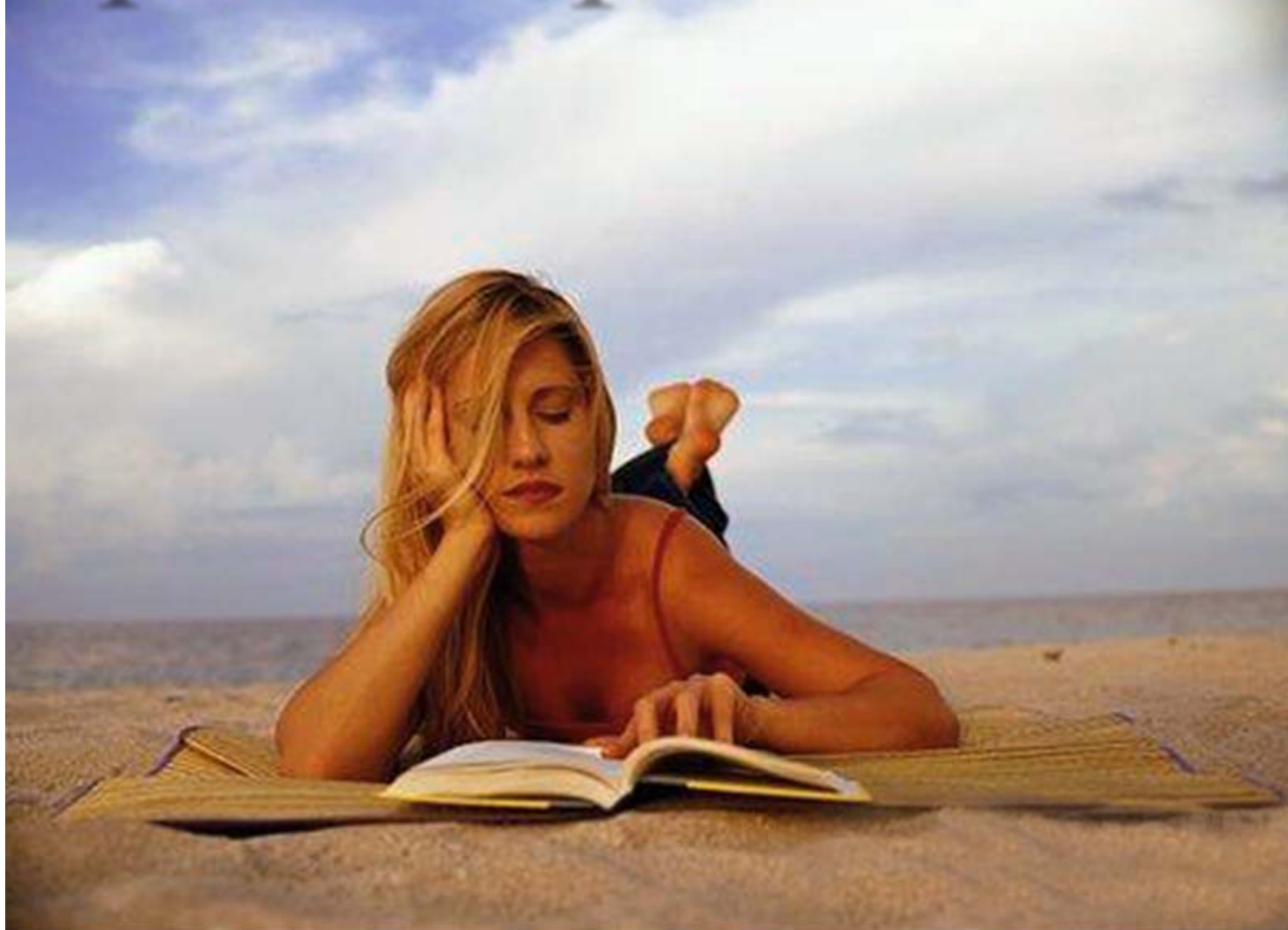


paid to proofread



Secrets to Financial Freedom and Success

by Suzanne Gilad with Andrew Gitzy

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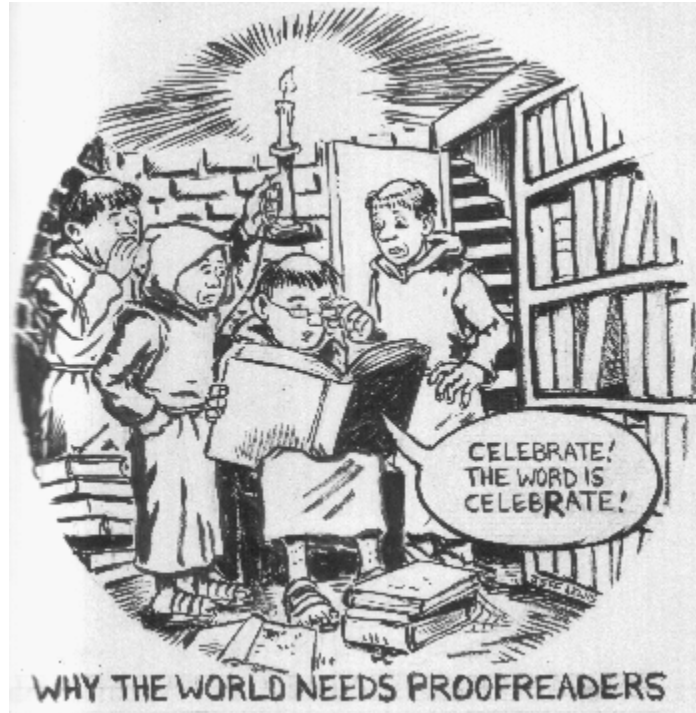
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Introduction



Have a Life. Not a Job.

My passions have always pulled me in many directions. I majored in *everything* in school. After college, I traveled through Europe and the Middle East for a year. Since starting my life as a grown-up, I've succeeded as an actor and voice-over artist, worked as a private financial consultant, invested in real estate . . . and become a mother. Twice. Through all of this, I have never held a nine-to-five job, in any field. I haven't had to and I haven't wanted to. Very early on, I discovered something that has given me the freedom to pursue my dreams while still being able to live well: **proofreading**.

Does *proofreading* sound unexciting? Well, it's not. And the payoff in time and money alone can make it the most exciting thing you've ever done; to say nothing of the great stuff you get to read. So stick with me.

I don't buy books anymore or go to the library. I don't need to. But I bet we have some of the same favorites: *The Da Vinci Code*, *How to Make an American Quilt*, the entire *Star Wars* series, *Dave Barry Hits Below the Beltway*, *The Accidental Tourist*, and *The Chronicles of Riddick*. I get to read bestsellers like these and rave about them to all my friends months before anyone else can get their hands on them.

And I do it all on my own time. Whenever I want. I work in the intermittent hours—while I'm riding on the train, before an audition, or sometimes even in the recording studio between “takes.” I'll just pull my page proofs and a pencil out of my bag, plop them on my lap, and go at it.

I started proofreading by pure chance. Judy, a family friend who worked for a local publishing house, asked if I was interested in being an editorial assistant. (That's a standard route into publishing—basically a glorified coffee-getter, and not a bad first job if you want to climb the corporate ladder in the full-time world.) That same week, I auditioned for and booked a national tour of a musical. Judy gave me the company proofreading manual and a simple project to read while I was on the road. (Later, she was also gracious enough to send me a long note detailing all my errors.)

One book led to two, and then other editors in Judy's office began to send me projects. Those editors moved to larger publishing houses and tossed my name around to still *more* editors. Pretty soon I was working for fifteen different book publishers on everything from Stephen King to erotica.

Over the past ten years that I've been proofreading, I've had hundreds of friends and strangers ask me, “What are you doing?” You can't imagine the excitement it elicits when I

answer simply, “I’m proofreading a book.” They can’t believe I get paid to read. They can’t believe *how much* I get paid to read. They see the flexibility of a freelance, from-anywhere job that is rewarding, easy, kinda cool—and doesn’t bore the heck out of you. They want that for themselves.

The next question is, “Can you teach me how?” Yes, I can. I’ve led seminars explaining and detailing the skills required to be a successful proofreader. More significantly, I’ve taught the *business* of proofreading: how to track down the jobs of interest; how to find the right people; how to create and foster strong relationships with employers to obtain consistent, profitable, and intriguing work.

This book is for the artists, the moms, the entrepreneurs, the retirees, the stuck-in-my-full-time jobbers, and anyone who just plain hates what they do now. You can begin proofreading without having to be on the inside of the industry. I did it, I am still doing it, and there is plenty of work to go around. For so many people, this can be the perfect job: working from wherever you want, getting a free education, and earning up to a six-figure income.

Flexibility

When my son was 3 months old, we hopped on a plane to Miami for a quick vacation. I packed a proofread with me: Jonathan Kellerman’s latest thriller. There is nothing better than sitting under an umbrella on the beach, my son frolicking with my sister, as I read a fabulous suspense story—one that paid for the entire trip. That is the spirit of being a freelancer.

Lauren Demming

Flexibility encompasses the what, where, and when. Imagine the freedom. You can pursue other activities and career options, like being an artist or student or entrepreneur, while you still have income to support yourself.

Also, consider mobility. Proofreading can be done from anywhere in the world—between loads of laundry, when the kids have gone to bed, on a sleepy Sunday morning, or on the train en route to work. Or imagine no commute! No horrible traffic jams or unwashed fellow travelers or sensible shoes. No shoes at all!

Plus, the hours are great. Proofreading can be done any time you might read a novel for pleasure—day or night. If you're a night owl, or an early bird, or can only find time between 3 A.M. and 5 A.M., the hours are ideal. You create them, and you can change them every day.

A Free Education

I'm a Jeopardy! freak. After I started proofreading, I noticed that since I've been reading a little bit about a lot of things, I get so many more questions right . . . and faster than the contestants on the show. I plan on getting a slot on Jeopardy! next year. Brad Rutter won over a million dollars in 2002. I'm going to beat that. I'm completely serious.

Chris Hemple

Were you in college? How much did it cost? How much were the books *alone*? Are you still paying for school? Education is not cheap in America. But let's turn the situation around. How about getting a fabulous education for free? You can discover topics you never knew existed, and be introduced to all sorts of new information that can shape your ideas, enhance your imagination, and allow you to be a fascinating person to talk to at parties. Now what if you get PAID for that fabulous free education, too? When I proofread *The DaVinci Code*, I was paid

over \$1,000 for it. If I wasn't in this profession, I could have bought the book for \$24.95 instead.

You do the math.

I've also had the chance to read *Oh, Yuck!: The Encyclopedia of Everything Nasty*; *Sugarbusters!*; *The Little Strength Training Book*; and *Sex for the Clueless*. As you can imagine, I've learned some remarkable stuff. Would I have ever thought to seek out these books on my own? Never. Reading gives you a broader understanding of the world, which can help you discover untapped parts of yourself. Remember "reading is fundamental" from kindergarten? You may find, through the magic of books, something that truly lights you up. This is a great way to explore the world and discover new passions.

Show Me the Money!

It's a great little secret, my proofreading. I am a writer, which heaven knows is anything but steady. But between writing gigs, I get to read other writers' work . . . and make money doing it! It's like getting paid to do research for my own writing career . . . plus, it covers my rent every month and then some.

Leigh Anderson

A couple of years ago I started proofreading on the side. And I'm so happy I did. Not only do I make a pretty great supplemental income, I also get these fantastic tax benefits. I can deduct part of my rent because it's my workspace, all my supplies, mailing expenses, business lunches, and even the mileage on my car.

Jory Alexander

So how much can you make? The sky is really the limit. Proofreading is an amazing source of revenue. You can supplement your current job or make it your main income—it's your choice. Full-time freelance proofreaders can and do make six figures.

The work is abundant. Our society is filled with publications—look at the proliferation of giant super-size bookstores, not to mention online stores like Amazon.com. And the Internet has fundamentally transformed the written word and the way information is shared. The good news for you is that almost every piece of written material you can think of needs a proofreader.

Everything that is published of quality must be checked for the basics:

- Books—nonfiction and fiction
- Magazines and newspapers
- Internet sites
- Business plans
- Catalogues and directories
- Management training manuals
- Promotional literature (brochures, pamphlets, and programs)
- Sales documents
- Travel guides and tourist information

. . . the list goes on.

And here's the skinny: Because your freelance projects can come from lots of sources, nobody knows who else you're working for. Some freelancers have five projects on their desk at once. (I don't recommend this, but hey, go crazy.) The point is that you can take on as much or as little work as you see fit. And remember, all you have to do is read.

So What Is It?

I wish there had been a proofreading program in school so that I would have known about this sooner. I don't have to answer to anybody, I can read all day in my pajamas and fuzzy slippers, and I have such a comfortable work environment—my home. Who knew?

Wanda Roderiguez

As a freelancer, you're a gun for hire. You can accept or decline whatever work is offered you. You get to say where, you get to say when, you get to say who. The majority of freelance proofreaders work exclusively from home.

Proofreaders are used in several stages of the production of any printed material. Basically, the proofreader "reads the proofs." Proofs are a loose-leaf copy of the material sent by the printer before publication. As the proofreader reads, he or she may compare the original manuscript to the proofs to check that no errors were made. Better yet, proofreaders are frequently offered "cold proofs," meaning that there is no comparison necessary and you can simply enjoy reading the text straight through.

How many times have you been reading a book or a menu or a magazine and an error suddenly pops out at you? Well, my friend, you've just done the job. Proofreading is a skill that is easily learned. Anyone who can read this book can proofread. Whether you realize it or not, this is a profession you have been training for since you picked up your first set of A, B, C blocks.

Everything You Don't Need to Know

I didn't know I had so much experience as a proofreader when my first project came my way. I was surprised when I got the call for the second one. Then another editor wanted me to send in my résumé, which I scrambled to get together. I was pleased and kind of impressed with myself. I didn't realize how much I already knew about proofreading. Or how good I'd be at it.

Omar Schmidt

Freelance proofreaders come from all walks of life and all sorts of backgrounds. There really are no prerequisites to limit anyone from being successful in this profession. Take a look at all the things that a successful proofreader *doesn't* need to know.

The names of grammatical rules or how to articulate how they work: You just need to be able to identify that it's wrong, and fix it. I dig the phrase “dangling participle,” but that doesn't mean I know what it is or does. The only thing I remember from elementary school is “subject/predicate,” but if you tell me “there's a clause there,” I'll just nod and smile. You don't have to put into words *why* something needs to be corrected—simply correct it. That's your only job.

