

# Copy Editing Versus Content Editing

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Question: What's the difference between copy editing and content editing?

Answer:

**Copy editing** is what anyone with an excellent sense of good English can do. For example, correct spelling errors, fix punctuation mistakes, point out inconsistent tense of verbs, correct grammar errors, whether you've used the word "lay" or "laid" properly, etc.

A good copy editor will see if you have dropped some words in your typing, if your sentence structures are overly complicated, or if your paragraphs are too long. Since most readers prefer reading at the fourth to seventh grade reading level, the copy editor can advise you on how to make your writing easier to read for those readers. In other words, a good copy editor can help you with the "English" of the work.

Your story may have technically correct English, but still fail to sell.

A **good content** editor can tell you if your writing has

- point of view errors
- weak characters
- too many characters
- the male characters read like female characters with male names, and vice versa
- the characters talk alike
- too many words to have a decent chance of selling the novel
- a plot that is not credible or exciting
- not enough emotion in the scenes
- melodrama
- not enough description to the settings to satisfy those readers who are very sensorial

A good content editor can also tell you if your writing has

- an opening that does not grab your reader
- established your protagonist as a sympathetic character early enough in the story
- the hero always winning every conflict, making it easy for the reader to get bored because she expects the hero to win in the end, too
- an antagonist that is too weak or too evil to be believable
- not enough rising tension in the story
- insufficient tension on every page
- an ending that does not depend on something the protagonist did that was very hard to do
- and much, much more.

After all, you can write a story in perfect English that is very boring to most readers. That happens all too often!

So you need both kinds of editing: copy and content.

The most important is content editing because that can help you make your story--and how you wrote it--much stronger. Perhaps even strong enough that a publisher will consider it, even with a few English errors. (And I stress the word "few.")

In this business, English is important, but content is King!

Most writers write their first novel because they enjoyed the writing. What they fail to consider is that the reader may get a very different feeling about the novel. I tell my clients that the first draft is often for you, the writer. Now go back and rewrite it for your readers. And I show them how to do that. A good content editor can also give examples to make her points clearer.

Writing to entertain is much harder than writing perfect English. Writing to entertain so well that hundreds of thousands of readers can't wait until your next book comes out requires a whole lot more. It requires two critical ingredients: (1) a great storyline and (2) excellence in storytelling. Just writing perfect English won't get you there. And, of course, even a good content editor can't guarantee your story will become a bestseller, either.

The most common weaknesses I've seen are:

- (1) the opening does not grab the reader soon enough or strong enough,
- (2) the protagonist does not appear soon enough or does not have a problem that readers gain a strong sympathy for,
- (3) there are point of view errors, and
- (4) there is not enough tension on every page.

Ninety-eight percent of the manuscripts I've seen are simply not ready to be sold to a publisher. Don't let yours fall into that category.

If you plan to self-publish your book, it is critical that you use a good editor BEFORE you spend a lot of money on publishing. After all, you want your product to be as good as it can get before you pay for 5,000 copies. Once you publish your novel, you can't go back and change it.

Do yourself a favor and hire a good editor.

Victory Crayne

Independent Fiction Editor, Writing Coach/Mentor. "Feedback from Victory will improve not just one novel, but EVERY novel you write."

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