



MARKING UP PAGE PROOFS: THE DOMINO EFFECT

Louise Harnby
FICTION EDITOR & PROOFREADER



Designed page proofs and the domino effect

If we want to proofread for publishers or independent authors who are preparing for print publication, we need to be comfortable with working on page proofs.

Good proofreading practice requires us to acknowledge that, for example, changing one word, or moving one line, can have unintended and damaging consequences throughout the rest of the book if we aren't careful.

This is the domino effect.



What are page proofs?

The mainstream publisher will usually require the proofreader to work on page proofs.

Page proofs are so-called because they are laid out as exactly as they will appear in the final printed book.

If all has gone well, what the proofreader is looking at will be almost what the reader sees if they were to walk into a bookshop, pull this title off the shelf and browse through the pages. The layout process has been taken care of by a professional typesetter who designs the text in a way that is pleasing to the eye and in accordance with a publisher's brief. In this case, the proofreader does not amend the text directly. She annotates the page proofs.

You might be asked to work on both hard-copy page and PDF page proofs – it depends on the client's preference.

Here, you're looking for any final spelling, punctuation, grammatical, and consistency errors that remain in the text. However, you're also expected to check the appearance of the text.

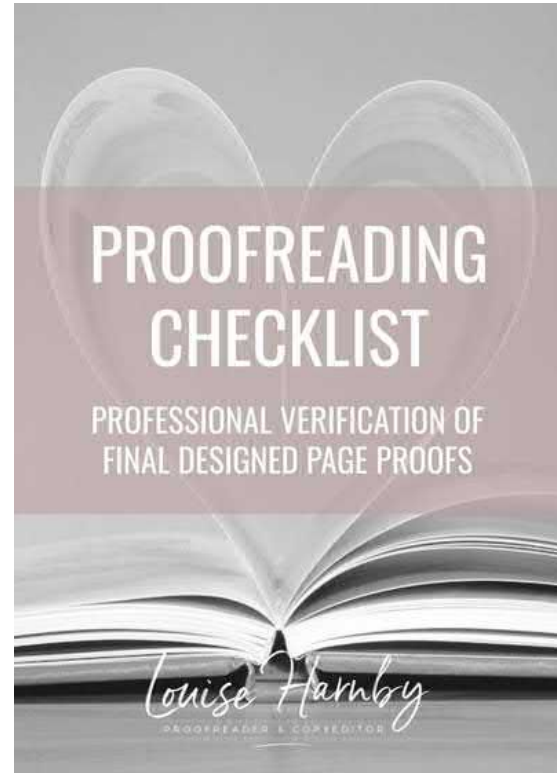


This will require a range of checks to ensure the following:

- the running heads match the chapter title
- the chapter title matches the entry in the contents list
- the design of the various text elements is consistent (e.g. correct font, text size, use of bold/italic, consistent capitalization, correct paragraph indentation, line spacing, etc.)
- the chapter title drops are consistent throughout
- the text on facing rectos and versos (right-hand and left-hand pages) is balanced
- in-text citations are presented according to preferred style and can be located in the book's references or bibliography
- footnote/endnote markers are present and correct in text and correspond to relevant footnotes/endnotes
- odd page numbers always appear on recto pages
- bad word breaks are flagged
- part titles always appear on new recto pages

Suffice it to say that every amendment you suggest might have an impact somewhere else. That doesn't mean you shouldn't make the amendment; it means, rather, that you need to be mindful of the consequences of your actions – the domino effect.

For a more comprehensive list, download this **free Proofreading Checklist**.



What's the domino effect?


In the UK, proofreaders refer to the indirect consequences of our mark-up as knock-on effects. But let's stick with the term 'domino effect' here because it provides us with the perfect description of what's at stake.

You line up four dominos: A, B, C, and D. You push over A and it pushes over B. B then knocks over C, which in turn causes D to fall. Domino D's topple was caused indirectly by Domino A, even though A didn't touch D.

This process can occur on page proofs and can have serious consequences. The changes we make can, if we're not careful, impact on the text flow, the pagination, the contents list, and the index.


Here's an example to illustrate the point. Imagine the publisher's brief tasks the proofreader with attending to orphans and widows (those stranded single lines at the bottom or top of a page). Solutions that involve instructing a typesetter to shuffle a line backward to a previous page, or forward to the next page, in order to avoid the widow/orphan might cause one, or all, of the following problems:



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- The repositioning of a line onto a different page automatically forces a reflow of text. Things look fine for the next six pages, but on the seventh page after the amendment was made, a new orphaned or widowed line has now appeared. The previous arrangement of the text prevented this.
 - Let's imagine that the seventh page is still widow/orphan-free. But the reflow of text means that this seventh page now contains a line that appeared on the previous page. This line includes a keyword term that is cross-referenced 130 pages later. The cross-reference is now incorrect.
 - The index is being created simultaneously by a professional indexer. It's not uncommon for proofreaders to never see the index, nor to spot check it. The line that's been repositioned on a different page contains an author citation that is included in the index. The indexer doesn't know what the proofreader's done, and the proofreader doesn't know which terms are being included in the index. Neither of them knows that the index entry now has the wrong page number attached to it.

In all three cases, the proofreader has prevented one problem but caused others.

Consequently, good practice involves more than blindly placing mark-up instruction on any given page.



Thought needs to be given to how the problem can be tackled and the impact managed so that there is no domino effect. Spotting an orphaned or widowed line is not enough. We might also have to consider the following:

- Providing additional instructions to the typesetter regarding to how to manage the problem by compensating elsewhere on the page (e.g., increasing or reducing line spaces and page depths, new line creation, etc.) so that the impact of moving one line is restricted to the page where the change has been made and its facing recto/verso.
- Telling the project manager about the suggested line move so that the manager can inform the indexer.
- Looking out for obvious key words or citations in lines that have been moved to check whether they are cross-referenced in the text (having a PDF, even when working on hard copy, is a must in these circumstances).



Summing up

If you're considering training as a proofreader and want to be fit for the purpose of marking up page proofs, check that your course includes a component about domino/knock-on effects.

Even when we are supplied with detailed briefs about an ideal layout, the publisher client expects us to be mindful of the consequences of our amendments.

The proofreader's job is to find solutions to problems in ways that don't cause unintended damage.