Anything about the topic you're reading: My first projects were clinical psychotherapy books. Too bad for me I dropped out of Psych 101 in college. But as it turned out, I didn't have any need for the background. Of course, the more psychology books and journals I read for these publishers, the more I could recognize the correct spellings of famous names in the field, and the quicker I could spot a discrepancy. And I learned something about psychology (which comes in handy when you have a husband and children).

The business of publishing: You, the proofreader, are one small spoke in a very large wheel. Your work also takes place very near the end of the process, so any huge catastrophes have already befallen the project long before you entered the scene. Publishing is a tragedy-laden profession (at least to those in publishing). But never fear! You *don't* need to see the forest for the trees. All you need to do is read.

Let's Go

What you'll learn in the following chapters is to how to get to read great books—whatever you like best to read—before they're published and get paid thousands of dollars for it. We'll talk about discovering your innate proofreading skills, what additional resources can get you up to speed in order to compete for the business, what's important in your résumé, how to get the experience you want, how to track down the businesses that need your expertise, and more.

I am committed to financial freedom for every person. I found my path to financial freedom—the ability to work where I want, when I want, how I want, without having a boss, without having a cubicle or a commute, without even feeling like I have a job—through freelance proofreading. I believe anyone who wants to can have access to that same freedom. I appreciate your feedback, suggestions, and ideas to make future editions of Paid to Proofread an even more useful, useable tool. Please feel free to contact me at sue@paidtoproofread.com. I especially welcome your success stories. Happy proofing!

Sue Gilad

P.S. There are ten proofreading errors in this book. Can you find them?

View all the [Paid to Proofread products here](#).

PART I: HOW TO GET THE JOBS

Chapter 1

What Does Proofreading Really Entail?

My girlfriend really loved The Poisonwood Bible, so she gave it to me for my birthday. Now, Lisa knows that I only read books that I get paid for, so she stuck a hundred-dollar bill in it as a bookmark to make sure that I'd read it.

Bottom-line it for me: What's in this chapter?

You Can Do This: Discovering the Skills You Already Have

- Creating the Right Mind-set
- Learning How to Read?

Building Experience

- Six Degrees of Separation
- Approach a Total Stranger with Ease
- Local Opportunities
- Free Training
- Do It Now

A Crash Course in Publishing

- Who's Who and What's What?
- Where Do You Fit In?

Creating the Right Mind-set

There's a myth that, to be a successful proofreader, you need a sacred space, absolute silence, ultra sharp pencils, and last but not least, a stick up the behind. Proofreading takes attention and concentration, but it isn't brain surgery. In fact, as you get accustomed to reading like a proofreader, it will become a natural process. You will enjoy what you're reading while getting the job done in less time. If you want to start thinking like a proofreader, here are a few simple tasks you can incorporate into your day to establish the right mind-set.

Read the newspaper

The magic of reading the newspaper is that it will get you used to . . . reading. Reading is a process—something that needs to be exercised. If you're not a regular reader, the newspaper is a cheap, digestible source of practice material. And reading the newspaper will help you to become familiar with current expressions and common terminology.

Even if you are a big reader, the newspaper can still be useful. You should check out sections of the newspaper you wouldn't normally open—whether it's the arts section, the real estate section, the business section—whatever you line the birdcage with. Even if you read only two paragraphs a day, you will begin to see how a person can effectively proofread without actually knowing what the text is talking about. (And it might help your future stock portfolio.)

Surf the Internet

The Internet is a door into the entire world. You can find all levels of reading and all topics of interest. As you wander around, you will notice that you gravitate toward certain kinds of Web

The Daily Bungle

Presumably you will read the best-quality newspaper in your area, but even if you don't, that can be useful, too; lesser-quality papers may be more apt to have errors. You'll learn how spotting errors can be a great job ticket in **Chapter 3: Finding the Jobs**.

sites. Take note of the sites that you enjoy and keep coming back to. The tone or content of these sites will be the sort you will look for when you go out to find jobs.

What's more, the Internet is a mess—in the best of all possible ways. Because so much of the material posted on the Web is put up in a hurry, it's rife with errors. There are far more mistakes on the Internet than in any other written material. This is a boon for your proofreader-in-training eyes. The errors are yours to find.

Keep a running list of recurring errors you see. This will be useful in two ways. First, you will become acquainted with the sorts of common mistakes writers make. Second, list-making is a good habit to cultivate. When you begin proofreading for a living, you will want to make lists of specific alterations you are making, habitual errors the writer has made, and unusual spellings to remember.

Open junk mail and read it

Lots of folks get excited about their mail. They go to the box with great anticipation and are invariably disappointed by the plethora of junk mail crammed therein. Well, here's a way to turn that frown upside down: Use it. Junk mail is nearly as error ridden as the Internet. However, junk mail has the added advantage of being printed.

One the best things about junk mail is that no one will get offended if you write all over it, and that's exactly what you should do. It's perfect practice. If you're not familiar with the symbols yet, just get used to neatly circling the errors you see. If you've studied the proofreading symbols, you can adorn your junk mail with them.

Listen to the TV

Everybody has difficulty remembering how to spell some words. One study reports that twenty percent of writers do not spell well because they cannot visualize the word in question. So get in some proofreading practice while you are enjoying your favorite program: Visualize words as

you hear them on TV. Obviously, you can't try to spell everything you hear. Just pick out a juicy or interesting word every minute, picture the word in your head, and say each letter to yourself. You may want to write down your spelling of particularly tricky words and check a dictionary later.

For advanced television listeners, try picturing the entire dialogue as you hear it. Don't spell the words, but rather try to see the text like a ticker tape in your head. If you can picture the text as quickly as it is spoken, you will greatly improve your reading speed.

A wrinkle in the brain is worth two on the face

Studies have shown that some brain-wave activity is lower when you are watching TV than when you are asleep. So visualizing words will help get those brain waves moving, too!

Learning How to Read?

Most of us don't think about how we read; we simply read at one tempo. So start to take note of how you read. Are you fast reader, a slow reader, or someplace in between? Then practice reading at a variety of speeds different from your usual pace.

First, slow down. Don't skim or scan; read each word carefully. This will help you begin to notice details. To assist you in slowing down, break up the text. There are a couple of techniques you can try:

1. Run a ruler or a blank piece of paper under each line of text you read so that your eye doesn't get distracted. It will only follow that line. Take time to notice the details of each line, such as small words like *a*, *of*, and *the*.
2. Set your four fingertips under each line of text. Slowly sweep your hand across the page as you read.

Now, speed up. Still read carefully, but test the limits of the pace you can set for yourself.

Here are some techniques you can try for faster reading:

1. Trace your whole hand down the page just ahead of your eyes. Keep an even motion as your hand drifts downward. You can experiment with a faster and slower pace at the beginning of each new page.
2. Run a ruler or a blank piece of paper *above* each line of text you read. This will stop you from reading a passage repeatedly and help you pay close attention the first time. Try moving the paper down faster than you think you can go.

You innately possess the capacity to do this job. Your abilities just need to be exercised and practiced. Be inventive with the ways you train yourself, and find techniques that work for you. After you have spent some time creating the right mind-set and explored your reading skills, you're ready to start building real experience.

Building Experience

The act of building experience is going to do two things for you. First, it's going to teach you how to do the job. Second, it's going to give you experience that you can put on your résumé in order to get more jobs.

This is one of those chicken and the egg situations. How do you get a proofreading job without knowing how to proofread? And how do you learn how to proofread without doing proofreading jobs? You can take all the classes you want and read every "how to" book on the market, but quite simply, you just need to begin. The best way to learn how to proofread is to dive right in, whether or not you know the proofreading symbols or how to employ them. Chances are, if you are dealing with local publications and personal material—which you will be doing—the people you will be working for won't know how to interpret them anyway.

These first jobs are going to be freebies. The purpose is for you to create a serviceable pool of experience that you can put on your first résumé, not earn income. Keep a list of the jobs you

complete as you are building experience. (More on résumés in **Chapter 2: Getting Ready to Sell Yourself**.) So where do you start? Read on.

Six Degrees of Separation

You may have heard that everyone on Earth is separated from everyone else by no more than six relatives or friends. Take advantage of these six commas of separation through your immediate circle of associates. Networking through friends and family is a time-honored and non-threatening place to begin any experience-building adventure. Make contact with everyone listed in your e-mail account, Rolodex, or Palm Pilot. Don't dismiss anyone out of hand. You may be pleasantly surprised by who can help you.

When contacting your network, simply communicate the following: "Friends, I am beginning my proofreading career. Right now, to gain different kinds of experience, I'm looking for any sort of project that needs a second eye." If you have friends in business, you can proofread their brochures, business cards, correspondence, or even a restaurant menu. A friend in school may need someone to look over a thesis or dissertation. Someone you know (or a "friend of a friend") may even work in some sort of publishing job and will let you come in and trail them for a day. Or perhaps they will let you swing by and poke your head in on a project.

The squeaky wheel gets the grease. If no one knows that you've decided to take on proofreading as a career change, no one will be able to help you. If you don't get a response to your first assault, ask again. People need to be gently prodded. And prodded.

Approach a Total Stranger with Ease

The Internet is an incredible resource for practice materials, offering two great benefits: instant access and anonymity. And because you can only communicate with people online through written

correspondence, it is a very comfortable way to start practicing the skill of approaching unfamiliar people.

There are literally thousands of writer's Web sites, Web rings, and online writing classes supporting (mostly unpublished) authors. Just go to your favorite search engine, such as Google, and type in keywords like "Writer" plus "Web site" and/or "Web ring." Take some time to browse through the countless sites you encounter, and look for Web pages where you can post to chat rooms or bulletin boards.

Post a simple message to the sites you choose: "I am a freelance proofreader. I am in the process of expanding my résumé and would like to add (fiction/nonfiction/whatever) to my experience. I will proofread a chapter of anything you are currently writing at no charge. Materials should be no shorter than ten pages and no longer than thirty pages. I will return pages to you with corrections within (24/48/72) hours. I can indicate corrections either on Microsoft Word using the *Track Changes* feature or on a hard copy. In exchange, I ask that you allow me to add your name and the title of your work to my résumé. I will not plagiarize your work or share it with anyone else."

The basic message to get across is, "I am a proofreader." Period. Don't ever say, "I don't know what the heck I'm doing." Rather, choose positive phrasing: "I am building my résumé" or "I am moving forward to a different level." Whatever you say, couch it in the implied terms of "I already have knowledge."

Tracking Changes

Microsoft Word lets you *Track Changes* on screen. *Track Changes* will mark where you make deletions, insertions, or other edits. A similar function allows you to make *Comments*, which usually appear as balloons beside the document. Both these functions are listed on the **Tools** menu in MS Word.

If you're using *Track Changes*, you don't have to worry about knowing the proofreading symbols—Microsoft Word inserts your changes for you. So electronic editing is a terrific place to begin.

When you declare that you are willing to give away your services for free, you will be *shocked* at the response you receive. You will undoubtedly be given the opportunity to read both some wonderful things and some pure rubbish, but it doesn't matter. You can get selective later. Right now, the point is to practice. If, however, you are lucky enough to get a response from anyone who has already published a book—or published anything legitimate—offer to proofread his or her forthcoming projects. Getting a published writer on your résumé is always a good thing.

Local Opportunities

There is something to be said for hometown beginnings. While the Internet is certainly an easy and immediate way to build experience, don't overlook the “real world.” Most communities abound with organizations of all sorts that produce publications of all sorts.

Think about the various community groups in your city or town. Most of them probably have some sort of written publication, whether it takes the form of a monthly newsletters, bulletin, brochure, press release, or even Web site. Here are a few places to help get your mind percolating:

- Churches
- Community centers
- Historical societies
- Libraries
- Museums
- Neighborhood groups
- Police and fire associations
- Recreation centers
- Sporting leagues
- Theaters

Seeking contacts with local organizations may be another opportunity to utilize your six degrees of separation. If your mom has been a member of the church or synagogue for twenty years, drop by the day that they're putting the monthly newsletter together and ask to pitch in by proofing the mock-up copy. Or you may need to stretch your wings and put yourself out there in person—to a total stranger, no less! Make a phone call or stop by the organization and see what you can

do for them. Most small groups need all the help they can get. I'm sure they'll be happy to use your services.

Free Training

One-day or several-day training courses are often available for free through temp agencies. This is particularly true for larger cities since there is always a demand for freelance proofreaders in law firms and big businesses. There are also private proofreading courses you can take that will connect you with temp agencies after you complete their courses. If you live in a bigger city, this is a great opportunity. While you might not be reading the most thrilling material, this sort of intense training will quickly give you skills and experience that you can easily translate into freelance employment. You can find local proofreading courses through Internet search engines using keywords like "proofreading course," "[name of your city]," "class," and "proofreader."

Do It Now

If you're near an Internet connection, put down this book for a moment and log on. Snoop around a bit and post your generous offer of a free proofread to a few writer-friendly sites. If you're not near the Internet, call a friend or two, let them know you're officially a freelance proofreader, and have them mull that over while you think about community groups that could use a good proofreader.

A Crash Course in Publishing

Your next step is to start getting familiar with the world you're going to be entering into and the lingo you're going to hear bandied about. You'll be pursuing jobs in an industry that may be unfamiliar to you. Knowing who's who and what's what will give you a leg up.

Who's Who and What's What?

As a proofreader, get ready to be a very small cog—albeit an important one—on a very big wheel. Let's look at the “stages of production” so you can understand the industry that you're going to be a part of. “Stages of production” describes the process that moves a handwritten text to a fully bound book or a completely accessible “live” Web site. Let's look at book production, because all other printed things take their cue from the book. Understanding book production will allow you to grasp how all published matter comes into being.

Don't be too concerned about how a book gets to a publisher, but just so you know: The **acquisitions editor** is the person who takes responsibility for finding and buying a publishable manuscript. Because publishing a book is expensive, this process is extremely competitive. At larger publishing houses, an entire editorial board will be included in the decision of whether or not to take on a manuscript.

Once a book is acquired it moves into the production stages. The acquisitions editor passes the manuscript to the **production manager**. The manager will choose a **production editor (PE)** from the staff to handle the manuscript based on the individual strengths of the editors and their availability. (Often, PEs handle many projects at once.)

The production editor oversees the process from typed **manuscript** (hopefully, with a computer disk) to **bound book**. Think of the PE as command central. The manuscript will rebound to and from the PE's desk as it moves through the various stages of production—always returning after changes have been made. Some production editors are just glorified paper-pushers; others serve as midwives who support all stages of labor and delivery of a bound book.

