



# Levels of Editing

By Stephenie Hovland

I was recently doing some yardwork with my husband and couldn't help but think about editing. (I know. I should've been paying more attention to the big clippers he was using right next to my head!)

**Developmental editing** is like when you look at the landscaping, garden, and lawn and see how it all works together. Do you have the flowers in the ideal spots for their light and water requirements? Do the bushes need trimming? What's the best grass for your soil?

A developmental editor can let you know that you need more illustrations and different content organization in your non-fiction book. She can tell you that your novel's pacing is off or that some of your characters are a bit flat. This is big-picture stuff. It's the overall view but also very fundamental. If you have an unbelievable book for which there is no market, those correctly spelled words won't do you any good. Just like some people hire a landscaper before buying their plants, some writers hire a developmental editor when they're in the outlining or rough draft stage.

**Line editing** is like when you realize the hostas are taking over an area; you thin them out and move some around, so the poor primrose can be seen again. It's not that hostas are bad, but they can outgrow their space. What if you have the opposite problem, and the deer are eating your hostas? You have to take care of that problem, too!

Line editing helps show what needs to change within a paragraph or within a sentence. Sometimes the order of sentences makes all the difference, just as sometimes simply switching word position can make everything clearer. If you overuse certain kinds of words (like adverbs, for example) or some of the vocabulary isn't quite right for your audience, an editor can point these things out. It's more about the rhythm and flow of the words.

**Copyediting** is much more detail-oriented. This is when you prune the bushes, pull the weeds, and clean the branches that fell on the lawn the last time it stormed. We're getting into the little stuff that some might let go—but if we want our yard to look its best, we do these things.

Copyediting is down on the word-by-word level. We're talking about spelling, grammar, and details. This is the nitty-gritty stuff that most people miss, even though they know better. Your eyes and brain can trick you into seeing the correct spelling or thinking you do really know when to use "lie" and "lay." The editor will hunt down all those tricky little words that need hyphens (they can be so unpredictable!) and be sure your main character has the same color eyes throughout the entire book.

**Proofreading** is the little stuff that most of us don't care to do, like raking every single leaf on an October afternoon. Do you go back to a bush you just trimmed and make sure it is uniform on all sides and that every little piece you cut is picked up? Are all the rocks and mulch contained in their areas? Did you deadhead each flower in the garden and all the ones in the baskets too?

If you enjoy all that tedious work, you might like proofreading. Those minute details are exactly what proofreaders get paid to notice. From an extra space after a period, to the indentations of the paragraphs, to the spelling and grammar that was already checked—the proofreader is the last person to review the manuscript before it goes to print.

Before you decide to do-it-yourself on your entire manuscript, consider hiring an editor or two to cover some of these essentials. It's not that you necessarily want to win the Best Landscaping award, but you do want to make your backyard so inviting, people feel welcome there. You want to put your best writing forward. Polished manuscripts—from idea development all the way through the placement of each period—will show a level of professionalism that can appeal to editors, agents, and readers alike.