

# What Kind of Editing Do I Need?

## An Epilogue Editing Cheat Sheet

When people think of editors, they often imagine a persnickety reader correcting grammar or finding stray commas. In reality, people hire an editor for lots of reasons:

- Some people like to work collaboratively on projects, and editors provide a sense of companionship, accountability, and a feeling like they aren't writing into the void.
- Other people like writing, and just need someone to help with productivity or staying on track.
- Still others love research, get overwhelmed by writing, and need someone to help them move their ideas toward publication.
- Other times, people have feedback from reviewers and need help making sure it's sufficiently incorporated into the final draft.

As the manuscript evolves, you may want a coach at the beginning, or a developmental edit in the middle, or a stylistic edit at the end before the piece is proofread. Regardless of whether you do some of this yourself, have a network of support to read various drafts, or you want to hire an editor to help you through the process, it's important to make time for each stage. This post walks you through five stages of writing and how to get the help you might need at each stage.



### Where are you in the writing process? Idea Phase

**What do you need help with?** Staying on track, generating ideas for turning ideas into something publishable

#### Phase One: Ideas and Brainstorming

**Can you do it yourself?** Yes! Ideas are fun – keep a note in your phone or a column on a Trello board for brainstorming. Always have a project in the ideas phase.

**Can someone in your network help?** Yes! Have a circle of people in or adjacent to your field that you chat with about early-stage projects like this.

**What could an editor do?** Usually editors come in later, but sometimes people want to bring an editor in on the ground floor to help guide the project from beginning to end, or just to brainstorm a framework for a project.

**What would that be called?** [Coaching or consulting](#)

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## Where are you in the writing process? Drafting/research phase

**What do you need help with?** Staying motivated while I write, learning how to develop a manuscript

### Phase Two: Drafting/Research

**Can you do it yourself? Yes!** Write yourself an outline, make yourself a schedule, give yourself some rewards, and start writing! Sometimes people feel like they need to be working with an editor all along, but if you know what to write, go for it!

**Can someone in your network help? Yes!** Get an accountability group, update them on your progress. Join an online writing circle, where you post your word count every week. Find a buddy in a neighboring department, take them out for coffee and have them write with you.

**What could an editor do?** I do two types of coaching here. The first is coaching about very specific parts of research – so people will have questions about research design, or how to do qualitative coding, and I'll consult on different parts of the project. I also do A LOT of coaching on how to write a book, helping individual clients navigate the process along the way.

**What would that be called?** [Coaching or consulting](#)

## Where are you in the writing process? Messy First Draft

**What do you need help with?** It's on paper, but I need help getting it cleaned up.

### Phase Three: Messy/First Draft

**Can you do it yourself? Yes!** You know what this paper wants to look like – put it aside, work on some other things in your pipeline, and then come back to it.

**Can someone in your network help? Yes!** Do you have a critique circle? Or beta readers? This is a great time to exchange feedback. Workshops and conferences work too to get great content-specific feedback!

**What could an editor do?** I read a lot of manuscripts at this stage for structure, argument, voice, and narrative.

Depending on the project, I often take a rough draft and suggest a reorganization of material into different chapters, a way to create a framing narrative for the book, a way to deprivilege data in the text and privilege storytelling, how to move from lit review to a discussion of literature that interacts with your argument, etc.

**What would that be called?** [Developmental editing, or a developmental/stylistic combination](#)

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## Where are you in the writing process? Revised Draft

**What do you need help with?** I don't like the way it reads/ it sounds too academic and boring/ I can't find my voice / English isn't my first language and so I need an extra set of eyes on the language/ I have a pretty good draft but it keeps getting rejected/ I can't figure out what the argument is or what story I'm telling/ I'm converting a dissertation to a book and that's hard [*in other words – this is a complicated phase!*]

### Phase Four: Revised Draft

**Can you do it yourself? Yes!** Put it aside and pretend like you're writing a blogpost or giving a presentation about your work. Use that to try to find the voice you want to write in. You can also read the paper aloud, print it out and read it on paper, reverse outline it and rewrite different sections – all of this can help get the voice and tone right.

**Can someone in your network help? Yes!** Critique buddies are great for this kind of editing. Even better if you have someone who isn't in the same field who can read for how well the piece can be understood by interested, but not expert, readers.

**What could an editor do?** Editors are great at this phase – when you've taken the paper as far as you can go and need an extra set of eyes, call in an editor!

If the paper has gotten rejected or a tough R and R, a developmental editor can be great at this – we can read the reviewer memos, read the manuscript, and figure out where the disconnect is.

If you're happy with the content but not the way it reads, then a stylistic edit might be useful. Instead of focusing on how the manuscript holds together as a whole, we are concerned about the paragraph/sentence level. A lot of this editing is focused on voice, tone, sentence structure. This can be particularly valuable for people who don't write in English as their first language, because they can focus on developing their argument, knowing someone else will help with the language specifics.

I will also make sure that the manuscript complies with specific usage requirements as suggested by CMOS or another style guide.

**What would that be called?** [Developmental and/or style editing](#)

# What Kind of Editing Do I Need? An Epilogue Editing Cheat Sheet

## Where are you in the writing process? Polished Draft

**What do you need help with?** I need someone to go through and check citations/find missing punctuation/ just do a final clean-up check.

**Can you do it yourself?** Yes! If you have a good grasp of your style manual and a sharp eye for errors, print it out and go at it!

**Can someone in your network help?** Sure! This is a great time to engage people – they don't even need to be academics!

**What could an editor do?** Here's some irony – this is what most people think editors do, but in reality, most academic editors don't actually do a lot of proofreading. This is because a lot of journals and publishers will have their own, in-house proofreaders that will doublecheck the manuscript for their own stylesheet.

I tend not to do a lot of this kind of editing, because journals and books will hire proofreaders at the final stage of the process. Be aware that if you need citations checked, editors will often charge a separate fee for this (often estimated at 5 minutes/citation).

**What would that be called?** [Copyediting or Proofreading](#)

Phase Five:  
Polished Draft