The production editor will first get familiar with the manuscript—this can range from leafing through the pages to actually sitting down and reading the entire work. The PE then “farms” the book to a **copyeditor**. (These days most copyeditors, like proofreaders, are freelance.) The copyeditor addresses all content, grammatical, and stylistic issues in the manuscript, as well as preparing it for design.

The Copyeditor

Proofreading is like high school: learn the material, spit back the information.

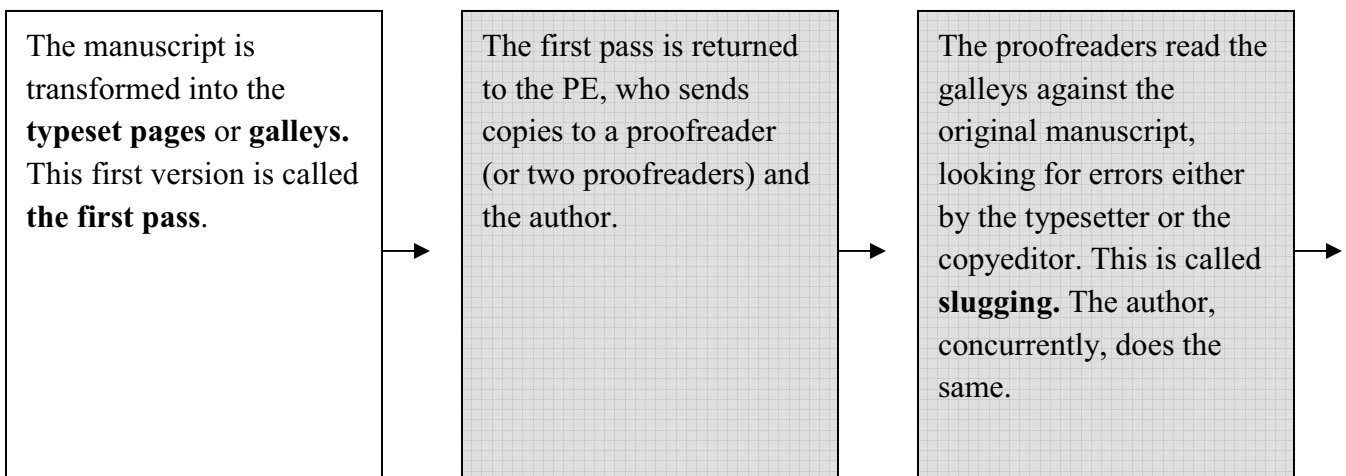
Copyediting is like college: Now you’re allowed to have opinions. Becoming a copyeditor is a logical next step for successful proofreaders.

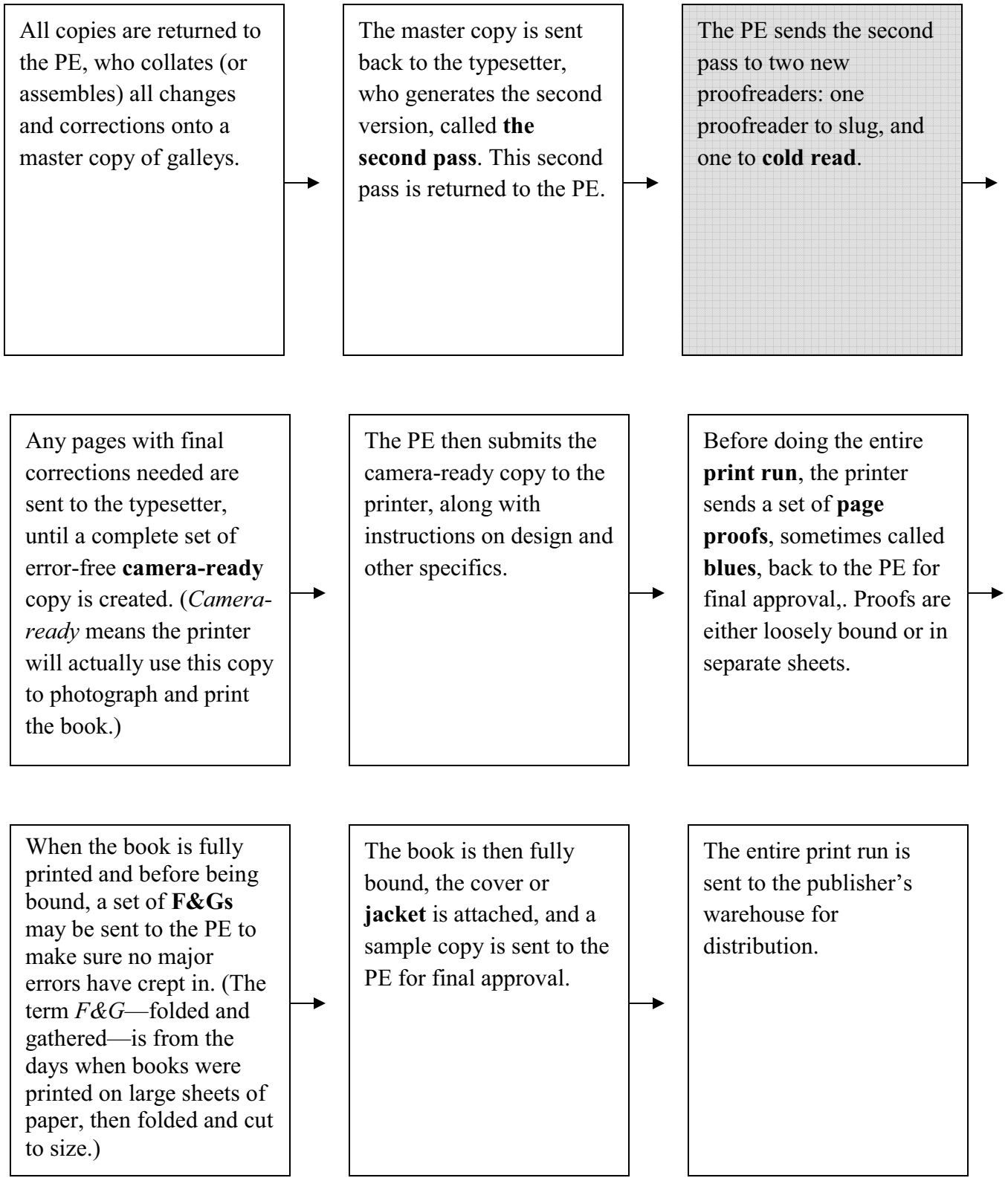
While the manuscript is being copyedited, the PE will contact a **designer**. With the input of the acquisitions editor and PE, the designer decides what the book will look like. The designer will choose the best size for the book (6x9 or 8 1/2x11, for example), the layout of text and illustrations that will be on each page, the fonts for the various page elements, and the cover design.

After the copyeditor finishes correcting and styling the manuscript, it is sent back to the author for approval and any necessary rewriting. Once author approval is secured, the manuscript then is sent to the **typesetter**, who is also known as the **compositor**. Typesetters are almost always outsourced or **out of house**.

Where Do You Fit In?

Now you come in. Here’s what happens:





Notice the specific role of the proofreader. You will be used in two places: after the generation of the first pass and that of the second pass. The first pass is almost always a comparison or slug read. If there are substantial changes to be made, they usually happen at this point. To ensure that

all the errors are caught, very often two proofreaders will be employed to do separate comparison reads.

The second pass receives a comparison read and what is called a cold read. With a cold read, there is nothing to be compared. You are simply a fresh pair of eyes, reading the book straight through, just as you would for pleasure.

So throughout the process of one book, you have four chances to work. Over 175,000 books are published every year. How many opportunities are available to you right now?

Wrap Up

Decide right now that you're a proofreader. Start to envision the opportunities and the material you'd like to read. Put in the forefront of your mind the kinds of authors that you'd love to be reading—the authors that indicate that you've succeeded. Take your career in hand and let people know what you're up to. Then take out a pen and your current résumé. Let's move on to Chapter 2, where you'll be revamping your résumé.

Chapter 2

Getting Ready to Sell Yourself

How did I build experience? I lied. Well, I didn't lie—I just took some creative license. After all, I had proofread my entire life . . . poring over term papers, menus, love letters. Now I just had to find ways to get it on my résumé legitimately.

Bottom-line it for me: What's in this chapter?

Creating a Winning Résumé: A Step-By-Step Guide to Identifying the Experience

You Didn't Know You Had

- Creating a Résumé from Nothing
- Reinvisioning Your Résumé
- Nuts and Bolts

Creating a Basic Cover Letter

- Laying the Groundwork
- Styles: Academic, Trade (Fiction and Nonfiction), and Mass Market

If you want to read books for money, the first thing you have to do is put *yourself* down on paper. Step one in getting work as a proofreader is proclaiming that you are one. In the world of business, the thing that best reflects who you are is your résumé—it is your entrée, your calling card, or your foot in the door. And going through the process of creating your résumé will have two great side benefits: First, it will help you realize how much ancillary experience you really do have. And second, in putting your experience down on paper, it will make your new career more real for you. It will be your official announcement to the world that “I am a proofreader.”

Creating a Winning Résumé: A Step-by-Step Guide to Identifying the Experience You Didn't Know You Had

You may have spent years in school studying art history or agriculture or the culinary arts. Perhaps you've gone on to a career in education, business, or even publishing. Most everyone who begins freelance proofreading has had some sort of different occupation in the past. No one starts in this profession with years of schooling and an overabundance of knowledge. Yet, proofreading is something you're already eminently qualified to build a résumé for—because just about any “job” experience you already have on your résumé encompasses many of the skills of a good proofreader.

All your résumé needs is a little repurposing before it's ready to roll out for all those editors anxiously awaiting it. This chapter will help you figure out how to do just that. You'll be learning how to read between your own lines: listing related experience you hadn't previously considered, jotting down new ideas, and reshaping your phraseology to better suit your new profession. As best as possible, your résumé should convey the idea that you are a proofreader. All your other abilities, talents, and expertise—even things that might be a big deal—will be put in relation to that fact.

If you have a current résumé, pull it out. (If you don't have one, don't sweat it. You may be better off. Just start making a list of your current job experience on a pad of paper.) You're going to look at your work history—and maybe even your life history—and examine: *Where have I had proofreading experience?*

As you read on through this chapter, ask yourself these questions about your past jobs, volunteer positions, or even personal experiences: *Where was the proofreading in it? Where did I review, correct, edit, improve, or rework someone else's words?* If “proofreading” seems too huge a stretch, then consider: *Where was the paperwork? What aspects involved specific, exacting, follow-through skills?* You never know what unexpected things you may uncover about yourself and your abilities in reconsidering your background.

To get an idea of how to redirect your experience, let's examine the résumés of two individuals: Benny and Marisa. They both came to proofreading from different careers and with different sorts of skills. And they both had vibrant previous careers, full of achievements that had virtually nothing to do with proofreading.

Creating a Résumé from Nothing

When Benny decided to begin proofreading, he had very little “translatable” experience. Benny was very accomplished in one specific field: He had several Broadway shows under his belt. But he was between acting gigs, he needed some cash, and he was looking for a steady “backup” job. Benny's connection to publishing and proofreading was obviously rather remote. In fact, the only résumé Benny had was his performing résumé. So he had to build his proofreading résumé from the ground up. Here's what he came up with:

Benny Reed

Cell: 646.555.0179
Home: 646.555.8540
Fax: 646.555.1234

Proofreader

364 Kiwi Street
Brooklyn, NY 11215
ReedReads@yahoo.com

EMPLOYMENT OBJECTIVE

To obtain freelance employment as a proofreader in the publishing industry, utilizing exceptional proofreading skills

PUBLISHING EXPERIENCE

Freelance proofreading projects completed for:

- **Bob Barlow**, *Bob Barlow's Book of Brain Boosters*
- **Jeremy L. Blaken**, *Breathe Softly*
- **Gerard San Giacomo**, *Destructuring the Corporation*
- **Shelby Myers**, *Failing the Faith*

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- Adjunct Professor in Speech/Communications, City University of New York (CUNY), 2004–2005
- Guest Lecturer in Speech/Communications, Fordham University, NY, 2003–2004
- Private Tutor: ESL (English as a Second Language), 2004–present:
Designed curricula for students' specific needs

EDUCATION

- **MFA**, University of Iowa, Drama with concentration in dramaturgy and literary history
- **BA**, Macalister College
- Paid to Proofread School, NYC

SKILLS

Highly computer literate (Mac, Microsoft Word)
Excellent with deadlines
French comprehension
Working Broadway actor (three shows to date)

So how did he arrive at this point? In order to explain that, it's most useful to examine Benny's résumé from the bottom up—since someone's most recent (and most impressive) experience usually appears first on a résumé, we'll follow the same path that got Benny from past to present. As you examine each section, make note of any sorts of headings, language, listings, or skills you may be able to use on your own résumé.

Skills

For the beginning proofreader, skills are key. They are the foundation for everything that will be built upon them. This heading doesn't presuppose that you have any experience in the field.

Rather, it presents you with the opportunity to describe your significant assets as you choose.

And there are many relatable skills that you can pop in there that will fill out your résumé nicely:

Highly computer literate (Mac, Microsoft Word) This knowledge is always useful in the event that electronic editing is needed. (It also tacitly implies that you can communicate via e-mail.) “Mac and PC literate” is a bonus if you ever find yourself working for companies that use these specific systems—like a graphic design firm (Mac) or a law firm (PC). If you are familiar with any other software programs, add them as well.

Excellent with deadlines A line such as this clearly conveys that not only are you aware of the production schedule needs, but also that you are quite conscientious. “Extremely attentive to detail” is a good variation too.

French comprehension Benny included this not because he wanted to proofread entire tomes in French, but because so much of English borrows from other languages. (*Apropos*, his French familiarity could award Benny the *crème de la crème* reading material. Perhaps a travel guide to Paris!) If you have even a bit of familiarity in another language, add it under your skills. And if you don't speak another language, don't worry, neither do most other people. *C'est la vie.*

Seriously Spanish

Spanish is the second most common language in the United States, spoken by about 28 million people—over 10% of the population. There are now more Spanish-language publishers in the U.S. than ever before. If your language skills are formidable enough to be able to proofread books in Spanish, you don't have to contact Spain or Mexico. There is a burgeoning market right here.

Working Broadway actor (three shows to date) You gotta love this one. Is that a quick way to sum up a lifetime of training and success or what? Benny’s Broadway experience is certainly worth noting, but it is the very last tidbit—almost like an afterthought. Nowhere else is it indicated that he has had such enormous success in the world of theater. It’s just a juicy little morsel. An editor might blink and miss it, but it might also make him or her far more interested in calling this guy.

