

TRANSCRIPT

The Editing Podcast, Season 1, Episode 8 Page proofs and the proofreading process

Louise Harnby: Hello and welcome to Episode 8. So this week we're talking about page proofs and the proofreading process.

Denise Cowle: We are! And this is important because 'proofreading' is probably one of the most problematic terms in the publishing industry.

LH: Yes, that word – proofreading – is so tangled. People use it to mean all sorts of different things. So we thought it would be useful to look at how the mainstream publishing industry, and a lot of editors use it, and what they mean.

DC: That's right. And the terminology has been complicated further by online publishing, but we'll get to that in a minute! So the first thing to say is that proofreading isn't some catch-all phrase that means 'sort my book out'! It's a very specific part of the editing process that you'll do (or get help with) just before you publish your book.

LH: So maybe we should start by saying that whether you're publishing for print or digital, you'll still be organizing that final prepublication check. What you do as part of that check will be slightly different, depending on whether there's paper involved.

DC: That's right. So if you're printing, you'll be dealing with designed page proofs. Whereas if you're publishing in ebook format, you might be dealing with your raw-text file. So Louise, why don't you kick off and tell everyone what page proofs are?

LH: Okay, so page proofs are either paper or PDF versions of what the pages will look like in the final printed book. So imagine someone walks into a bookshop, picks a book off a shelf and opens it. What they see will pretty much be the page proofs, only with any final typos or layout problems removed. So what's important here is that the layout will have been taken care of. Maybe you or your publisher has worked with a professional typesetter or interior designer and they've made sure that the pages are attractive to look at and meet industry-standard conventions that readers are used to seeing.

DC: Yes, and remember that that in addition to all the text, all the page numbers, running heads, contents list, copyright information, any artwork, and

things like the references, bibliography and index will also probably be included.

LH: Now if you're creating only an ebook, you might not be as fussed about layout – it all depends on how complex the interior design is. Certainly for fiction, your book's likely to be mostly text so the proofreading can take place in the raw-text Word file. So let's have a look at the process. I think the way the mainstream publishing industry treats page proofs and proofreading is a useful model to look at, because it illustrates really well the issue of due diligence by staging the editing journey, and I think it's one that indie authors can mimic too.

DC: Yes, I agree. Proofreading is something that happens at the end of quite a lengthy chain of events. And while different publishers do things in different ways, broadly speaking it goes like this. So after all the big-picture structural work has been done, the author submits the text of their book to the project manager in the publishing company. That project manager will then ask a line or copyeditor to work on the text, usually in Word. And it's at this point that most of the sentence-level intervention happens.

LH: That's right. Then the copy-editor returns the files to the project manager when they're done. The project manager then commissions an interior designer or typesetter to lay out the text. This is where page proofs are created. When the typesetter has done their bit, they return this first set of page proofs back to the PM. The PM then contacts a proofreader. Now what's important to note here is that they'll only want them to check the text for any final design problems and text-based errors. The proofreader won't be expected to rewrite any sentences because of clarity problems or deal with plot holes, or introduce missing tables or information.

DC: At the same time, the PM will forward a set of first proofs to the author. When the proofreader and author are done, they send each of their sets to the PM, who collates all the final amendments into a single set of proofs. Then these are sent to the typesetter, who sorts out a final tidy-up.

LH: And when the typesetter is done, the proofs go back to the PM, who organizes the printing. And what this shows, is that there's quite a lot of checking going on by multiple parties, and all of those people are separate and fresh sets of eyes. Now, if you're self-publishing, that means you'll have to do a lot of the donkey work yourself, and that's going to be time-consuming. Do think about how much you can do yourself and who you're going to need to help you so that you get fresh eyes on the pages, even if you're e-publishing.

DC: So what kinds of things are being dealt with at proofreading stage? If you're working with a pro editor and it's for a printed book, they'll be checking that the running heads match the chapter title, that the chapter title matches the entries in the contents list, and that the design of all the different text elements is consistent – so I'm talking about things like the font, the text size, consistent capitalization and hyphenation, correct paragraph indentation, and line spacing.

LH: That's right. And they'll also be checking that the chapter drops are consistent, that the text on facing pages is balanced, that any in-text citations are styled correctly, and that they're included in the references or bibliography. They'll also be checking that any footnotes or endnotes are correct, and that they match the in-text markers. Another thing they'll be looking out for is that odd numbered pages always appear on right-hand pages – or rectos.

DC: That's just some of the things that happen when page proofs are being checked in addition to any spelling, grammar or punctuation problems. And I think it gives you an idea of how this type of proofreading goes beyond just checking the text for typos, but how it **doesn't** extend to more invasive sentence- or story-level editing.

LH: And one other thing to mention is knock-on effects. So imagine a set of dominos. You line up 4 and knock the first one over. 2 knocks over 3, and 3 knocks over 4. So by doing something to 1, you caused something to happen to 4. And proofreading is a bit like that when you're dealing with page proofs, especially on more complex interiors that some business, educational and academic books have.

DC: That's so true. You have to be so, so careful when you're proofreading. You can move just one word to a new page and it messes up the index, or it causes another word to shift to a new page 20 pages later. And before you know it, the cross-reference on page 250 no longer makes sense! Sledgehammer proofreading can do more harm than good. It really is quite an art from that point of view.

LH: Yes, that's a great term – sledgehammer proofreading. When you're proofreading page proofs, you really do have to make sure that you're only changing what's absolutely necessary. That's one problem you really don't have to worry about when you're editing fiction, but I saw that danger lurking in so many of the academic books I proofread years ago!

DC: So let's talk a little more about proofreading raw-text files for ebook publishing. Obviously, there's a little more freedom here precisely because the so-called page isn't fixed.

LH: There is no page.

DC: Are you getting all Matrix on me, Louise?

LH: I'd prefer it if you were Keanu, but never mind. Carry on!

DC: Aaaanyway, so back to proofreading, so with ebook files you'll still want to be looking out for any final spelling, grammar and punctuation problems, and that the different elements of the text are styled correctly, but the process will be more fluid. Do still make sure that you've done all of your big-picture editing and line and copyediting. Proofreading really is the final prepublication tidy-up before you go live with your book.

LH: Now, one other thing to say is that if your interior is complex – let's say you've got a lot of illustrations or tables, and it's important that they're laid out attractively on an ereader – it really is worth considering investing in a specialist eformatter. Uploading a Word file won't give you a professional result.

DC: That's absolutely right. So now it's time for Editing Bites! This is our weekly feature where we each offer you a recommended tool or resource. What have you got for us this week, Louise?

LH: So I'm going to recommend RL Trask's *Penguin Guide to Punctuation*. It's small and digestible, and there are some really great examples that will help any writer get the basics of punctuation right.

DC: You beat me to it! That's one I recommend to lots of my clients! My pick this week is Grammar Girl, real name Mignon Fogarty. Her website, Quick and Dirty Tips, is chock full of advice on all aspects of language use, and she also has a podcast with over 600 episodes – we've a long way to go, Louise!

LH: Ha! I'm exhausted just thinking about that. Still early days! We all have to start somewhere! So, That's all for this week. Thank you so much for listening to The Editing Podcast. You can rate, review and subscribe via your podcatcher.

DC: And don't forget to share, share, share! Tell your writer friends, your editor friends, your business friends ... basically anyone who writes!

LH: And if you have any questions about page proofs or the proofreading process, please do get in touch with us via The Editing Podcast Facebook page. If you ask us, we will answer – we promise.

DC: And don't forget – all the links we've mentioned are in the show notes. Thanks for listening.

