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The Institute of Professional Editors Limited

Guidelines for editing research theses (revised 25 February 2019)

Guidelines for editing research theses outlines the nature and extent of services that professional editors may ethically provide when editing students' theses and the responsibilities of editors, students and supervisors relevant to editing. The *Guidelines* applies to all forms of research theses, including an exegesis that may accompany a creative work submitted for examination.

Background to the *Guidelines*

Writing a thesis enables research students to demonstrate their capacity for independent research and to present their research within the context of other scholarly work. Importantly, a thesis tests how well students can communicate their ideas and arguments in writing.

Students may contract editors to proofread and/or copyedit their work with the aim of improving its readability, clarity and consistency. Supervisors may also encourage students to have their thesis professionally edited before submission.

This raises ethical questions. What kind of editing is appropriate and how much editing is permissible? At what point is there a risk that the thesis is no longer the student's own work? The *Guidelines* provides guidance to students, supervisors and editors with the aim of maintaining the integrity of thesis editing.

This edition of the *Guidelines* was consolidated in 2019 from the original *Guidelines* developed collaboratively in 2001 by the forerunners of the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) and the Australian Council of Graduate Research (ACGR) and revised in 2010 by IPEd and approved by ACGR. The *Guidelines* refers to IPEd's *Australian standards for editing practice* (the *Standards*).

Scope of editing and proofreading of theses

Editors should explain clearly the extent and nature of services they are offering when editing theses (as detailed below) and draw students' attention to the *Guidelines*. Supervisors and students need to understand the role of an editor and the scope of editorial services they may expect.

It is expected that supervisors will provide their students with editorial advice on:

- matters of content, substance and structure
- interpretation of the research literature and data
- use of illustrations and tables
- use of language (including clarity, voice and tone, grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- use of technical and specialised terminology.

Supervisors may also assist with copyediting and proofreading. The *Standards* addresses the differences between editorial advice relating to content, substance and structure (Part C 'Substance and structure'), copyediting (Part D 'Language and illustrations') and proofreading (Part E 'Completeness and consistency').

Services professional editors may provide

Professional editorial intervention should be restricted to copyediting and proofreading, as covered in Parts D and E of the *Standards*. On matters of content, substance and structure (Part C of the *Standards*), editors may draw attention to problems but may only offer examples or comments to guide the student. The *Standards* explains what is involved in copyediting and proofreading ('The fundamentals of editing' and Parts D and E).

Copyediting services may include editing language and illustrations to achieve:
- clarity of expression and flow of the text (e.g. removing ambiguity, wordiness and needless repetition, and ensuring clear and logical connections between phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and sections)
- correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation
- appropriate use of idiom, style and tone
- appropriate use of technical and specialised terminology, including discipline-specific terms, abbreviations and units of measurement
- consistency in the presentation of illustrations, diagrams and other display items.

Proofreading services may include checking to ensure that all thesis elements are complete, consistent and correctly placed, including checking, as necessary:
- completeness of all parts of the thesis
- correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation
- consistency in the use of language, style, terminology, numbers, symbols, shortened forms, capitalisation, italics and other mechanics of text
- consistency in the presentation of illustrations and tables
- consistency in the format and layout according to the specified style
- conformity of references and citations to the specified style.

Services editors should not provide

Editors should not make corrections to the content, substance or structure of the thesis (Part C of the *Standards*), although they may note problems for the student's attention. The editor is not responsible for identifying issues of content, such as checking facts, reference to others' work and plagiarism. However, if problems of this type are identified, the editor may advise the student to check the university's guidelines and to seek advice from their supervisor.

Selecting and engaging an editor

Students should select an editor with appropriate expertise and experience. IPEd has a directory of professional editors that can help students find a suitable editor. Universities may also have a list of approved editors. Supervisors may wish to guide students in selecting an editor.

Members of IPEd are bound by its Constitution and Code of Ethics, which are available on the IPEd website.

When enquiring about editing, it is helpful if the student provides the following details to the editor: thesis length (word count), preferred editing schedule and/or due date, parts of the thesis to be edited, and any other specific requirements. The editor may ask to see the complete thesis or a sample of the writing to gauge the extent of editing needed and to provide an estimate or quote.

Students should obtain written approval from their principal supervisor to use a professional editor and provide evidence of this approval to the editor, which could take the form of an email from the supervisor.

Ideally, students should engage an editor at least one month before the deadline for submission of the thesis to allow sufficient time for editing and review of the suggested changes. 'Engaging' an editor means (a) agreeing with the editor about the timing, schedule, estimated cost, method

of payment, expectations and extent of editing before editing begins; and (b) committing to using that editor. The editor may set out these details in an email or other form, which, once agreed to by the student, constitutes a contract. Alternatively, the editor may ask the student to sign a contract.

Some students may benefit from working with an editor early in their postgraduate studies, for example, when drafting thesis chapters or manuscripts that will be included in the thesis. Any editing of a student's writing should be limited to copyediting and/or proofreading, as indicated in the *Guidelines* and the *Standards*.

Paying the editor

The cost of editing a thesis depends on a range of factors that affect the time needed for editing, including the quality of the writing and the length, complexity and presentation of the thesis. Some students may receive a grant from their university to contribute to the cost of thesis editing. Students should not assume that this grant will cover the full cost of editing.

Providing the thesis to the editor and agreeing on the editing process

The student is responsible for providing the editor with a clean copy of the thesis and should inform the editor of any university requirements or style guide that should be used.

The thesis may be submitted to the editor in electronic form or hard copy. If a university has a preferred editing format, this should be followed. Unless the university specifically forbids it, IPEd recommends that the thesis be submitted for editing in electronic form, as a Word document, so that changes can be tracked by the editor and efficiently reviewed by the student. The student should discuss the choice of format and style with the editor. The editor should explain any specific requirements of the student during the editing process.

Editing a thesis including publications

Some students complete a thesis that includes work published or accepted for publication before compilation of the thesis. When arranging for editing of this type of thesis, the student should indicate any parts of the thesis that have been previously published and whether these should or should not be edited.

Editors may provide editing services for individual manuscripts that form part of a thesis but will be submitted for publication before compilation of the final thesis provided that the editing complies with the services editors may provide (see 'Services professional editors may provide' above) and the definitions of copyediting and proofreading covered in Parts D and E of the *Standards*.

Finalising the edited thesis

The student is responsible for reviewing and checking all changes suggested by the editor. Using a professional editor should ensure a thesis is expertly and thoroughly copyedited and/or proofread. However, it is impossible to guarantee that all errors are eliminated. **Students have final responsibility for the integrity of their thesis**, including meeting all their university's requirements and guidelines.

Acknowledging professional editing

Editing assistance should be acknowledged at the appropriate point in the thesis, as indicated by university requirements, if any. Unless the university specifically requires that the editor be named, editors may choose not to be acknowledged by name.