If Benny hadn’t yet succeeded on Broadway, he could still have listed acting as an area of interest. If you have interest or expertise in a subject, **SKILLS** (or **SKILLS/INTERESTS**) is a great place to highlight your knowledge. (More on this below in Marisa’s résumé.)

Where There’s a Will, There’s a Skill

Here are some great ways to express a myriad of skills and talents:

- 2+ years proofreading experience.
- A stickler for grammar, context, and AP style.
- Able to maintain the style, tone, flow, voice, and overall integrity of editorial content.
- Computer literate, good at English grammar, spelling, and writing.
- Excellent command of proofreader’s marks.
- Excellent in accuracy of spelling, grammar, punctuation, consistency and page number references.
- Exceptional knowledge of the English language.
- Have a flair for design.
- Possess the rare skill of being able to dot every “i” and cross every “t” (not some, not most, but EVERY) in a document.
- Solid editing talent.
- Detail-obsessed multi-tasker.

- Knowledge of and ability to utilize standard tools such as dictionary, thesaurus/synonym finder, and Chicago Manual of Style.
- Able to work independently and prioritize multiple projects.
- Able to focus in a fast-paced and sometimes noisy environment.
- Able to work in a fast-paced environment and handle multiple tasks and deadlines.
- Can handle multiple tasks and deadlines (and maintain 99.99% accuracy).
- Comfortable working independently.
- Confident self-starter.
- Good problem solver who is flexible and communicates well.
- Knowledge of (financial / music / real estate / etc.) industry and terms.
- Team player who focuses on making everyone else's work better.
- Very high orientation to detail and organization.
- Works well under pressure, completes tasks quickly and efficiently, handles tight deadlines.
- Familiarity with Macintosh operating systems and the Internet.
- Proficient in (Microsoft Word / Excel / Quark XPress/ Adobe InDesign) using Mac and PC formats.
- Quick study in new procedures and technologies.

Education

The only time education should be left off of a résumé is as a sin of omission. If you have a high-school degree, an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or even a Ph.D., the highest level of education completed should always appear on your résumé. Don't worry about appearing overqualified to be a proofreader: The plain fact is, *everyone* is overqualified to be a proofreader.

Take a look at how Benny included his education:

MFA, University of Iowa, Drama with concentration in dramaturgy and literary

history Benny's MFA was indeed in Drama. For the purposes of this revamping, it behooved Benny to review the titles of the courses he took and pull out appropriately bookish subject areas to focus on. "Dramaturgy" and "literary history" work nicely in a proofreader context.

BA, Macalister College Benny credited his Bachelor of Arts but left out the detail that his degree was a Bachelor of Arts in Music. If you have a degree in the fine arts or another seemingly unrelated major, you may want to just mention that you have a bachelor's degree and leave it at that. A sin of omission such as this is easily overlooked when a potential employer is quickly perusing a new résumé. However, pointing up something like a music degree might put off someone in the publishing biz (unless of course, you're applying for work with a music publisher).

Paid to Proofread School, NYC Benny took a one-day proofreading class at this school. Though the editor looking at the résumé may never have heard of the school, its inclusion certainly adds weight to Benny's résumé because it specifically qualifies him in his new field. If you do take a proofreading class, include it on your résumé.

Related Experience

"Related Experience" means things you've done that relate to the skills of being a good proofreader, but weren't specifically proofreading. (This is an especially useful category if you don't have an enormous amount of "work" experience that you can link to proofreading.) You can include volunteer jobs, functions you've performed for community organizations, neighborhood groups, or your college alumni group, and even things you've done for family and friends. It's all about how you express it on paper.

Let's examine how Benny expressed his related experience:

Adjunct Professor in Speech/Communications, City University of New York (CUNY), 2004–2005 Benny was employed at the City University of New York for a semester, lecturing to students about working on Broadway and making a living in the arts, so he listed this as an Adjunct Professor in Speech/Communications. One might argue that this is a bit of a fudge, but technically it is accurate: The theater department came under the catalog heading of “Speech/Communications” and an “Adjunct Professor” is a university lecturer who does not have a permanent position at the academic institution.

Guest Lecturer in Speech/Communications, Fordham University, NY, 2003–2004 Benny did a couple of guest lectures throughout the year at Fordham University, so he couldn't really be called an adjunct professor in this case. Guest lecturer sounds impressive, too, though. And variety is the spice of life.

Private Tutor: ESL (English as a Second Language), 2004–present: Designed curricula for students' specific needs Benny's experience in tutoring English as a Second Language came about because of his French wife. They conversed in English, which improved her language skills dramatically. He then got some help putting together some ESL materials for her specific needs. (When their son was born, she received a crash course in “pacifier,” “bouncy seat,” and “your turn to change him.”) Benny subsequently obtained a few paying students, and for that reason can quite legitimately add “ESL teacher” to his résumé.

Publishing Experience

When Benny decided to start proofreading, he took some good advice and got right onto the Internet. He announced his services as a freelance proofreader, willing to proof any completed manuscript completely free. And he got four legitimate bites, all of whose titles are listed.

(Benny was sure to obtain author permission to list these titles on his résumé.)

Note that Benny chose the heading, **PUBLISHING EXPERIENCE**. He specifically didn't use **EMPLOYMENT** in the head because he wasn't paid for his work. Of course, if the jobs on your résumé are a mix of paid and unpaid, you can put them all under the same heading of **PUBLISHING EXPERIENCE**; don't separate them. It's just simpler.

Luckily for Benny, *Bob Barlow's Book of Brain Boosters* was actually published not long after by a legitimate press. So what did Benny do? He contacted the publisher to let them know that he was the freelance, pre-production proofreader on a new book that they had accepted. And by the way, he'd be more than happy to proofread future manuscripts directly through their publishing house.

So if you haven't yet taken advantage of all those good ideas to help you build experience in Chapter 1, now's the time to hit the pavement. And if you have, prominently display the titles of the projects you have completed at the top of your résumé.

Your Contact Information and Employment Objective

Finally, let's review the top of Benny's résumé:

Benny Reed Cell: 646.555.0179 Home: 646.555.8540 Fax: 646.555.1234	Proofreader 364 Kiwi Street Brooklyn, NY 11215 ReedReads@yahoo.com
<u>EMPLOYMENT OBJECTIVE</u> To obtain freelance employment as a proofreader in the publishing industry, utilizing exceptional proofreading skills	

One excellent thing about this format is that Benny declares himself a proofreader right off the bat, in large bold type. Doing this immediately gives the résumé a sense of clarity and specificity. From the first glance, you want the person reading your résumé to know what you do and what you want.

Benny's contact information is clearly displayed, so an editor will have no problems knowing how to get in touch with him. Your phone, e-mail, fax (if you have one), and street address are

all essential: An editor may choose to contact you via any method, and won't need to ask where to send you materials.

If you don't yet have the kind of experience that you wish you had in a given field, **EMPLOYMENT OBJECTIVE** or **OBJECTIVE** can really make your goal clear right at the outset. Besides the example shown on Benny's résumé, here are a few alternative ways to phrase an objective:

- *To obtain freelance proofreading work utilizing my expertise in the areas of economics / the arts / etc.*
- *To obtain freelance proofreading work utilizing my excellent organizational skills and sharp eye for detail*
- *To obtain work as a freelance proofreader*

Benny created a strong résumé with which to shop himself out. As he obtained more proofreading experience, some of the elements—such as the *Objective* and some of the items in the *Skills* sections—were minimized or removed. But this certainly gave him a great place to start, and gives you a sense of how you can construct a winning résumé from almost nothing.

Reinvisioning Your Résumé

Now let's meet Marisa. Marisa was a trained musician working as a freelance journalist for several music publications. She had also worked in-house on a short-term basis for several publishing-related companies, because she felt the experience would help her journalism career.

Because Marisa had experience in a parallel field, she was more readily able to make over her résumé to suit her new line of work. A little nip, a little tuck, and voilà! She's a whole new woman. (If you have experience in a related field—or experience in a field that involved any sort of work with documents or the written word—the lessons shown in Marisa's résumé are going to be particularly useful for you.) Take a gander:

MARISA PEREZ

858.555.0179 Pager
858.555.8540 Home
858.555.1234 Fax

3598 Carter Street
San Diego, CA 92113
MarisaCorrex@cox.net

EMPLOYMENT

Learning Tree, San Diego, CA

Proofreader, 1/04–present

How-to, career guidance, and child supplementary education books (Freelance)

International Data Group (IDG) Books Worldwide*, Boston, MA

In-house proofreader, 10/02–12/03

Proofread general nonfiction and computer books (Part-time)

*IDG is the publisher of the popular “FOR DUMMIES” series.

New Line Home Video, Los Angeles, CA

Assistant Director of Marketing, 1/02–9/02

Compiled surveys to form reports targeting the home video market; reviewed critical commentary for publication

Boston University, Boston, MA

Research Assistant, 9/01–6/02

Confirmed all sources of researched data and collated programs for university curricula

EDUCATION

Boston University, Bachelor’s degree with Honors (Full scholarship)

Humanities Award for Writing Skills

San Diego State University, Extended Studies Course: “Keys to Effective Editing”

STRENGTHS

Excellent communication skills
Effective organizational and analytical skills
Meets deadlines consistently
Computer friendly

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Screenwriting • Journalism • Music composition

References available upon request

As we did with Benny’s, let’s flip Marisa’s résumé on its head and examine it bottom up.

Once again, as you consider each section, think about what you may be able to use on your own résumé.

Areas of Expertise

For the individual with several strong interests and/or a great deal of world knowledge, the **AREAS OF EXPERTISE** category can be strong closer for a résumé. Marisa chose to include three specific areas: **Screenwriting, Journalism, and Music composition**. Marisa's knowledge of these areas is truly extensive. Were she creating a résumé for one of these fields, she would include much more information about her experience in these areas. For proofreading, this suffices.

The subjects Marisa listed have the added benefit of being widely written about. Wouldn't an editor holding a book on Woody Allen or Walter Winchell or J.S. Bach much rather hire Marisa? Someone who lists an expertise or strong interest is more likely to be given projects related to those subjects.

So what is an expert? An expert means that other people look to you for advice in that department: You're trained, you can direct a conversation and impart information to others. Can you lead a twenty-minute conversation on this topic? If you can, you're a de facto expert—at least in terms of proofreading. Of course, if you don't feel comfortable with being called an expert, **AREAS OF INTEREST** is perfectly fine, too.

Also, if you want to proofread material about a specific topic, add it to your list of interests. If you want to read more books on Victorian literature, for example, cite your considerable knowledge of the life of Queen Victoria. If you're just crazy about dogs, great; how many

Get Smart!

Once you gain more experience, you can use the titles of your completed projects to get more work on topics that interest you. Suppose you've proofed a lot of fiction, but now you want to read more business books. So add business as an area of expertise to your résumé. Then go through your roster of completed projects and pick out the ones with business-esque titles—even the fiction books. When sending out a résumé to generate business, enclose a list of completed projects highlighting those titles and mention a few of the biggies.

dogs do you have? Five. Terrific. Add “Skilled dog handler” to the list. There is a market for *whatever* you have going on in your life.

Strengths

This is another variation for titling the **SKILLS** section. Marisa listed: **Excellent communication skills; Effective organizational and analytical skills; Meets deadlines consistently; and Computer friendly**. These strengths all hover around reliability, neatness, and conscientiousness—the underlying message being, *Trust me, I am not going to mess up your project*.

It’s good to list a number of strong points if you don’t have a stocked résumé yet—it gives employers the chance to learn a little bit more about you. (For ideas, take a look back at the section titled *Where There’s a Will, There’s a Skill* on page 19.)

Education

Marisa listed her diploma from **Boston University** as a **Bachelor’s degree**. Now, to be more specific, Marisa earned a Bachelor’s of Music degree. However, with the intent of refocusing her résumé to appear more apropos to a student of letters as opposed to notes, Marisa chose to prune her title.

Marisa’s résumé rightly and prominently lists the fact that she graduated **with Honors**, that she attended BU with a **Full scholarship**, and that she was given a **Humanities Award for Writing Skills**. Any sort of award, honor, or recognition in an academic realm should be positioned to pop right out. Honorary mentions, scholarship, Phi Beta Kappa, anything that can imply that “this person was conscientious in his or her academic studies” is a boon.

Employment

Marisa already had professional experience in fields on the periphery of proofreading, so it didn’t take much finagling to perfect her résumé. Marisa examined her work experience and broke down the duties she had performed in each job. For example, while her job at **Boston**

University was mostly non-proofreading-type work, she focused on the aspects of the job that included written documents; that implied: *I read, I reviewed, I gave input and got feedback regarding the printed word.*

Boston University, Boston, MA
Research Assistant, 9/01–6/02
Confirmed all sources of researched data and collated programs for university curricula

She also applied this idea to her experience at **New Line Home Video**. Marisa was the director of marketing. Most of her responsibilities dealt with people and customer relations, but her job did include some paperwork. So she concentrated on that aspect and utilized as many literary or proofreader-related terms as she legitimately could.

New Line Home Video, Los Angeles, CA
Assistant Director of Marketing, 1/02–9/02
Compiled surveys to form reports targeting the home video market; reviewed critical commentary for publication

Notice that at this stage in her career, Marisa actually has some proofreading experience. Even if she didn't, she would already have a strong résumé. However, since she does, she's wisely put it right at the top. First, in 2001, she worked briefly for **IDG**—the very prominent publisher of the “For Dummies” series. More recently, she has been working for **Learning Tree**.

Learning Tree, San Diego, CA
Proofreader, 1/04–present
How-to, career guidance, and child supplementary education books (Freelance)

International Data Group (IDG) Books Worldwide*, Boston, MA
In-house proofreader, 10/02–12/03
Proofread general nonfiction and computer books (Part-time)

*IDG is the publisher of the popular “FOR DUMMIES” series.

Marisa got connected with **Learning Tree** because, while she was pregnant, she worked in-house for them. Marisa took the job because she suspected she might be able to work from home post-baby. Sure enough, Marisa's work at Learning Tree became a part-time telecommuting job after her daughter was born.

This raises an important point. While you do want your résumé to impart a sense of who you are and share some interesting tidbits about your life, omit details that are too personal—like

your family or your age. Don't mention if you're a stay-at-home mom or dad; you don't want to give the editor any excuse to not hire you (visions of tricycle tracks on the pages, Popsicle smears). After you and your employer become friendly, you can show him photos of your little angels, but not right now. Also, try to avoid as much reference to your age as possible. You'll either seem too old or too young—no matter your actual age.

