or confident and need some general guidance. In some cases, it can save spending a lot of money when it might prove that your skills aren't at the right level yet and you need to work on your craft before pursuing an edit. Or sometimes a critique is a good idea when you're an experienced writer but want to gauge opinion on this novel.

Structural editing is for when you've got your novel to a certain stage you're happy with. You've worked on it, possibly a lot with several drafts, and maybe had other input too. Now

you need to hone it into something strong and beautiful. It's like taking a rough diamond and getting it properly cut and set.

Copy-editing is the next stage. It's the polish for your diamond. This focuses on the prose, so it's only done when you're sure the structure, plot, characters, story, setting and pace are working for you 100 per cent. If you're submitting to an agent or publisher, we recommend you go down this path if problems with the prose are likely to be an obstacle to an editor liking the work (these days the high number of quality submissions they receive means your work has to be near-perfect to get the interest you seek.) If you're self-publishing, it's essential.

Finally, proof-reading. You only need this if you're self-publishing. Sometimes if you've had several drafts of copy-edits, and the last one asks you to make no further changes, it's not necessary, although it's always advisable. But it's definitely not for writers who are submitting their work to agents or publishers as it's the final stage before publication.

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