Publishing Glossary

AA and AC

When editing a proof of a manuscript, you may see these initialisms:

- **AA** – Author's Alteration
- **AC** – Author's Correction

These indicate that a change was made by the author.

Acknowledgements

The place where the author thanks those who have played a role in the development of a book (e.g. people who helped them with the research, friends, family, mentors, and even editors and proofreaders). An author might 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. Acquisitions editors may also be involved in helping authors to develop a manuscript.

Afterword

A short section at the end of a book, usually looking at its context or how it came into being. This is often written by someone other than the author.

Alterations/revisions

In publishing, the words 'alterations' and 'revisions' usually refer to changes made after the initial page proofs have been produced (i.e. after the first round of proofreading).

Back matter

Back matter – also known as 'end matter' – is the material in a book that comes after the main text, such 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 the baseline.

Big Five

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

Binding

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

Blurb

The promotional text accompanying a book, often used on the back cover.

Content editing

Another term for substantive editing. This may involve making changes to a manuscript's structure or content.

Copy

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

Copy editing

A form of editing whose focus is fixing issues with spelling, punctuation, grammar, consistency, repetition, clarity, and general readability. This is typically the final stage of editing before a manuscript is typeset.

Copyright page

The part of the front matter in a book that includes the copyright and cataloguing information.

Design

How a finished published work is presented. The 'design process' can involve many stages in publishing – from typesetting to cover art. When proofreading, you may be required to look for issues or inconsistencies with the design as well as the text itself.

Developmental editing

A form of substantive editing that occurs before or during the production of a manuscript. It may extend to making decisions about the topic, overall structure, and content of a publication.

Ebook

A digital version of a book, designed to be read on an e-reader or computer.

Foreword

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

Front matter

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

Galley proofs

Traditionally, the 'galley proofs' were a typeset document that a proofreader would check for errors. The name comes from the tray used to hold the type when printing a document. These days, the first proof document will usually be an electronic file, such as a PDF, produced on a computer. These 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 neatly into a particular genre (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.

Gutter

Additional space on the page which 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

The stylistic preferences of a publisher. This may cover spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, and other elements of writing, as well as issues of formatting and presentation. A house style is designed to ensure a consistent style across all texts printed by the same publisher. Publishing clients should provide you with a style sheet if they expect you to use their house style with a document.

Knock-on effects

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

Layout

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

Leading

The term 'leading' is used by typographers to refer to the distance between two baselines of lines of type. For proofreaders and editors, 'leading' has the same meaning as 'line spacing'. When proofreading or editing a PDF, look out for uneven leading/line spacing.

Line editing

A heavier copy edit with a focus on the flow, clarity, and style of text in a manuscript.

Literary fiction

Books that do not fit neatly into a specific genre. Often considered more meritorious than genre fiction, literary fiction may be denser, more experimental, or more stylised.

Manuscript

Sometimes referred to as an 'MS', this is the original document the author sends to a publishing house for consideration. If you are providing an editing service rather than a strict proofreading one, you will usually work with the 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 often ask a developmental editor to critique their work.

Markup

Feedback and instructions left by an editor or proofreader.

Narrative non-fiction

Non-fiction 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 the first line is on one page and the rest is on the next 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, you may need to highlight orphans and widows so that the publisher can redesign before printing.

Page layout

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

Pagination

Pagination is the process of adding consecutive sequential numbers to a document in order to identify specific pages therein.

Pass

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

Pica

A unit of measurement used in typography (approximately a sixth of an inch).

Preface

An introduction to a book written by the author.

Proofreading

In traditional publishing, proofreading is the final stage before printing and simply involves checking for introduced errors or layout issues. Changes at this stage should be minor. If any major changes are needed, the document should undergo a further round of editing. As a freelancer, you may also offer authors the kind of mixed proofreading and copy-editing service that we discuss in the introductory module of the course.

Query

A question from an editor to the author or publisher.

Query letter

A letter that an author sends to an agent or publisher to garner interest in a manuscript. For non-fiction books, it is more common to send a book proposal, which outlines the project and may include sample chapters, but it would not usually accompany 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 when something was written in a left-to-right language (e.g. English). In right-to-left languages (e.g. Arabic), recto and verso are reversed.

River

A river is a 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

The process by which authors publish their own work. This can take many forms, including print (e.g. print-on-demand services) and digital (e.g. self-published ebooks).

Spread

The open left-hand and right-hand pages of a book (i.e. a 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' 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 organisation. 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 while performing the final check before publication.

Synopsis

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

Thin space

The 'thin space' is used to 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 something to keep in mind when proofreading typeset texts.

Title page

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

Typeface

A size and style of type, otherwise known as a 'font' (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial), and the effects applied to it (e.g. bold, italics).

Typesetting

This is part of the layout/design phase of a document. The term comes from the days when printers used to literally set type in blocks for printing. Graphic designers now generally 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'. This is traditionally the document a proofreader checks for errors. After typesetting, it becomes more expensive to make revisions to a document. This is why traditional proofreading restricts itself 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. There are specific conventions about how to split a word in typeset texts that proofreaders should know.