Publishing copy-editor/proofreader: Job description

Publishing copy-editors and proofreaders ensure that texts due for publication are well written, grammatically correct and accessible. They work on a range of publications, including books, journals, newspapers and IT-based resources.

Depending upon the project, the employer and their own specialist experience, copy-editors/proofreaders may be required to correct basic spelling, typographical and grammatical errors (proofreading), or check facts and style consistency and undertake significant rewriting (copy-editing). Many perform both functions in tandem.

Increasingly, copy-editors and proofreaders are employed on a freelance basis by publishing companies. It is not uncommon for them to work for a number of employers at the same time.

Typical work activities

- Work activities depend upon experience and whether you work in-house or freelance. They may include:
- working with IT-based publishing systems and databases, as well as via the internet, CD-roms, or from paper manuscripts;
- liaising regularly with authors and publishers by phone and email;
- checking that authors have provided all the required materials and paperwork;
- resolving queries directly with the author, e.g. style and text inconsistencies;
- correcting spelling mistakes and grammatical errors;
- coding manuscripts for design features, such as hierarchy of headings, to instruct the production team;
- creating artwork briefs to detail the content of illustrations;
- ensuring that illustrations are correctly captioned and referred to in the text;
- producing or working to a style checklist to ensure consistency in hyphenation, capitalisation, formatting of references, etc;
- sub-editing text written by a number of authors to ensure consistent house style;
- maintaining awareness of new words or phrases coming into popular usage with a view to ensuring they are appropriate for the readership;
- discussing and resolving any potentially libellous sections with the commissioning editor and author;
- retrieving articles from archives and rearranging within publications;
- preparing preliminary pages for the title, contents and preface of a publication;
- overseeing the work of indexers, typesetters and designers;
- (increasingly for freelancers) typesetting and designing layout;
- ensuring that publications are prepared on budget and to schedule;
- (for those who are self-employed) managing marketing and business activities.