

Working with self-employed editors: A guide for clients

For editors to provide to their clients, including publishers

The Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) has developed this guide for clients so you know what to expect when you work with a freelance editor.

The guide sets out some basic principles, both professional and ethical, so you can approach the project with a clear understanding of what is required and build a strong working relationship from the start.

The guide ensures you are both familiar with the process for:

- agreeing on the work
- defining the scope of work
- varying the agreement
- communicating with each other
- providing supporting documents
- paying for the work
- dealing with disputes.

If your editor is an IPEd member, they will also follow the IPEd [Code of Ethics](#), [Standards for editing practice](#) and [Guidelines for editing research theses](#). These documents explain the principles, values and standards IPEd members have agreed to work to.

Agreeing on the work

Before the project begins, you will enter into a binding agreement with each other. This might be a formal contract or an informal written agreement, such as a set of emails.

You can use the standard agreement template from IPEd and the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) as the base for your own agreement. The IPEd–ASA agreement is particularly useful because it defines many of the key terms that apply to editing work, including some that appear in these guidelines. You may already have access to the template if you are a member of either organisation. If not, please ask your editor for a copy (the template is available in the IPEd member portal). For academic editing, a sample agreement and notes, developed by the Standing Committee for Academic Editing, are also in the portal.

Defining the scope of work

Whatever form your agreement takes, it should clearly set out:

- what material you would like edited – for example, its genre, word count or page extent
- what the scope of work is – for example, the type and extent of editing you need (including how many rounds of editing you expect), inclusions and exclusions, and the supporting documents you will supply
- how the material will be edited – that is, in hard copy, digital or both (and the software you'll be using)

- who is responsible for accepting or rejecting any tracked changes
- what the expected schedule and costs are, including booking dates, deadlines, invoicing and payment terms
- whether you will acknowledge the editor, if appropriate and the editor agrees to be acknowledged, and provide them with a complimentary copy of the published work.

The editor will need all this information, especially the scope, before they agree to or start the work. If the editor cannot see the material, or the brief is incomplete, you will need to discuss how best to manage the project.

To quote or give an estimate of the cost of the job, many editors do a trial edit. Some will ask you to supply a sample; others prefer to select their own samples at random from the entire manuscript. Some charge for this trial edit; others absorb it into the project cost if their bid for the work is successful. Your editor will agree these details with you before starting a trial edit.

Varying the agreement

Changes to projects are sometimes unavoidable. Altering any aspect of the agreement – extent, scope, method, start date or deadlines – constitutes a variation that you must both agree to.

If you need to change your agreement, you should tell your editor as soon as possible and explain why. They will do the same. Together you may need to renegotiate the project's:

- timelines, especially if the scope of work changes or the start date is delayed
- cost, which will likely increase if the scope of work increases, for example.

You should both also check your original agreement for terms related to compensation and termination, such as non-refundable deposits, options for replacement work, payment for work completed and notice periods.

An agreement may need to change for various reasons. For example:

- An editor bases their quote on a sample chapter but they later find the sample was not representative of the whole project. If less work is required, the editor may charge less than the agreed fee. If more work is required, the editor and client will need to agree to a new fee.
- A client books an editor to proofread a typeset manuscript. When the editor starts work, they find it requires much more editorial intervention than is usual for a proofread. The scope of work exceeds that in the agreement, so a new fee may need to be agreed.

Communicating with each other

As with all teamwork, respectful communication is essential for you to have a good working relationship with your editor.

You should discuss how you both prefer to communicate, including the best methods, times and days, and your expected turnaround times for email responses. You should be mindful of each other's time and commitments and be clear in advance about availability for communication.

Work hours for self-employed editors are not always standard and editors often work on several projects in a given period. This means you might agree the likely number of hours for the project but not necessarily the times and days your editor will work.

Providing supporting documents

You should give your editor as much information as possible, as quickly as possible, such as your in-house style guide or project style sheet if you have one. These supporting documents can streamline the editor's work and reduce the overall cost. Your editor may not be able to start editing without them.

The style sheet should include:

- particular word or spelling choices
- lists of proper nouns, such as places, people and organisations
- specific language terms, such as First Nations, Māori or foreign words
- the referencing style to be followed, if appropriate (especially for multi-author works)
- a chronology, if appropriate (such as for memoir or historical fiction).

If agreed, the editor should also provide a style sheet, or add to your style sheet, when the project ends.

Paying for the work

Editors are highly qualified and skilled, some with exceptional levels of experience. It is in your best interest to value and compensate your editor appropriately. IPEd publishes a range of [fair pay rates](#) for self-employed editors on its website. These are a guide to appropriate rates for different skills and experience. [Indicative costs for academic editing](#) are also on the website.

However, the rate your editor charges is entirely at their discretion, as is whether they charge by the hour, word, page or project.

An editor's rates may increase for some types of projects, such as multi-author works or jobs with a fast turnaround. The editor may require a deposit or payment at intervals, particularly for work over a long period. For example, some projects require intermittent work over several months, a year or more.

You should:

- agree the payment terms before the editor starts work
- promptly pay your editor all payments due to them.

If a project is more time consuming or complicated than expected, and therefore requires the agreement to be changed, your editor should not charge more than the original contracted amount without your agreement. The editor may pause work until you agree to a new fee.

Dealing with disputes

You and your editor should seek to resolve disputes promptly and fairly, considering all the circumstances, including the terms of your agreement.

Your editor must perform their work in line with the principles and practices of Australian Consumer Law and other applicable federal, state and territory legislation. If your editor is an IPEd member and they breach the Code of Ethics, they may face the disciplinary measures set out in section 8 of [IPEd's Constitution](#).

The Australian Government's [business website](#) contains some helpful information about dispute resolution.