MANUSCRIPT-READINESS CHECKLIST

How to tell what your book needs before you pay for editing

FORD MOUNTAIN PUBLISHING
Publishing with heart, for dreamers of every age.

Work through these steps in order. Each editing level can undo the one after it: a developmental edit may cut whole chapters, and every polished sentence in them goes too. Knowing which level your book needs keeps you from paying twice.

Title: _____ **Word count:** _____ **Genre:** _____

1. Your own revision pass

- ☐ The draft is complete from first page to last, with no placeholder scenes or "[fix later]" notes.
- ☐ It rested for several weeks before your revision pass, long enough that you read it as a stranger would.
- ☐ You can summarize each chapter in one sentence, and each chapter changes something.
- ☐ You have read it aloud, or listened to it with text-to-speech, at least once.
- ☐ Names, dates, and spellings are consistent, and you keep your own list of them.
- ☐ You have searched for your personal crutch words and cut most of them.
- ☐ Your word count sits within the usual range for recent books in your genre.
- ☐ For nonfiction, every fact you would hate to get wrong has a source.
- ☐ You can say who the book is for in a single sentence.

2. Beta readers

- ☐ Choose three to five readers who already buy books like yours.
- ☐ Give each reader the same questions: Where did you put the book down? Which choice did you not believe? What did you expect that never happened?
- ☐ Collect every comment in one list, with the chapter it refers to.
- ☐ Treat one reader's complaint as an opinion, and the same complaint from three readers as information.
- ☐ Revise for the patterns before you hire an editor.

3. Match the symptom to the service

Check the rows that describe your manuscript. The service in the right-hand column is usually the one to buy first.

	What you or your readers notice	What it usually signals	The service that addresses it
☐	Readers drift in the middle, or the ending feels unearned	Structure, pacing, stakes	**Developmental edit**
☐	Readers misread a character's motives	Character development	**Developmental edit**
☐	Nonfiction chapters repeat each other or wander	Organization	**Developmental edit**
☐	The story works, but the sentences feel flat or clumsy	Prose and voice	**Line edit**
☐	Names change spelling, timelines drift, commas multiply	Mechanics and consistency	**Copyedit**
☐	The files are formatted and you want a last sweep	Errors left after editing and layout	**Proofread**
☐	You suspect something is wrong but cannot name it	A diagnosis is needed first	**Manuscript assessment**

4. The four levels of editing, in order

Developmental editing deals with content, organization, and genre expectations, usually through an editorial letter. **Line editing** works sentence by sentence on clarity, rhythm, and voice. **Copyediting** corrects spelling, grammar, usage, and punctuation, checks consistency, and produces a style sheet. **Proofreading** happens on the formatted pages, near the very end.

Service	Fiction, per word	Nonfiction, per word	80,000-word novel, fiction rates
Developmental editing	3.0–3.5¢	4.0–5.0¢	$2,400–$2,800
Line editing	2.7–3.5¢	3.5–5.0¢	$2,160–$2,800
Copyediting	2.0–2.7¢	3.0–4.0¢	$1,600–$2,160
Proofreading	1.2–2.0¢	2.0–3.0¢	$960–$1,600

Median ranges from the Editorial Freelancers Association's 2026 Rate Chart (survey of 2025 rates), checked October 29, 2026. The EFA does not set rates; experience, turnaround, and subject matter all move them.

5. Hiring an editor

- ☐ Ask for a short sample edit, so you see their notes on your own pages.
- ☐ Get the scope in writing: the level of edit, the number of passes, what you receive, and the deadline.
- ☐ Ask which genres they edit most often.
- ☐ Check references, or look the business up in the Alliance of Independent Authors' service ratings.
- ☐ For large projects, pay in stages tied to delivery.
- ☐ Leave yourself time to revise after each round, since an editor's notes do nothing until you act on them.

> **Working with Ford Mountain Publishing**
>
> Every project starts with a free consultation and a free sample edit of about 15 pages. Developmental editing is $75 an hour and proofreading is $45 an hour, with project pricing available for long manuscripts or several shorter pieces. Visit fordmountainpublishing.com.

This checklist is educational and is not a quote. Rates change; confirm current prices before hiring.