

Proofreading and Copyediting: What's the Difference?



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The short answer

Proofreading and copyediting are two separate processes with elements in common, but in a nutshell, copyediting comes first and is quite detailed and intrusive. Intrusive, but always in collaboration with the composer. Proofreading is a less intrusive final check to weed out errors that the copyeditor might have missed, as well as finding mistakes introduced during any intervening stages.

There is another incarnation. Proof-editing is a hybrid of the two, a service that would not be up to mainstream publication standard, but which is fine for performance purposes and self-publication. There are three simple reasons for this: time, budget and professional experience.

For independent clients, if no other eye has seen your music and you request 'proofreading', you really mean 'proof-editing'. The work needs a

full copyedit, but you may not have the budget for that. Proof-editing is good enough, and doesn't mean settling for something second-rate – just not perfect, that's all. No self-respecting editor working alone would presume to offer perfection!

So what does intrusive mean, as an aspect of copyediting?

Copyediting

Copyediting involves two aspects: 1) changing and improving some of the way the music is notated (which never happens in proofreading); and 2) making sure that recurring elements are always consistent, especially when music is repeated, or repeated with varied aspects. These elements could include, for example, percussion instruments appearing on the same line/space of the stave every time; similar beaming patterns; a consistent application of articulations; and keeping typographical house style consistent. Amongst many other things.

What a copyeditor might look for first

After an initial perusal to see that the whole score is present(!) and legible, the copyeditor might do the following preliminary stages, not in any strict order, but crossing off items as they occur:

See if the score is transposing/concert pitch.

See if any instruments are missing, or unexpected instruments added later.

Look at the overall plan of tempo markings; see if all MM marks add up.

Put all typographical elements into the publisher's house style, or suggest a tailored house style to the client, based on what they already have.

Check time signatures are used appropriately and that there are no redundant reappearances of the same time signature.

Check that key signatures are correct and if the music needs to use different signatures to avoid using too many accidentals.

Check order and logical placing of rehearsal figures.

Check use of marginal labels and instrument abbreviations.

Check if any small repeats need to be written out.

Next, the copyeditor will look at the music in closer detail, going well beyond what a proofreader would do.

More detail

Check that instrument registers are correct and, if any passages look unplayable, advise the composer.

Check for impossible changes of instrument.

Check that rhythms and rests are notated correctly.

Check that beaming is correct, or if idiosyncratic, consult the composer.

Check enharmonic spellings – would a C# to C $\sharp$ be better as C# to B#?

Check doublings of pitch, rhythm, dynamics, articulations.

Check use of cancelling/warning accidentals.

Check use of up/down stems for pitches on the middle line of stave.

Look out for very long hairpins – would cresc. or dim. be better?

Check consistent notation of rhythm, dynamics, articulations across similar passages throughout the score.

Can some articulations be simplified using 'sim', or 'sempre stacc.'?

Check positioning of tuplet numbers – are they too far from the notes?

Look at wording of performance instructions – could they be improved?

Check use of double barlines, especially before key changes.

Check if string divisi is laid out logically, and if extra staves are needed for clarity.

Check continuities: see if dynamics 'add up'; mutes con or senza; brass stopped/open; strings pizz./arco, sul pont./nat., solo/tutti, div./unis; shared stave instruments correctly labelled a 2 or 1, 2, etc.

Check underlay in vocal/choral music for positioning, spelling, word division, extender lines, use of upper/lower case.

Look out for copyright problems in both music and words.

Layout

All the above points deal with the content of the music. That should take priority over 'cosmetic' issues. In a publishing house, the setters usually will have formatted most things, but a composer's initial file is probably going to be full of empty staves just in case of revision. A copyeditor might well do some formatting and hiding of unnecessary staves, not

least because it's useful to establish the left- and right-hand pages of a score fairly soon. Font sizes might well get a look over for consistency, as well as paper size, stave size, and margin measurements.

Proofreading

In a publishing house, when all the above has been done, the score will be checked by the composer and then passed on for a final proofread. The proofreader is not expected to change anything in the score at this stage, but might make suggestions if something doesn't look right. To give you a feel for all this, it helps to know the pecking order: a copyeditor queries and consults the composer; a proofreader queries and consults the copyeditor.

The main things that a proofreader does are the following:

Check all material is present.

Check tempo indications are present and 'add up'.

Check pitch and rhythm against a source.

Check dynamics and articulations are present and consistent.

Check continuities (as in the copyediting list above).

Check page turns in parts are possible.

Check cues in parts are adequate.

*Check any copy-editing issues, **but only if they leap out**; this work should be already done.*

You will see from the above that proofreading appears to include a smaller list of elements. This is usually the case with a publisher, but as a rule of thumb, when dealing with independent clients outside of houses, copyediting at some level is what will be required and negotiated, so hopefully you have a better handle on the distinction now!

Ivor McGregor August 2026

Ivor McGregor is a professional music proofreader, editor and typesetter. Need help presenting your written music? Visit ivormcgregorproofreading.co.uk