Publishing Glossary

AA and AC

In a manuscript proof, author's alteration (AA) or author's correction (AC) denote changes made by the author.

acknowledgements

A page, often placed at the beginning of a book, where the author thanks those who contributed to a book's development (e.g., researchers, friends, family, mentors, editors, and even proofreaders). An author may also include a dedication page at the start of a book, where they will identify the person or persons to whom they are dedicating the work.

acquisitions editor

The person at a publisher responsible for selecting manuscripts for publication. They may also be involved in helping an author develop a manuscript.

afterword

A short section at the end of a book, usually examining its context, the root of the idea, or how it was developed. This is often written by someone other than the author.

alterations/revisions

In publishing, these terms typically refer to changes made after the initial page proofs have been produced (i.e., after the first round of proofreading).

back matter

Also referred to as end matter, this is material in a book that comes after the main text, such as an appendix, a bibliography, or an index.

baseline

The line on which letters and words are written in a regular typeface. Superscript appears above the baseline, while subscript appears below.

Big Five

A term often used to refer to the five biggest global publishers: Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster.

binding

The way in which a book is held together. Common binding types include saddle stitching, perfect binding, section-sewn binding, and wire or spiral binding.

blurb

The promotional text accompanying a book, typically placed on the back cover. This can be an excerpt from the content, a teaser, or a brief overview of the plot.

content editing

Another term for substantive editing. Content editing typically involves making changes to a manuscript's structure or content.

copy

Written material (as opposed to other elements of layout, such as images). Copy refers to all the text in a published book or document. In publishing, it often refers specifically to the author's manuscript (i.e., what a copy editor will edit).

copy editing

A form of editing that focuses on fixing issues with spelling, punctuation, grammar, consistency, repetition, clarity, and general readability. It is usually the final stage of editing before a manuscript is typeset.

copyright page

The part of the front matter in a book that includes copyright, publishing, and cataloging information.

design

How a finished published work is presented. The design process involves many stages – from typesetting to cover art. A proofreader may be required to check for issues or inconsistencies in the design as well as the text.

developmental editing

A form of editing that occurs before or during the production of a manuscript. It typically involves working directly with an author to help develop their ideas, and it may include making decisions about the topic, overall structure, and content of a publication.

ebook (or e-book)

A digital version of a book designed to be read on an ereader or other digital device.

foreword

A short introduction to a book, usually written by someone other than the author.

front matter

Also known as preliminary material or prelims, this is the material in a book that comes before the main text, such as a title page, copyright page, or contents page. These pages often use different page numbering (e.g., Roman instead of Arabic numerals).

galley proofs

Traditionally, galley proofs were the typeset pages that a proofreader would check for errors.

The name comes from the tray used to hold the type (individual metal letters) when preparing a document for printing. Nowadays, the first proof document is usually an electronic file, such as a PDF. The electronic versions are commonly known as the page proofs, while revised proofs contain corrections from the first round of proofreading.

genre fiction

A term for books aimed at the popular market that fit into a particular genre or type (e.g., romance, sci-fi, mystery, crime, horror, fantasy) and follow its generic conventions.

glossary

A list of terms and definitions relevant to or used in a book. In fiction, the glossary may contain words invented by the author to describe the world they've created.

gutter

Additional space in the margins of a page that assists in the binding process. In a book, these are the inner margins on facing pages (i.e., the left margin on rectos and the right margin on versos).

hard copy

A printed rather than a digital version of a document or manuscript.

house style

A publisher's stylistic preferences. This may cover spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and other elements of writing, such as formatting and presentation. A house style ensures consistency across all texts printed by the same publisher. Publishing clients should provide style guidance if they expect a proofreader to use their house style.

knock-on effects

Issues caused by corrections in a set of revised page proofs (e.g., if adding a missing word caused issues with line breaks later in the text).

layout

The overall design of a book's pages, including how the text is arranged, illustrations and other visual elements, headers and footers, and fonts.

leading

A term used by typographers for the distance between two baselines of lines of type. For proofreaders and editors, this is more commonly referred to as line spacing. When proofreading or editing a PDF, proofreaders should check for uneven line spacing.

line editing

Slightly more in depth than copy editing, this form of editing focuses on the flow, clarity, and style of the text.