Because Marisa is a bit further along in her career than Benny was, moving to the next level for her means getting paid to read the kinds of books she would read for pleasure. With this strong a résumé, she's well on her way to doing just that. (You'll learn more about how to focus your employment search in **Chapter 3: Finding the Jobs.**)

Nuts and Bolts

Notice that different levels of experience produce different types of résumés. The two samples in this chapter are good templates for your first proofreader's résumé. You can identify the style that best matches your level of experience and build on it.

The Design

Appearance does count for something. And the résumé of a successful proofreader needs to be organized in a consistent format and have clean, crisp lines. In short, it should be a pleasure to look at. This does not mean it has to be professionally designed; just well laid out. In fact, if you don't have a lot of experience using the various functions of a word-processing program like Microsoft Word, your résumé can be a great learning opportunity.

A few basic points:

- Use harmonious fonts (or typefaces) that are clear, easy to read, and inviting. The fonts can convey a sense of personality, but please don't choose anything too

FLORID or medieval or OUT THERE!

- Twelve-point font is a standard size to use.

- Serif fonts (fonts with a little ornamentation) are warmer than sans serif fonts (fonts without ornamentation).
- It is often nice to use a **BOLDFACE SANS SERIF FONT** for the résumé headings and a serif font for the body text, or vice versa.
- Be sure your headings are identical in size to one another and that all indents are precisely lined up.
- If you are mailing your résumé, use a nice quality paper to reflect the fact that your work will be of quality. (If you choose a good quality stock, whoever is reviewing it wants to hang on to the feel of that paper for a moment or two longer!) And select a pleasant color—no fluorescent orange paper, please.
- Be concise. It is better to have a lot of white space on a résumé than to have everything crammed in.

Your résumé does not need to be highly creative, but rather a work of elegant simplicity; highly readable and accessible. Ultimately, it should convey a sense of order and peace—reflecting the order and peace you will bring to your employers' lives.

The Inevitable Boo-Boos

Many employers complain of the shocking number of mistakes that they find on applicants' written correspondence. If you've already worked with a company and they've been satisfied with your efforts, the occasional error will be overlooked. However, if you are sending out a résumé cold and it's not error-free, chances are you won't hear back. So proof your résumé. Twice. Then have someone else you trust proof it. Several other someones, actually. You will have been staring at the thing for quite a while, so you won't even see the mistakes that are right in front of your nose. And after all, *everyone* needs a proofreader. And that's good news for you.

Free Sample Résumés

If you want more help putting together your résumé, go to any of the post-your-résumé Web sites, such as monster.com, hotjobs.com, or careerbuilder.com. You will be able to search and view countless other samples.

Simply open one of the suggested Internet sites and search under keywords like “editing,” “publishing,” “proofreading,” and “copyediting.” Observe and emulate the word flow, style, and format of résumés that appeal to

you, so that yours has the same level of professionalism. Or check out mediabistro.com. This site actually helps you *build* a résumé. Go to <http://www.mediabistro.com/postresume/intro.asp>.

Lingo-licious

Be sure your résumé contains some publishing keywords, such as: *proofreader, copyeditor, editor, and publishing*. In **Chapter 3: Finding the Jobs**, you will learn how to post your résumé to job search Web sites. These terms will allow a prospective employer searching under these keywords, to find you.

Creating a Basic Cover Letter

Laying the Groundwork

OK. You’ve got a good start on your résumé. The next step is to get your cover letter ready. “What?” you ask. “I don’t have a single nibble. I don’t even know what I’m doing yet!” The thing is: You want to be ready. And you want to be ready right now. If you make a great contact and the employer says, “Hey, send me your stuff,” you do not want to have to pull an all-nighter throwing together something that’s going to impress no one. Now that you’re working with words, the ones that you use need to be carefully chosen. This section is going to help you create a simple cover letter template that you can later tailor for specific jobs.

Ultimately, your cover letter should be no more than three or four, two- to three-sentence paragraphs, with line spaces between each paragraph. This makes it extremely easy to read. If you’re mailing a cover letter, use the same stock as your résumé paper.

It's a good idea to get all this input into a word-processing program, so that you can easily make changes. Here's a cover letter template:

Jane Q. Proofreader	Proofreader
	111 Proof Road, #1 Cedar Rapids, IA 52403 319-555-1234 (phone) 319-555-5678 (fax) JaneQ@proof.com
[CONTACT NAME]	
[COMPANY NAME]	
[ADDRESS]	
[ADDRESS]	
Dear [CONTACT],	
[OPENER]	
I have been employed as a freelance proofreader for several companies. I am comfortable reading both technical and general publications, and have completed work in several subject areas, ranging from music and art to fiction and children's books.	
My schedule is extremely flexible and allows me to complete projects quickly and efficiently. I pride myself on never having missed a deadline. (You can check with my editors on that!)	
[CLOSER]	
Sincerely,	
Jane Q. Proofreader	

At this stage, you are only going to worry about preparing a couple of paragraphs that you can later adapt to read appropriately. First, you are going to create a paragraph that provides a little breakdown explaining what you've been up to: *I've been working for X amount of companies on a wide variety of subjects, specializing in X, employed as a freelance proofreader for X months/years.* In other words, I already do this stuff.

In the second paragraph of your cover letter, you are going to provide a "dependable teaser" detailing what the employer's life would be like if s/he hired you: *My schedule is extremely*

flexible and allows me to complete projects within short time frames. (Translation: I'll get your projects back to you early and make you look really good to your boss.) Telling employers that you can meet rush deadlines gives you another “in” with publishing folk. In a pinch, when no “regular” is willing to do an entire job over a weekend, or with only a one-week turnaround, informing them that you are the go-to person may just open up a door that would otherwise stay shut.

Styles: Academic, Trade (Fiction and Nonfiction), and Mass Market

You will have dramatically greater success if you tailor your cover letters (and your résumé) to the kind of company you're soliciting. You may want to prepare several different cover-letter templates that you can use depending on the market. In general, there are three markets: academic, trade, and mass market. (It's probably easiest to get work in subjects that are drier, such as academic or nonfiction. They pay better, too.)

If you're interested in academic projects, emphasize your education more—if you had any scholarships or honors, be sure that they are prominently displayed on your résumé and also drop a sentence about them in your cover letter. Emphasize any mind-expanding experience you may have had: if you're a MENSA member, or you were on the math team.

If you want to proof trade books—those that you find in your local bookstore—your cover letter's tone should be intelligent, but not intellectual. Still come across as bright, but don't use oppressively big words.

Mass market is as its name implies—books for the masses, usually paperbacks you can buy in the drugstore that are light, easy reads. Prepare a cover-letter template for this market that is extremely readable and accessible. Use conversational, easy language that is very immediate and friendly.

Wrap Up

You may be surprised that your “new, improved” proofreader self is so . . . experienced! As you get more projects, keep adding them to your résumé following the steps laid out in this chapter.

Now that you have your building blocks—the résumé and cover letter that will back up your level of experience and professionalism—let’s take a look at some of the ways to find the countless jobs that are out there.

Chapter 3

Finding the Jobs

When I first started looking for work, I sent a cover letter to a subsidy press. I don't like to take myself too seriously, so at the end of the letter I added: "P.S. I never make mistakes."

Well, it worked like a charm—the editor called me in. When I arrived, he showed me my letter. Besides my inventive P.S., I had made a mistake! But he said, "I invited you anyway because I thought your letter was clever."

The lesson? Putting yourself out there is the greatest thing you can do. Woody Allen said it best: "Ninety-five percent of life is showing up."

Bottom-line it for me: What's in this chapter?

The Pathways to the Publishers

- Follow the Footprints, Dear Watson
- Everyone's an Expert at Something
- Knowledge Is Power

Other Inroads

- The Secret to Classified Ads
- Where Else Do They Hide the Jobs?
- Allow the Jobs to Find You
- Spotting the Potholes on the Information Highway
- Subsidy Presses

Start Me Up

Okay, you've learned the symbols. You've done some small jobs through your local network. You've got your snappy cover letter and résumé. Now what? It would be ideal if once you

decided to become a freelance proofreader, the phone rang with your first job offer. But that's probably not going to happen. So let's find the jobs.

Step one towards your success as a freelance proofreader is to generate opportunities. After you are established in the industry, the work will find you, but initially you need to locate prospects for yourself. There are a number of indispensable traditional and nontraditional resources for finding jobs. The key is to approach your search for work from as many different directions as possible.

Your Little Black Book

You're going to have several phone numbers to keep track of (and addresses and Web sites and names . . .). Create a proofreading notebook to keep track of all the publishing contacts you uncover. You may even do a little bit of detective work about the companies. By the end of this chapter, you will have a viable list of contacts and a way of tracking your communication with them.

So what goes in your little black book? Below is one way to set it up. (For this chapter, you're only going to be concerned with the highlighted section.)

<p>Name of Company: _____</p> <p>Type of Company: _____</p> <p>Where I Found This Listing: _____</p> <p>Contact Information</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Phone: _____</p> <p>Web Site: _____</p> <p>Notes on Company: (What do they publish? Merged recently? Hiring full-timers?)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Contact Name: _____ **Ext. #:** _____ **E-mail:** _____ **Date:** _____
 (Who answered? What information did you get? Whom do you contact next?)

Résumé and Cover Letter Sent? Yes When? _____
 No Why not? _____

Details Regarding Correspondence or Personal Info about Editor s :
 (Subjects they focus on? Where else have they worked? How's their attitude? Married? Kids?)

Take a Field Trip

You want to become familiar with publishers. And you want to find out who publishes the material that interests you. Get out and spend some time roaming your local bookstore. Visit your favorite aisles and stroll down some of those you've never darkened before: travel, science fiction, nonfiction, self-help, psychology, children's, and yes, even New Age. Take a look at the spines of the books and notice the publishers' names. Crack open a book that really interests you and go to the copyright

page, found immediately after the title page at the front of the book. The publisher's contact information is listed there, and usually includes the mailing address as well as Web site info.

You can look at magazine publications that interest you, too. However, because magazines generally operate on insanely fast schedules, they tend to use in-house proofreaders. Stick to targeting e-zines instead—the online versions of magazines—which often do use freelancers. More on e-zines in the section titled **Spotting the Potholes on the Information Superhighway** in this chapter.

What do you want to work on?

You don't need to enjoy what you're reading as a proofreader, but wouldn't it be more fun if you did? If you target the publishers of books you like, then you'll be able to proofread books you would read anyway.

Write It Down

Make note of the contact information of any publishers you find interesting. As you begin tracking job possibilities, the names of the various publishers will become more familiar.

The Pathways to Publishers

Follow the Footprints, Dear Watson

Writers beat well-worn paths to publishers. Follow those paths. Wherever writers look to get published, there is a job for you. Much of the detective work has already been done. Your first step is to delve into industry bibles. There are two main references: *Writer's Market (WM)* and *Literary Marketplace (LMP)*. While both books provide great information about the publishing industry, let's focus on *Writer's Market*, which is smaller and very user-friendly.

Writer's Market is one resource representing the market of "I want to sell what I'm writing." While you are *not* trying to sell what you are writing, the writers and publishers who use this resource are the people who will sign your paychecks.

WM is a bulky tome, but don't let that intimidate you. When you first open it to the table of contents, you will see that it is divided into sections: the first few are *Getting*

Published, *Personal Views*, *The Business of Writing*, and *Literary Agents*. Ignore those parts.

You want to proofread the books that have already been accepted for publication, so skip right to the listings titled *The Market*. This section breaks down the different segments of the publishing

Writer's Market

Writer's Market is published every year and comes with a CD-ROM for technophiles. The cover states, "8,000 Editors Who Buy What You Write," and that's exactly what's inside. The listings include publishing opportunities, consumer and trade magazines, book publishers, script buyers, phone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and Web sites. In short, everything you need to know to get in touch with the publishers who need your expertise. You can find *WM* in most libraries and bookstores. It is also now available online at *WritersMarket.com*, in a continually updated format.

industry into appropriate categories. It lists *Book Publishers*, *Canadian and International Book Publishers*, and *Small Presses*. These listings hold the most potential.

First let's focus on mainstream book publishers. The publishers are listed in alphabetical order, and all the crucial details are laid out in an easy-to-see format. Look first at the publishers that interested you from your field trip to your local bookstore. There are a lot of particulars in each listing, but as you skim through them, focus on one key piece of information: **How many titles are published each year?** The larger publishers—any company that publishes over 100 titles per year—use freelancers.

For example, one publisher that often employs freelancers is Harperperennial, one of the many imprints of HarperCollins. When you look at their listing in the *WM*, it says, “**Publishes 100 titles year.**” This is the sort of publisher you want to contact.

Write It Down

Add any potential publishers with their contact information to your proofreader's notebook. You will be able to use this list when you are ready to make calls.

But Who Do I Talk To?

WM listings will often include the names of acquisitions editors: those big-deal folks who get wined and dined by agents and writing hopefuls. Guess what? You *won't* be working with them. Your employment opportunities will come through the production editors. In **Chapter 4: Getting the Jobs**, you'll learn techniques for making calls and getting through to the right person.

Everyone's an Expert at Something

Are you a beautician? Have you worked in the armed forces? As an elevator operator? Maybe you did a stint as a stand-up comedian. If you have experience in a specific field, even if it's a marginal field, you can capitalize on your know-how. In each publisher's listing in *Writer's Market*, there will be one or two sections titled *Nonfiction* and/or *Fiction*. These list the various

subject areas in which the publisher specializes. For example, in the listing for Harperperennial, the nonfiction subject areas include wide-ranging topics from biography to women's issues. If you were a women's studies major in college, you have a distinct advantage when contacting this publisher. And isn't it so much better if the material you're working on truly interests you?

Similarly, *WM* includes listings of consumer and trade magazines in subject areas as specific as "Church Administration" or "Lumber." There tend to be fewer opportunities for freelancers in magazines, but if you have knowledge of a specific field, it is one more foot in the door.

The Heavy Hitters

In *Writer's Market*, there are an enormous number of listings. Many of these publishers are divisions or *imprints* of larger publishing conglomerates. As of the publication of this book, there are six major publishers:

- **Bertelsmann:** Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Dial, Random House, Knopf, Modern Library, and Ballantine
- **Holtzbrinck:** Farrar, Straus & Giroux, St. Martin's, and Henry Holt
- **The News Corporation:** HarperCollins, Avon, and William Morrow
- **Pearson PLC:** Penguin USA, G.P. Putnam, and Berkley
- **Time Warner:** Little, Brown, Book of the Month, and Warner Books
- **Viacom:** Simon & Schuster and Pocket Books

If you start working for one imprint, chances are good that a sister imprint is in the same building. So, if you get in with one, you've gotten in with many.

