

How Much Does Music Proofreading Cost?

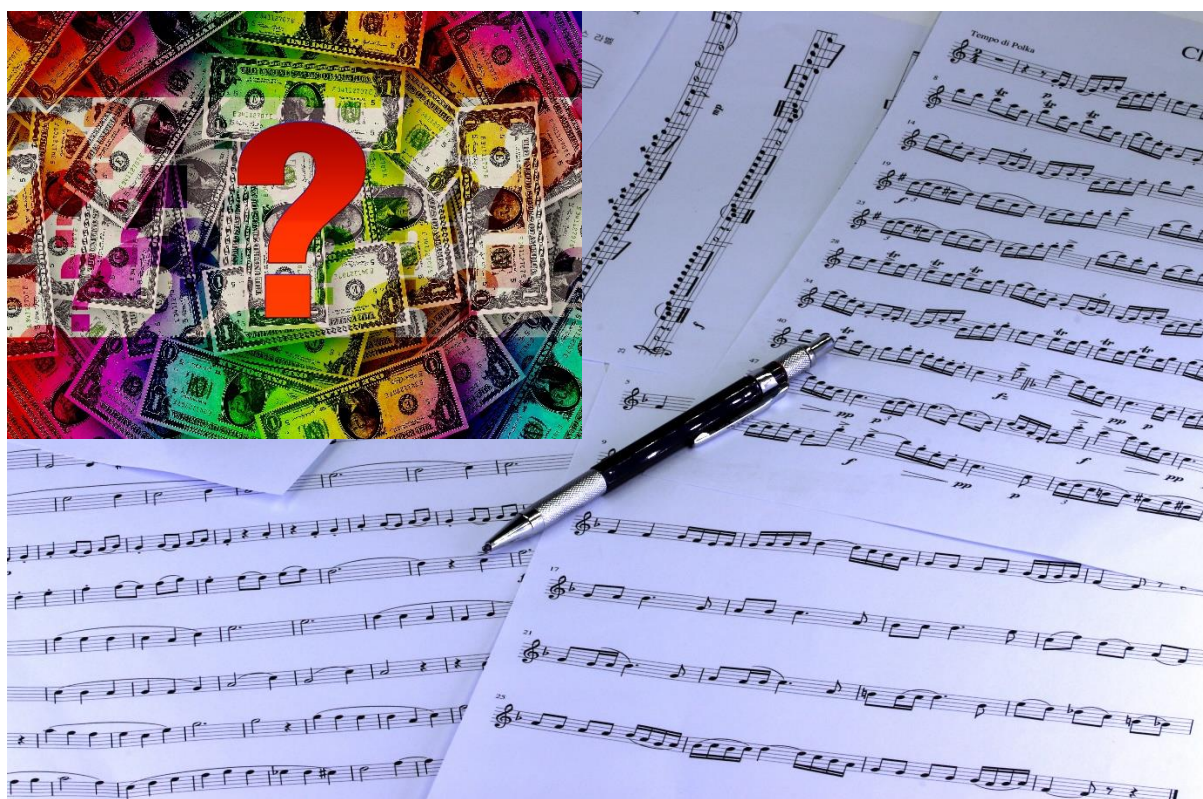


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The subtitle of this blog might well be: 'Why can't I just get a straight quote upfront?'

It's understandable. We all want a ballpark figure, whatever the service. After all, you don't go into a supermarket without weighing up the price of each product before reaching the checkout till.

But those are commodities: actual objects that you purchase. When it comes to music editors, you are talking about buying our time. And that time is heavily dependent on the state of the music you present to them.

Well, can't I just work it out from the size of the piece, relative to previous projects? Alas, no.

Clients usually present me with their own settings in Sibelius, Dorico or other programmes. Everyone comes with a different standard of setting; some are really expert while others are at more elementary stages. An

advanced setter may have some editing issues outstanding, and conversely, a good self-editor may be at an intermediate level when it comes to interacting with the machine. So there is already a wide range of variables to weigh up before even beginning to work out the initial quote!

There are two extremes of setting that I encounter. The work I do for mainstream publishers at publication level deals with immaculate files with possibly only one error per 10 or even 20 pages. That error can be hard to find. You have to work slowly, systematically and vigilantly, resisting the temptation to speed up.

The opposite extreme is when a score is littered with errors. Pitches, dynamics and articulations are the main offenders here. Although they tend to leap out, the sheer volume of them can make it hard to catch absolutely all, especially when marking up a PDF with callout boxes. So that takes time.

But long before anything else, what is the service that is actually required? Many clients ask for a 'proofread', but what they probably mean (and need) is a 'copy-edit'. To understand the very important distinction between these two services, I must refer you to my previous blog: [Proofreading and Copyediting: What's the Difference?](#)

Formatting is another issue that usually needs attention. Some clients rarely come to me for this alone, but it can be done.

This then leads on to a negotiation process with the client to ascertain what I can realistically do and what level of editing I will actually provide. This is the first aspect that contributes to the quote.

Once we've established the level of input required, I then do an initial hour's work on the piece. This is the second contributory aspect. It will go towards calculating roughly how many hours I need to complete the work at the level agreed. But this quote can still only be approximate, however, as experience has shown that more time-consuming problems might emerge further on into the piece. Hopefully, I will have spotted anything really serious during my first look through the whole score. As it's all too easy to under-quote at this stage, I tend to give an estimated range between £x and £y (a lower and higher figure). The actual cost can fall somewhere in the middle, but forewarned is forearmed, as they say, and my aim is to avoid any surprises for the client. I try to give a best-possible outcome as well as a worst-case scenario!

What tends to happen for big projects is that I suggest a staged approach, breaking the project up into manageable chunks which can be done separately if the timescale allows. This helps clients to budget realistically and get the most pressing problems of the project sorted out first.

So the bottom line is this: I can't tell you straightaway how much a project will cost, but during the course of a series of initial perusals and questions to you, a ranged quote emerges and we take it from there.

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