literary fiction

Books that do not fit neatly into a specific genre. Sometimes considered more worthy or high-brow than genre fiction, literary fiction may be denser, more experimental, or more

stylized.

manuscript

Sometimes referred to as an MS, this is the original document the author sends to a publishing house for consideration. When working with a publisher or a signed author, an editor will typically work with a manuscript.

manuscript critique

An evaluation of a manuscript, including all elements of the story and writing style. This is not part of proofreading, but authors may ask a developmental editor to critique their work.

markup

Feedback and instructions from an editor or proofreader that are left on a document.

narrative nonfiction

Nonfiction writing that uses a narrative form (e.g., memoirs or true crime stories).

orphans and widows

During typesetting, a single line of a paragraph may appear separated from the rest of the text (e.g., if most of the paragraph is one page, but one line is on another page). An orphan is the first line of a paragraph at the bottom of a page. A widow is the last line of a paragraph at the top of a page. When proofreading a typeset document, a proofreader may need to highlight orphans and widows so the publisher can redesign it before printing.

page layout

How text and other design elements are presented on the page.

pagination

This term can refer to the process of adding consecutive sequential numbers to the pages in a document or the numbering on those pages once it has been applied.

pass

A read-through of a document. Editing and proofreading a document may involve several passes or checks.

pica

A unit of measurement used in typography (approximately a sixth of an inch). It also refers to 12-point type size.

preface

An introduction to a book written by the author.

proofreading

In traditional publishing, proofreading is the final stage before printing and involves checking for small errors or layout issues. Changes at this stage should be minor. If any significant edits are required, the document should undergo another round of editing. A freelancer sometimes

provides authors with a mixed proofreading and copy-editing service.

query

A question or note from an editor to the author.

query letter

A letter that an author sends to an agent or publisher to garner interest in a manuscript. For nonfiction books, it is common to send a proposal that outlines the project. It may include sample chapters, but it would not usually be a full manuscript.

recto and verso

Recto and verso refer to the right-hand and left-hand pages, respectively, in a book or pamphlet when viewed as if it were open in front of you. This only applies if the text is in a left-to-right language (e.g., English). In right-to-left languages (e.g., Arabic), recto and verso are reversed.

river

A coincidental line of white space running vertically between words on a typeset page.

running header

A line that appears at the top of each page in a document or section (e.g., chapter headings).

self-publishing

A process by which authors publish their own work. This can be in the form of a printed work (e.g., print-on-demand services) or a digital format (e.g., self-published ebooks).

spread

A book's open left-hand and right-hand pages (i.e., verso and recto together).

stacks and ladders

Stacks occur when the same word appears at the start or end of successive lines in a typeset text. When this happens with hyphens in multiple word breaks, it is called a ladder.

stet

An instruction meaning "let it stand," which is used on printed proofs to show that a correction was made in error (i.e., ignore the correction and leave the original text as it was).

style sheet

A document setting out spelling, grammar, and other stylistic preferences for a text, publisher, or organization. Usually, an author, publisher, or editor will create a style sheet during the drafting or editing process to help ensure consistency. A proofreader will then use the style sheet to perform the final check before publication.

synopsis

A summary of the main events and characters in a story.

thin space

Denotes separate single and double quotation marks at the end of a sentence in which a quote appears within a quote. This is common in the publishing industry and essential to consider when proofreading typeset texts.

title page

Part of the front matter that states the book's title, author, publisher, and city of publication.

typeface

The size and style of the text, otherwise known as the font (e.g., Times New Roman or Arial) and the effects applied to it (e.g., bold or italics).

typesetting

The layout/design phase of publishing a document. The term comes from when printers used to literally set type (individual metal letters) in trays for printing. Graphic designers now usually use design software to set out text and images as they will appear on the printed page. The first typeset version of a document is known as a proof or page proof. In traditional publishing, this is the document a proofreader checks for errors. After typesetting, it becomes more complicated and expensive to revise a document. This is why traditional proofreading is often restricted to minor edits and corrections.

typo

A typographical error or misprint.

word break

Word breaks occur when a word is split across two lines with a hyphen. Proofreaders should be aware of specific conventions for splitting words in typeset texts.