Knowledge Is Power

Do you want to find out more about a publisher you would like to work for? Go to the company Web site.

- Find out what they publish, which may be a wider range of materials than you know. Just-released titles will be on the home page with links to complete listings.
- Nose around the site for the name of a **production editor** or **managing editor**—anyone on the production side—although finding someone is rare, as these individuals tend to stay behind the scenes.
- Check out the “Press” or “News” section. You will quickly be brought up to date on the company’s current events, such as a merger, which may come up in your phone conversations.

Don’t get bogged down in research. You don’t have to know a company’s current stock price to make a call—just what kinds of books they publish.

Cast Your Net

Here are the heavy hitters’ Web sites. Generally, all the divisions or imprints are accessible from these main sites.

- **fsgbooks.com**: Farrar, Straus & Giroux
- **harpercollins.com**: HarperCollins, Avon, and William Morrow
- **henryholt.com**: Henry Holt
- **penguinputnam.com**: Penguin USA, G.P. Putnam, and Berkley
- **randomhouse.com**: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Dial, Random House, Knopf, Modern Library, and Ballantine
- **simonsays.com**: Simon & Schuster and Pocket Books
- **stmartins.com**: St. Martin’s Press
- **twbookmark.com**: Little, Brown, Book of the Month, and Warner Books

Write It Down

Add any additional contact information, helpful information, or book titles you found interesting to your proofreader's notebook.

Other Inroads

The Secret to Classified Ads

Pick up the Sunday edition of a major newspaper for the largest nearby city. Pour yourself a cup of coffee, pull out a nice highlighter pen, and take a look through the classified ads. Sometimes there are listings for freelance proofreaders under the section heading of *Proofreader*, and certainly you should contact these companies. But if you also take some time to read between the lines—or rather just widen your field of vision—there are many other job opportunities hidden in the tiny print.

Examine the listings for *Copyeditor*, *Editor*, *Production Editor*, and *Publishing*. Within these sections, take note of those job listings for Copyeditor or Production Editor positions. These are the in-house employees with whom you as a freelancer will work. Within the description of the job responsibilities, look for a line that includes something like, “work with freelancers.” This tells you that whoever is hired in this particular position will be working with freelancers—and one of those freelancers should be you.

Write It Down

Write down the name of the publisher and the contact information. Give the publisher about three weeks to fill the position; after that time, you will call and ask for the name of the person hired in the advertised position. There are two advantages to this:

- No one else will be sending in their materials, as there was no solicitation for freelancers.
- You will establish a relationship with a brand-new employee before anyone else does.

You'll learn how to make effective cold calls in **Chapter 4: Getting the Jobs**.

Where Else Do They Hide the Jobs?

There are two more excellent places where you can find job listings: Publisher's Web sites and job search engines.

Publisher's Web sites: Publishers often put job listings on their Web sites. On each site, there is usually a section titled "Careers" or "Employment," often under the "About Us" head or at the bottom of the main page.

Refer back to the section titled **Knowledge Is Power** on page 40 for the heavy hitters' sites.

Job search engines: Thanks to the Internet, finding job opportunities is a piece of cake. Job search engines, such as Monster.com, HotJobs.com, and MediaBistro.com, are becoming more and more popular with employers, as they can instantly post jobs, search résumés, and screen job seekers. You can use these Web sites to find the jobs. If you want to see the latest opportunities, just click on the "Job Listings" head.

Write It Down

Just as you did with the classified ads, log on and check out the job listings at least once a week. You can examine publishers' Web sites for their job listings for *Copyeditors* and *Production Editors*, contact the publisher after the position is filled, and get the jump on the job.

Allow the Jobs to Find You

You can also post your résumé for free on Monster.com and HotJobs.com, making yourself available to anyone searching for your particular skills. To post your résumé, you'll need to register using a username and password.

Have You Googled Today?

You can use a search engine such as Google.com to find more publishers' Web sites. Just type in the complete name of the publisher in quotation marks, such as "Kensington Books." Your first hit will usually be the main page for the Web site.

Most importantly, you need to post your résumé with keywords, including: *proofreader*, *copyeditor*, *editor*, and *publishing*. Since you have done the work in **Chapter 2: Getting Ready to Sell Yourself**, these terms will already be on your résumé (see **page 31** in that chapter). When a prospective employer searches under these keywords, your marvelous résumé will appear.

Write It Down

Write down the names of the various job search engines and the dates when you post your résumé. Make sure you note your username and password. Use this information as a reminder to update your résumé every month.

Out of the Woodwork

There is freelance proofreading work in advertising agencies, consulting companies, law offices, and accounting firms. You'll find that using your personal network is most effective here. For example, if your uncle Bob is a CPA, ask him to circulate your résumé.

There is no formal way to hunt down these jobs. Put the word out there and you will be surprised at what comes back to you.

Spotting the Potholes on the Information Highway

The Internet is a gold mine for the freelance proofreader. If you spend a lot of time on the Internet—for work or just surfing for fun—you have probably seen literally hundreds of errors on different Web sites. Some of them can be hysterical, such as this line from an online catalog: “Our goat is total customer satisfaction.”

When you encounter an error, you can simply send an e-mail to the Webmaster of the site with the correction and your résumé attached. Before you do, though, make sure you check into the nature of the Web site. Is it a site that has timely updates and posts new information every few days or weeks, such as an e-zine like *Inc.* or *Glamour*? These sites are ideal because they spend time editing and revising their content. However, don't contact a site that updates their information too frequently or needs security clearance, such as news, government, or banking sites.

Try to match the tone of the Web site you are contacting. Your approach to a site like DailyCandy.com should be very different from your approach to a site like Forbes.com. Below are two distinct examples. The first reflects the light-hearted tone. The second is still very simple, but more professional, and refers to your knowledge of the company. In **Chapter 4: Getting the Jobs**, there is more information to guide you through your written correspondence with publishers, including e-mail.

To: DailyCandy.com Webmaster



From: Jane Q. Proofreader

Dear Webmaster Jim:

I found this error on your home page. In the second paragraph, line two, the word *the* appears twice in a row. By the way, I'm a freelance proofreader. I find errors professionally. This one is for free, but if you'd like to hire me, I can proofread the rest of your site. My résumé is attached.

I look forward to helping you have a perfect Web site.

Best Regards,

Jane Q. Proofreader

To: Forbes.com Webmistress



From: Jane Q. Proofreader

Dear Ms. Money:

As I was browsing your Web site, I was surprised to note a basic spelling error on Forbes' home page. In the second paragraph, line two, the word *the* appears twice in a row.

Forbes is the kind of esteemed institution from which readers expect accuracy and precision. I would like to help Forbes have a Web site that reflects that standard.

I am a proofreader by trade. My résumé is attached for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Q. Proofreader

Write It Down

Write down the names of the Web sites and the dates you contact them in your notebook.

Subsidy Presses

Everybody has a book they want to get published, and subsidy presses exist to meet that demand. In the normal publishing process, an author submits a proposal and/or sample material to a literary agent or publishers' acquisition editors hoping it will be chosen for publication. If the work is chosen, the publisher usually pays an advance to the author and negotiates a contract. The publisher agrees to pay royalties to the author. In contrast, anyone can publish a work with a subsidy press. In fact, subsidy presses rely on the author, as they require the author to pay all the costs associated with publishing. Subsidy presses are also known as *vanity presses*.

Subsidy presses are not listed in *Writer's Market*. A good way to find these presses is to look in the back of publishing magazines, where subsidy presses often advertise. Some of these magazines include: *Publisher's Weekly*, *Writer's Digest*, *Writers Journal*, and *Poets & Writers*. You will contact them just as you would any other publisher.

Subsidy presses are great places to begin ...

- Because they publish a lot of material, there is a lot of work.
- In general, the quality control is not as precise as that of a major press, so they are more likely to forgive your fledgling errors.

But on the other hand ...

- There ain't no bells and whistles! Budgets are limited.
- Some of the books can be positively dreadful. (Though some can be very good—which just goes to prove how competitive publishing is.)

Vanity, Thy Name is ...

Here are some of the more well-known subsidy presses:

- **AuthorHouse:** authorhouse.com
- **Cader Publishing, Ltd.:** cader.com
- **Dorrance Publishing Company, Inc.:** dorrancepublishing.com

- **Infinity Publishing:** infinitypublishing.com
- **iUniverse:** iuniverse.com
- **Ivy House:** ivyhousebooks.com
- **Vantage Press:** vantagepress.com
- **Xlibris:** xlibris.com

Write It Down

Add any potential publishers with their contact information to your proofreader's notebook. You will be able to use this list when you are ready to make calls.

Wrap Up

This chapter has offered many different pathways to getting work as a proofreader. Any one of them leads to jobs. Don't feel that you must attack them all at once. Rome wasn't built in a day. Choose the type of reading that most excites you and branch out from there. Now that you're armed with your list of viable contacts, let's look at how you secure that first proofreading job.

Chapter 4

Getting the Jobs

I found a help-wanted ad for a full-time in-house proofreader. I didn't want to work full time or in house, but I didn't find it necessary to write that in my cover letter. I sent my resume—twice. Nothing. So I called the Human Resources Department. I asked the HR representative straight out if they used freelancers. She had no idea. So I got the name of a production editor in the company from her. I called back the switchboard, asked for the production editor, and told her “Jamie from HR gave me your name. I understand you're looking for proofreaders.” Because I had no idea what the protocols were, I inadvertently got myself a project, and eventually a working relationship.

Bottom-line it for me: What's in this chapter?

Warming Up Your Cold Call

- Putting Yourself Out There
- Your First Call
- How to Get Ahold of the Right Person
- Making First Contact: What To Say and How to Say It

Put It in Writing

- So They Said Yes: Tailoring Your Cover Letter
- You Don't Know Me, But . . .
- When to Use E-mail

It's Good to Be One of the Faceless Masses

One of the biggest perks to the freelance proofreading biz is the anonymity. Because of that anonymity, you will save an inordinate amount of time and money. You don't have to schmooze with people face-to-face. There's no commuting costs, budget for wardrobe, or expensive lunches out. One of the great advantages is that you don't have to worry about brushing your hair, or even brushing your teeth (though it's generally recommended). You don't have to find your car keys, make sure you have correct bus fare, or notice if your nails are clean. The BS is kept to a bare minimum, which means more time and more income for you.

In fact, you will probably never meet most of the people you work with. They're only voices on the phone, or sometimes just an e-mail address. But then again, so are you. So how you sound on the phone and look on paper is vitally important.

Warming Up Your Cold Call

Putting Yourself Out There

So your proofreading notebook is chock full of publisher's contact information. Now what? The next big step is to pick up the phone! <GASP This is definitely the most nerve-wracking moment, but the worst that can happen is that someone will say "No." And someone will. But so what? The fact that you're taking the plunge and making the call is 99% more than the rest of the would-be proofreaders-for-hire out there are doing.

Don't take an overwhelming bite out of the apple. Try making two or three contacts each day. You'll find your groove and may even discover that it's really fun talking to new people. Actually, get that in your head before your first call: This is fun!

Six Cold Call Pointers to Help Chip Away Ice

Before diving into the real nitty-gritty, here are some suggestions regarding cold calls in general:

1. Don't call on a Monday. It is rarely anyone's best day. The best times to call are Wednesday, Thursday and Friday between 3 and 4 in the afternoon. The day is ending, people are wrapping things up, but no one has left yet.
2. Don't leave a message on voice-mail. It's very difficult to get someone you don't know to call you back. If you get voice-mail when making a cold call, just hang up.
3. Know when to give up. If you've consistently tried to reach someone over the period of a week, set the number aside until next month.
4. Be eager, but not annoying. People will respond to you because you are showing initiative.
5. Listen, listen, listen. Aren't telemarketers annoying when they just start rambling the minute you pick up the phone? Don't be a telemarketer. Take a breath, listen to what people say, and reply appropriately.
6. Be prompt and follow up. If an editor requests your résumé, fax or mail it the same day. Then call to follow up one week later.

Your First Call

The majority of people who contact a publisher are interested in speaking with one of two departments: the acquisitions department or human resources. Acquisitions departments are constantly bothered by calls from writers begging to be published. And human resources, which generally only deals with in-house job positions, is a black hole for the freelancer. Because you want to talk to the seldom-hassled heroes of the production department, your chances of getting through to a pleasant, responsive individual are much greater.

You are actually making a fairly easy call. Remember: Your services are needed. You are offering something that will make the editor's job easier. Who knows? You may make your first call on the day that the editor is looking for someone new because she received some galley proofs that were returned late from another freelancer.

Write It Down

Have your proofreader's notebook open throughout your cold call so that you can take notes.

Any helpful information that you need will be right in front of you, as well. Ready? Here we go.

Step 1: Before you pick up the phone

Before you call, write out a quick five-second sentence or two that distills who you are and what you're up to. You can then use it as a starting point. It helps to be associated with a company, so come up with a name. It doesn't matter that you are the only employee. Publishers you contact will tend to take you more seriously.

Hi _____, my name is Jane Q. Proofreader. I am a freelance proofreader with Maximum Sentence Editing Services, and wanted to speak to you about freelance proofreading opportunities in your company. I understand that you use freelancers.

If someone referred you, throw the name in at the beginning.

Bill Jones gave me your number and suggested I call.

Since you've done your homework in **Chapter 2: Getting Ready to Sell Yourself**, you already should have your résumé and a basic cover letter prepared before you call. If the editor responds positively and asks you to fax your material immediately, you don't want to have to scramble to get it together. There is information later in this chapter on how to tailor your cover letter.

Step 2: Getting ahold of the right person

Now dial the phone. If you've dialed the main number, an administrative assistant (AA) will probably answer. Ask for the Managing Editor or one of the Production Editors. Often, the AA will have no idea what you're talking about. (After all, he or she is more used to fielding calls from over-eager writers.) You can explain briefly, "an editor in the book production department." If the AA says, "Oh, Jean Squares is in the production department; let me put you through," quickly ask, "Do you have Jean's extension, so I can reach her directly next time?" This will come in handy for follow-up calls.

If you're connected with the wrong person or the wrong department, just explain the situation again. Most people will be happy to redirect your call. In fact, whoever you reach in error might know better than the AA how to point you in the right direction.

Step 3: Making first contact

Here's a quick run-down of your first conversation with the editor. You're going to:

- Introduce yourself.
- Say who referred you or how you got his or her name.
- Say what you want: make a clear request.
- Ask for referrals for other editors.
- Confirm the editor's contact information if you are sending a résumé.

When you've reached the editor, be yourself. Explain who you are and why you are calling. Take it easy and enjoy this conversation. Your goal is to quickly turn this phone call into a conversation rather than a sales pitch. Tell them about yourself, your experience, and what excites you about their books.

