



Proofreading vs Copyediting

These two terms often get mixed up, and it's easy to see why, both happen late in the process, both involve correcting mistakes, and both make your book cleaner. But they're not the same job. Knowing the difference helps you decide what your manuscript really needs.

A Quick Prompt to Get You Started

Ask yourself: *Am I fixing the writing, or am I fixing the text?*

Copyediting fixes the writing. Proofreading fixes the text.

What Copyediting Does

Copyediting is the deeper, more detailed stage. It focuses on the *quality* of the writing and the *consistency* of the manuscript.

A copyeditor looks for:

- clarity and flow
- sentence-level improvements
- repeated words or awkward phrasing
- consistency of tone and style
- continuity errors (names, dates, details)
- grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- formatting consistency

Think of copyediting as polishing the writing so it reads smoothly and professionally.

What Proofreading Does

Proofreading is the final check, the last pass before publication.

It's not about rewriting. It's about catching anything that slipped through.

A proofreader looks for:

- typos
- missing words
- punctuation errors
- spacing issues
- formatting glitches
- stray italics or bold text
- errors introduced during formatting or conversion

Proofreading is the safety net that catches the tiny things.

When You Need Each One

- If your sentences feel clunky, inconsistent, or unclear → copyediting.
- If the writing is solid but you want to catch mistakes → proofreading.
- If you're self-publishing, you may need both, but not always.

Some writers do a strong self-edit and hire only a proofreader. Others hire a copyeditor and then proofread themselves.

A Simple Exercise

Take one page of your manuscript and read it twice:

- First, looking for clarity, flow, and consistency (copyediting).
- Second, looking only for typos and punctuation (proofreading).

You'll feel the difference immediately.

A Final Thought

Copyediting improves the writing. Proofreading protects the reader. Both matter, but you get to choose the level of polish your book needs.