

The 9 Types of Editors

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There are many types of editors you'll meet in the publishing industry. When you go to a book event or writer's event, chances are good that you'll meet editors there. But they won't all do the same thing.

*One might be an **Acquisitions Editor**, and another a **Developmental Editor**. What's the difference?*

Understanding the types of editors you'll encounter will help you better understand the mechanics of the publishing business as a whole.

When we typically think of editing, we think about someone making corrections – be it to fix:

- [story structure](#) and perhaps [word choice](#),
- [grammar](#),
- consistency, or
- accuracy of facts.

But editing can also be about other things:

- [choosing the stories to publish](#),
- hashing-out a story idea with the author,
- collaborating with the author through the writing process,
- [condensing the story](#), and
- *even offering ideas* about better name places or [character names](#).

So who does what and when?

Here's a break-down of the types of editors and their specific titles.

1. Editor-in-Chief / Editor-at-Large

These editors are responsible for establishing and maintaining the general philosophy and tone of a company. The Editor-in-Chief manages both freelance editors and in-house editors across several departments.

When a publishing company uses the title Editor-at-Large to describe this type of editor, it means that person is able to work on whatever interests them. An Editor-at-Large at a publishing house has a great deal of autonomy.

NOTE: This is quite different from an Editor-at-Large who works for a magazine or newspaper. See below for more. (Editor Type #5.)

2. Acquisitions Editor or Commissioning Editor

These editors search for new writers and/or manuscripts, and decide whether submissions and pitches have a chance to be green-lit (or not). The Acquisitions Editor is usually *not* the person who makes the

final decision about whether or not a title will be published.

The larger the company, the more Acquisitions Editors there are. That means that they must all present their recommended titles (everything on their list) and that some of their choices will not make the cut.

Acquisitions and Commissioning Editors can also gather the works of various writers for inclusion in an anthology or box-set.

3. Associate Editor or Section Editor

Acts as an Acquisitions Editor in the field of journalism (newspapers and magazines).

4. Copy Editor or Copyeditor

Copyeditors are primarily concerned with the nitty-gritty stuff: grammar, word choice, [punctuation](#), and spelling. These editors also check for the [visual appearance](#) of the publication, especially the book block (the pages of the book). Today, most Copyeditors work freelance and are hired project-by-project.

5. Contributing Editor or Editor-at-Large

In journalism, this is an editor who often contributes to a particular magazine and is highly respected. This type of contributor is also sometimes called a **Roving Editor**.

In publishing, an Editor-at-Large is an Editor-in-Chief with a great deal of autonomy. (See #1 above.)

6. - 7. Developmental & Substantive Editor

I list these two types together because sometimes it is one person who does both jobs.

Especially in publishing houses that specialize in educational books, Developmental Editors guide a writer from the first spark of an idea to the finished product. In truth, they *develop* the story, guiding the author.

Some Developmental Editors study the market needs and come up with book concepts - and then assign those ideas to writers.

Sometimes Developmental and Substantive editorial tasks are done by one person, and they are typically called a Developmental Editor. For larger companies, these tasks are split. When the manuscript is complete, the Substantive Editor takes over.

The Substantive Editor can make large, sweeping changes to a manuscript. Problems in consistency and structure are the focus. If something doesn't make sense, then that is an issue for the Substantive Editor.

If editing fiction: plot flow, [themes](#) and [character](#) are all points this editor will check.

If editing non-fiction: factual accuracy, [tone](#) and the strength of the message will be checked.

8. Executive Editor or Chief Editor

This is the editor who will prepare a product for its final release.

9. Online Editor

This is a fast-and-loose term used for any kind of editor at any level of experience who is additionally well versed in web copy. Online Editors look for links to include in the text, pictures to include, they format the overall look and then publish it to their website.

+ 1 more: The Proofreader

Most people imagine that editors do *all the proofreading required* of our text, but that isn't always the case. Sometimes it's the Proofreader who sort of wraps things up. Proofreading is the fine-toothed combing for essential errors that all other eyes have missed.

This isn't the first go at editing, it's the last. This is where the final line is drawn before a book block (or any text to be published) is greenlit.

What Matters

These are the types of editors you'll be getting to know as you get deeper into the writing life. Don't let the types of decisions they make intimidate you. Remember that their title, ultimately, doesn't matter. [What matters is that they love to read.](#)

Just give them a great story - and let them help you make it even better.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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