As for your pitch: Start out with your introductory sentence, "Hi, Jean. My name is Jane Q. Proofreader. I'm a freelance proofreader with Maximum Sentence Editing Services, and wanted to speak to you about freelance proofreading opportunities in your company. I understand that you use freelancers."

Pause for their confirmation: It may be “yes,” “mm-hmm,” or even “no.” If she is silent, assume that the company *does* use freelancers. The natural reaction from an editor who does *not* will be an immediate contradiction, “No, we don’t use freelancers.”

If the response is positive: Emphasize that you are not necessarily looking for a job *right this moment*, but rather you are developing new relationships: you would like to send your résumé, or be added to their list of freelancers, or perhaps take a proofreading test. This takes the pressure off of the editor. If people know that you don’t expect a job at that moment, they will feel much more comfortable saying yes.

Don’t spend too much time on the phone. Initiate the conversation, state your request(s), and close the conversation. Always close the conversation by asking, “Is there anyone else that you suggest I talk to?” Most everybody knows somebody at another publishing house, or magazine. Try to get the names of one or two other editors. A referral almost guarantees you a friendly response on your next call.

If the response is negative: Take advantage of having a real live editor on the phone, and ask for referrals. Follow up with, “Oh, I was just doing a freelance project, and I thought another proofreader mentioned that your company used out-of-house proofreaders. Perhaps you can help me, though. Would you by chance know of any publishers that do use freelancers? I’m expanding my client base and it would be great to know of any possibilities.” Jean will hopefully be able to share a name or two with you. Then

“Can I take a message?”

OK. So you have to leave a message on voice-mail. If you’ve consistently tried to reach someone over the period of a week with no luck, consider it.

1. If you leave a message, make it short and snappy.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. State your request.
4. Leave the phone number where you can be reached: slowly and twice.
5. Be patient. They may not call back right away. Give it a week before you try again.

when you call that referral, you can say, “Hi Kevin. Jean Smith suggested I call you regarding freelance proofreading.” And what happens if Kevin doesn’t have any work? “Perhaps you know of someone who uses freelancers?” And on it goes.

If the response is impolite: Don’t sweat it. There are all kinds of folks in this world, and the publishing industry is no exception. Thank them for their time and be gracious. Then let it roll off your back. It’s their loss.

Step 4: Wrapping it up

If the editor agrees to your request to send a résumé, make sure you get and confirm all the contact information, including the proper spelling of the editor’s name. This also would be a good time to confirm the editor’s extension number. This process will become more natural after a few calls. And the easier it becomes to talk to new people, the more receptive they will be to you.

Write It Down

After you have made first contact, add the information to your permanent mailing list. Send an updated résumé and a cover letter every three months.

Put It in Writing

So They Said Yes: Tailoring Your Cover Letter

Ohmigosh, they want you! They really want you! Well . . . they want you to send them a cover letter and résumé. And that’s a good start. Isn’t it great that you have all of that ready to go? You just need to tailor the cover letter to suit the particular publisher’s needs.

The sooner you send your cover letter and résumé, the better. More than half the business of proofreading is about being reliable, dependable, and timely. Ideally, your material should go out the same day you have the conversation. If you agree on a fax, fax it within the hour so the conversation is still fresh in the editor’s mind. Then mail a hard copy of what you’ve faxed. After three or four days, call to confirm that your mailing and/or fax has arrived. It gives the

editor time to receive and review the material, and it's a great excuse to reconnect with them and remind them of who you are, as well. Always follow through and follow up.

Since you have the cover letter template, it should be fairly simple to get the material out quickly. And the key word is *simple*. Especially in early correspondence, simplicity is definitely in the recipe for success.

If you remember, you set up two sections in your cover letter template: the first outlines your experience; and the second points up your reliability. You just need to bookend those sections with some details:

1. Thank the editor for her or his time and tell her/him you are enclosing your résumé.
2. If you had an exchange about the nature of the work or the publisher's needs, remind the editor and emphasize how you could fit with their plans.
3. Plug in the two sections you've already prepared.
4. Offer to provide references and add a closing: *Very truly yours, Regards, Best Regards,* or if the editor was simply fantastic to chat with, *Warm Regards*.

Make sure your letter makes sense and is free from errors. Triple check it before sending it out: First, spell check it. Next, read it out loud to yourself. (Or better yet, have someone else read it for you.) Finally, print it out, set it aside for ten minutes, and then read it one last time. This may seem like overkill, but misspellings and messy presentation are tantamount to losing the job before you've landed it.

Here's a good example of a completed cover letter:

Jane Q. Proofreader

Proofreader

111 Proof Road, #1 Cedar Rapids, IA 52403
319-555-1234 (phone)
319-555-5678 (fax)
JaneQ@proof.com

Jean Squares
Imaginary Publisher
100 Printer's Street
New York, NY 10001

← REMEMBER TO DOUBLE CHECK
THE CONTACT INFORMATION.

Dear Jean:

Thank you for taking time to speak with me this afternoon regarding freelance proofreading opportunities at your company. As per our conversation, I am enclosing my résumé for your consideration.

I particularly enjoyed learning about your needs as one of the leading publishers of books related to the performing arts. My substantial experience as a director could greatly help me to contribute to your publishing needs.

I have been employed as a proofreader for the past year. I am comfortable reading both technical and general publications, and have completed work in several subject areas, ranging from music and art to fiction and children's books.

My schedule is extremely flexible and allows me to complete projects quickly and efficiently. I pride myself on never having missed a deadline. (You can check with my editors on that!)

I would be more than happy to provide references. I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,

Jane Q. Proofreader

NEW

TEMPLATE
MATERIAL

NEW

Write It Down

Make sure you track the dates when you send your résumé and cover letter and when you make your follow-up call.

You Don't Know Me, But ...

There are going to be occasions when you will be sending out your cover letter and résumé to someone you have never spoken to, for example, when you are responding to a newspaper advertisement or when you haven't been able to reach an editor by phone. This is known as a blind submission. In these instances, you have to take slightly different tack in your cover letter approach.

When making a blind submission, your cover letter has to do all the selling for you. It is the first impression you are going to make on a new contact. Therefore, it has to be more textured than a letter you are sending to an editor you've contacted previously. So what do you write?

1. In the first sentence, explain how you obtained their contact information:

I am responding to your job posting. / Joan Smith at Scholastic suggested I contact you.

2. Then say why you are writing and explain what you're interested in:

I have been a freelance proofreader for several companies, and am looking to broaden my client base / expand my reading interests / expand into proofreading in my personal areas of interest.

3. Plug in the two sections from your template that explain your qualifications and reliability.

4. If you have a special skill that relates to the publisher, mention it.

5. Explain that you are enclosing your résumé, and can provide references.

6. Finally, make a specific request and tell them that you will follow up with a phone call:

I would be happy to speak with you at your convenience / meet with you / take a test.

I will follow up with a phone call in a few days.

Here's an example of a cover letter for a blind submission:

Jane Q. Proofreader	Proofreader
Freelance Coordinator Bigwig Publishing Group 1111 Michigan Avenue Chicago, IL 12345	111 Proof Road, #1 Cedar Rapids, IA 52403 319-555-1234 (phone) 319-555-5678 (fax) JaneQ@proof.com
	To the Freelance Coordinator:
I am responding to your on-line job posting for freelance editors.	NEW
I have been employed as a freelance proofreader for several companies, and am looking to broaden my client base. Currently I edit textbooks for Houghton Mifflin (in molecular biology and chemistry) and Learning Labs (in language development).	TEMPLATE MATERIAL
My schedule is extremely flexible and allows me to complete projects quickly and efficiently. I pride myself on never having missed a deadline. (You can check with my editors on that!)	
Enclosed please find my résumé, to give you an idea of my background. I can also provide references.	NEW
I would be happy to you speak with you at your convenience. I will follow up with a phone call in a few days, or feel free to contact me at 319-555-1234.	
Very truly yours,	
Jane Q. Proofreader	

Write It Down

Track the dates when you send your résumé and cover letter and when you make your follow-up call.

When to Use E-mail

E-mail is amazing. You can contact people across the globe almost instantaneously. If you are working in Chicago, but your editor is in New York, you can e-mail her and get an answer in a matter of minutes. It's almost like being in the same office, without the need for your power tie.

It is always more effective to talk to a person than to e-mail; however, there are many Web sites that do not have an office contact. When you are pursuing an online job, it's important to know how to approach the Web master. Additionally, in our electronic age, many publishers use e-mail as a standard form of communication—even for initial contacts.

Think Before You Point and Click

So when do you use e-mail and how?

1. It's great fun for your friends to e-mail at a clever address like drunkboy219@hotmail.com, but probably not such great fun for your potential employers. Set up a separate, easily identifiable, professional e-mail account for your work. That way you won't miss any important messages, and employers will be given the right first impression.
2. As e-mail and text messaging proliferate, so too does sloppy writing, dropped punctuation, bizarre abbreviations, and the dreaded emoticon. *viz.* :-) These things are not appropriate when pursuing freelance jobs via e-mail—especially a job as a freelance proofreader. Be professional. Write a formal letter when first contacting an employer. If the reply you receive is more casual, you can respond in kind.
3. although it has become common practice, don't write in all lowercase letters. **LIKEWISE, DON'T CAPITALIZE EVERYTHING.** No one likes to be yelled at, even on screen.
4. As fear of viruses abounds, some people won't open attachments. You may have to forgo your fancy formatting and send your resume in the body of the e-mail. This may not look pretty, but if the employer has requested it, they will be prepared to deal with it.

5. If you write your e-mails in Microsoft Word or another word processing program, pay special attention to your text when you cut and paste it into an e-mail. Some e-mail programs will cause strange formatting issues to occur, like the insertion of “°” signs at the beginning of every sentence.
6. Have you ever sent an e-mail out, only to realize, with a Homer Simpson–like *doh!*, that you left out a key piece of information or inserted a major error? As with your other correspondence, triple check it before sending it out.

Brevity wins with e-mail. Keep it short.

To: Freelance Coordinator, Bigwig Publishing Group



From: Jane Q. Proofreader

Dear Freelance Coordinator:

I am responding to your on-line job posting for freelance editors.

I have been employed as a freelance proofreader for several companies, and am looking to broaden my client base. Currently I edit textbooks for Houghton Mifflin (in molecular biology and chemistry) and Learning Labs (in language development).

My schedule is extremely flexible and allows me to complete projects quickly and efficiently. I pride myself on never having missed a deadline.

Attached please find my résumé, to give you an idea of my background. I can also provide references.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,

Jane Q. Proofreader

Wrap Up

The strategies in this chapter may *seem* to require an awful lot of effort. You may think, “All that just to cultivate one job or relationship?” But think long term here. One relationship can lead to literally hundreds of jobs and thousands of dollars. While you’re giving the ideas in this chapter a try, remember, quality beats quantity. Don’t feel like you need to contact every editor on the planet. Cast your line, see who bites, and slowly reel ’em in.

Chapter 5

Keeping the Jobs Coming

Once when I dropped off a project at my editor's office, I walked in to find everybody sitting around, gaily eating cookies. "It's a freelance proofreader who lives in Vermont," my editor told me between bites. "She sends cookies every time she returns a project. We LOVE sending books to her!" He was only half-kidding.

Bottom-line it for me: What's in this chapter?

Your First Project

- Cracking It Open
- The Deadline—Aptly Named
- Technical Tidbits and Tips
- The End of the Project: Thank You, Feedback, and Follow-up

Honing Your Skills

- Accentuate the Positive
- What to Look for
- Get Inside the Writer's Head
- What NOT to Do
- Keep Your Opinions to Yourself

Keep 'Em Coming

- Maintaining the Relationship
- That Extra Something

Setting Up for Success

- Setting Up Your "Office"
- Show Me the Money
- Setting Up an LLC

Hurrah! You've received your first project! All your hard work—building a résumé, amassing experience, making contacts—has paid off! You have arrived at being a freelance proofreader! Now, what do you DO with this project?!

Do you remember your first day of school? You were so nervous because you had no idea what to anticipate. Well, if you'd just known what was coming, then you really wouldn't have had any reason to worry. Really, this is the easy part! Below is detailed the mechanics of what to expect when your first project lands on your desk; just a simple step-by-step explanation of “First this happens. Then that happens.” Some things may seem silly to think about, but it's all designed to give you confidence every step of the way.

Your First Project

Cracking It Open

Your first book will arrive in either a Jiffy bag or box. Before you tear at the packaging in excitement, hang on a second: Jiffy bags are catastrophic to open, leaving those nasty little cardboard fluffies everywhere. Open it over a garbage can. Then save the box or Jiffy bag under your desk; you'll reuse the box to return the project, and the Jiffy bag is good to keep for the return address (just in case), or to protect the crisp, clean invoice you'll get to fill it out when you finish. (Billing and getting paid is covered in the section titled **Setting Up for Success** on page 76.)

Your opened package will contain the latest pass of galleys and, if you're slugging (doing a comparison read), a “foul” (or dead) manuscript as well. (Remember all this from **Chapter 1: A Crash Course in Publishing**?) Your editor probably placed all the good stuff right on top: a cover letter to you detailing all the glitches and traumas the book has survived thus far; a blank invoice; and, hopefully, a style sheet (a personalized cheat sheet to the book, created by the copyeditor). There is a sample cover letter below. A sample style sheet, plus more on copyediting appears in **Chapter 8: Beyond the Symbols**.

Dear Jane:

Enclosed are the second-pass pages of *BEDTIME WHISPERS* for you to proofread. The first-pass pages are included. This is a good suspense thriller, and I think you'll enjoy the story. Unfortunately, the copyeditor did not do such a great job—he was too preoccupied with the mechanical task of correcting punctuation to really “read” the manuscript—and the first proofreader missed quite a number of corrections. Watch out for any formatting problems, and check that the line and letter spacings are consistent.

Please review the proofreader's guidelines before beginning each job. Also, please write all queries on flags, not on the proof pages.

Please return this by **Tuesday, 28 June**. Please call if you encounter any problems with this project.

Thanks a bunch,

Molly Parness

Production Editor

The Deadline—Aptly Named

Take a look at that due date first. That's the most important thing in the whole package. Your primary goal is to ensure that you get the project done on time. The deadline is everything. The editor is waiting on you, the compositor is waiting on the editor, the publisher is waiting on the compositor, etc. If you miss your deadline, you're messing up all the deadlines through to publication. The compositor can't finish, so the publisher will get angry, and the editor will stop sending you projects. So don't miss your deadline!

Figure out your work schedule based on the days until the project is due. For example, if you've received a 400-page book and have three weeks to complete it, divide 400 into 20 days. (You'll return the project on the 20th day so the editor receives it on the 21st day.) Four hundred

pages in twenty days equals twenty pages a day. Suddenly that 400-page project doesn't seem so daunting. Twenty pages a day is a breeze. If you want to be a proofreading all-star, get a couple extra pages in each day and return the project early. See if your editor doesn't reward you by sending more work your way. The early bird gets the, er, bookworm.

If there's *any* possibility that you'll miss your deadline, always call up front. To call after the deadline has passed is tantamount to sprinting after a plane that is already taxiing the runway.

You can also call when you're returning a project to let the editor know it's en route; this gives you the chance to say, "Hey, got anything more?" It can't hurt, and it can lead to an instant turnaround business.

Technical Tidbits and Tips

Now, get to it. Your project is probably encased in a lot of rubber bands. Save the rubber bands in that box or bag under your desk. (Editors choose their own rubber bands, so if you return a project with exactly the same rubber bands you received, you're already winning points. Strange, but true.) Spread out your proofread: If it's a cold read, plunk it right in the center of your desk. If it's a comparison read, place the newest copy on the right side of your desk and the marked-up copy on the left side. (Southpaws, reverse that, so you can write on the newest copy comfortably with your left hand.)

Read instructions furnished by the production editor as well as the house style sheet and other items included with the manuscript. Use your red colored pencil (see **Setting Up for Success** in this chapter), write clearly and neatly, don't insult anybody in your queries, and catch all the errors you can. (Of course, you will do wonderfully, as you will have completed Part II of this book: **How to Do the Job.**)

Neatness Counts: You'd Never Imagine What Can Mess Up a Project

You will impress an editor more if you are precise and consistent about your work. Here are a few things that will help you do that:

- Put yourself on the path to a clean manuscript with a clean space. While it doesn't need to be sacred, you do need an area that contains only your proofreading. If your table is clean, then subliminally your project will become cleaner. Even if you're using the kitchen table, make sure it's clear of all debris before setting out your proofread.
- Work with sharp implements. (They can also come in handy if someone comes in to bother you while you're reading a salacious scene.) Use a finely sharpened pencil, and be sure your eraser doesn't leave tracks. Make distinct, non-smearable marks. (Here's where electronic projects have the edge: If you're editing a Web site or an electronic document, you can have the lousiest handwriting in the world—no one will see it!)
- Do not write anything in indelible ink. Do not write on anything that involves criticism that the author will see.
- Just as in the movies, lighting is key. The better your lighting is, the less tired you'll get and the more likely errors will pop out at you. A strong overhead light as well as a directional lamp that you can pull very close to the page is very good, but a well-placed floor lamp can do the trick.
- Don't bleed or spill blueberry pie on the project. If you insist on eating while reading (no! no! no!), be sure it's white, dry food.
- Don't smoke near your work. Especially don't smoke while you're working. Paper absorbs the scent of cigarettes. If the editor has to air your pages out for three days before being able to read them, no one benefits.
- Keep the project in the condition you received it. It should not be re-collated, stapled, paper-clipped, or have colorful magic marker exclamations on it.

When should you call an editor during the course of a proofread? If something looks oppressively wrong and makes no sense to you whatsoever, make a quick phone call in the afternoon hours. (If you have seven questions to ask the editor, don't call eight times.) Do not wait until two days before the deadline to make a call that could affect the entire book! If you're shy about calling, a quick e-mail is sufficient. Don't pester. Don't pester. Don't pester!

The End of the Project: Thank You Feedback and Follow-up

And you're done. (Now wasn't that easy!) When it's time to return your project, wrap it back up in the rubber bands it came in, put together a cover letter, complete the invoice, and send it away. Unless the editor indicated otherwise, the project will usually go back the way it came: FedEx, UPS, messenger, or U.S. Mail. (Messengers are private delivery services usually only used in the cities or areas where the publisher or company is located.)

FedEx and UPS bill whoever is indicated on the shipping invoice; many publishing houses will include a shipping label that bills to the publishing house. Ditto messenger services; they have an account with the publishers. If you're using U.S. Mail, be sure to get a tracking number and receipt in case the package goes missing.

Thank you

Enclose a cover letter with every project you return. (Yes, each and every one. The personal touch works.) It is wonderful to be acknowledged when you do something nice for someone, and when an editor first hires you, he's

The Shipping News

No doubt some of your employers will use either FedEx or UPS. You should open online accounts at www.fedex.com and www.ups.com. They're free, all your contact info will be stored so you'll never waste time repeating your address, and when you call for a pickup, FedEx identifies you automatically, via your phone. You can register on the Web and with a few clicks and have the UPS/FedEx courier at your door the same day. It is wonderfully convenient, especially if you're still in your slippers and comfy sweats at 4 P.M.

taking a chance on you. So thank him appropriately: Acknowledge his effort for going a bit out on a limb, for taking the time to explain the ropes to the newbie, and for giving you the opportunity. Even after you have established relationships with your employers, a simple “I really appreciate you giving me the opportunity to work with you” will always be welcome.

If you can, always add something personal in the letter. If the editor is en route to vacation, or it’s holiday time, add in a personal tidbit. (Go back to your old, faithful proofreading notebook to see if you jotted anything useful down there.) Be conscientious in building the relationship.

Although it may be tempting, don’t share any untoward observations about the book itself in your cover letter. Keep in mind that no one on the production staff had a say in whether or not the book should be published. So if you think it’s a piece of junk, your production editor just may agree with you. On the other hand, the book may have been written by your editor’s best friend. So just don’t share your opinions if they aren’t favorable.

Below are several example cover letters for various types of publications. First, here is a cover letter for a reprint issue of a book that had been published over 20 years ago:

Happy Monday, Vanessa:

Thank you for the first of what I hope is all five books in the series! (The author left some tasty loose ends and now I MUST know what happens. Clever of him.)

There are a few more corrections than I would have expected—some minor rebreak issues and (gasp!) some legitimate errors that have been in the published book since 19 1 waiting to be found. Clearly this was not a book edited by you the first time around.

What’s in the mailbag for this week? I am ready!

Yours,

Jane Q. Proofreader

Here's a cover letter that accompanies a first-pass proofread. (Remember that "first pass" proofreads have plenty more errors than second passes, since first passes are the first time the manuscript appears in galley format.)

Good morning, Jonah:

Thank you for the delightful romance.

You'll see quite a bit of red pencil, in keeping with first-pass tradition. There were three small unresolved issues:

- The preview excerpt on p. i reads very differently from the version in the text on p. 25. Not sure if you want to replace it (I think the excerpt is more entertaining than what's in text; maybe the reader will be more likely to buy the book . . .)
- Possessives were inconsistent (Beauvais's, Thomas's, *but* Mercedes'); I added the final s, but may have missed some Mercedes's, so can you flag the compositor just in case?
- On p. 34 , the phrase "what ifs" appears. It appeared earlier as "what if's" (note apostrophe) and for the life of me I couldn't find it again. Maybe you can flag the comp on that one too.

All else is in there. I checked chapter number order, referred to *Web 11* for all vocabulary, and generally had a great time. Thanks a million for keeping me warm this weekend. Sign me up for the next batch of whatever!

Best Regards,

Jane Q. Proofreader

And finally, here's a cover letter that accompanies a second-pass cold read:

Dear Linda:

Thank you for another favorite. I so enjoy the thrillers.

This cold read was fairly straightforward. The only note is in the second story—it was extremely exclamation-point heavy; I modified some of them to avoid overkill.

This year, I am able to devote more time to freelance work, so I say a big YES to anything you want to send my way, and if you know other wonderful editors/publishers looking for freelancers, I would greatly appreciate any referrals.

I am available for any upcoming projects you have. Thanks so much for keeping me busy!

Warmly,

Jane Q. Proofreader

Feedback and Follow Up

If this is your first project with an editor, it's good to close your cover letter with something to the effect of, "As this is our first project together, I look forward to your feedback so I can meet your needs even more effectively on future projects." Asking for feedback shows initiative. It demonstrates that you're more than a one-job Johnny—that you're in for the long haul, are eager to learn, and want to get yourself on the "frequent-use" freelancer list.

After you return your first project, wait two weeks. Then call the editor (on a Wednesday or Thursday, between 3 and 4 P.M., please) and in a perfectly warm, casual, and baggage-free voice, say: "Hi, it's Jane Q. Proofreader. I wanted to check in with you on the proofread I returned to you a few weeks ago, *War and Peace*. I'd love to hear your feedback, since it was our first time working together."

Then pause. Hopefully, you'll hear something good, or better yet, something helpful. Though the editor may say, "Oh, Jane, I haven't gotten around to reviewing that book yet; I'm swamped here." If she does, laugh with her in pity for a moment, then follow up with, "Well, if you're bogged down beyond repair, I'm happy to take on some more proofreading." She may offer to send you *two* projects just because you put the idea into her head. Or she may say, "I don't have anything right now, but it's good to know you're available. I'll call you when I get something." In any case, you're now in the forefront of her mind.

If You Get Negative Feedback

So you returned your project—having done your best—and you make that phone call to the editor, only to hear her reply of, "Well Jane, since you asked, I have to tell you, the other proofreader found about thirty more corrections than you did."

Take a deep breath. It's OK. You're learning, and that's fine. Nobody's insulting your intelligence; there's just a natural process everyone goes through to get good at this. Respond, "In that case, I'm doubly glad I called, because I am really committed to a career as a proofreader, and if someone found errors that I didn't, I want to know what they are so I can improve my skills and know what to look for in the future. It would mean a lot to me if you could get me the pages that I missed corrections on. Or just send me the corrected manuscript once the compositor doesn't need it any longer. That way I can review it and truly be prepared for upcoming proofreading projects."

Editors won't turn down a request to e-mail, fax, or snail mail pages of a proofreader's atrocities. (Offer to pay for postage; most editors will wave that offer away, since mailing costs are absorbed by the publishing house anyway.) Then really examine the corrections you missed. The good news is that in the world of proofreading the errors are finite. It's not like researchers are discovering new spelling innovations. Most of the errors come up time and again. Examining

your own mistakes will help you better learn the most common ones. (You'll see a lot of them in **Chapter 7: Proofreading Tests.**)

After you've reviewed the errors you missed, drop an e-mail or note to the editor: thank her for allowing you to review your mistakes, matter-of-factly take responsibility for your actions, and reassure her that your future work will be improved. It will attest to your level of commitment and your professionalism that you are conscientious and that you want to establish a professional relationship with this editor.

Honing Your Skills

As you complete more and more projects, your skills will improve along with your confidence. As your skills and confidence increase, more and more projects will come your way. It's a winning cycle. To help you get on the right track, below are some suggestions to keep in mind as you work.

Accentuate the Positive

Decide to like the project before you start it. If you consciously make it your ally, the job will be infinitely easier. When you begin, read the first thirty pages of a book—or whatever you're reading—slowly. Pay special attention to it, get to know it intimately, and find something to like about it.

What to Look for

The other advantage to paying close attention to the initial material is that you'll spend the rest of the project knowing what type of errors to look for. There's an exception to every rule, but in general, the sort of errors you encounter at the beginning will be the sort you see throughout. If you notice that words are being repeated like *the*, or if you find that *accommodated* is spelled with only one *m*, chances are you'll be seeing those errors later on as well. Read slowly and begin to understand the tone of the material—it will serve you for the rest of the project.

To help yourself remember, keep a running list of notes for yourself about a given project's idiosyncrasies. Also, write down proper nouns if they're odd spellings. (Misspelled names, for example, are extremely common.)

Get Inside the Writer's Head

Every writer has either an agenda or an opinion. You get so much more information if you read between the lines: there's tone, energy, point of view, character. If you grasp what the writer is striving for, your job will be easier.

Writers are often bad with language. Mechanics are left to the editorial staff—and you. Don't ever assume that just because the writer wrote it, it's correct. In fact, often the opposite is true—and be grateful for that, because it keeps you employed!

What NOT to Do

As a proofreader, you should never undo the author's or editor's changes. Don't even try to second-guess the motives of the author and the characters. Don't make considerable changes, without querying for approval for the editor and/or the author. Don't change dialogue. Never adjust the design. Never take for granted that someone else in the production line will take care of it. If something seems peculiar, simply flag it.

Keep Your Opinions to Yourself

If you read, say, religious studies books and romance novels interchangeably, you'll note that authors have different points of view and agendas when it comes to their writing. It is certain that, before the project has gotten into your hands, the writers have checked with many people whose opinions they value to make sure that whatever they wrote says everything they want it to say. They don't know you, and they really don't want your opinion.

If something mortally offends you—and that should be an extremely rare occasion, if ever—and you would feel uncomfortable seeing it in print, I recommend querying the editor on a Post-

It that can be removed before the author sees it. Don't complain; rather, make a polite suggestion or request. Different strokes for different folks—have a sense of humor about what you're reading.

No matter what sort of errors you find, always be wonderful in your communications. There is no need to gloat about finding a particularly sensational error or point out a horribly egregious error in a horribly egregious way. Treat the authors—and their words—with respect. Otherwise, come the next job, you'll be right, but out of sight.

Keep 'Em Coming

Maintaining the Relationship

The best way to be in communication with an editor (besides calling *if you have a reason to*) is to send an e-mail at 8:45 Monday morning. Monday is Swampy Day at the office, so don't call. On Monday, editors set themselves up for their week, and usually sometime in the morning they get a handle on what's coming in for the week. They'll see your e-mail first thing (because who doesn't check their e-mail inbox from the bottom up) and they'll know you're available when six proofreads suddenly come down the pike Tuesday morning.

What should your e-mail say? As always, short and sweet. You can try to be clever in the subject line: *Peddling proofreader* or *Proofreading for sale* or something that will make the editor smile but not grimace. Then the body of the e-mail is no more than two or three sentences:

Good morning, Steve,

I'm available for any and all proofreading you have coming up this week. My schedule is flexible, and I can take on standard or rush projects.

Thanks so much,

Jane

Or if you've worked together a few times already, and you know the editor trusts your work:

Hi Judy,

Got any great thrillers for a lonely proofreader? Or a romance or a fantasy or heck, even a cookbook?

Looking forward,

Jane

That Extra Something

There are many ways to thank an employer for helping to give you the freedom and flexibility to pursue your dreams. The best way is with your words. Say thank you, and say it often.

When you develop a closer relationship with someone and the work is coming in very steadily, entertain the idea of thanking him or her in more tangible ways. It's a lovely idea to send a small gift around Thanksgiving—because you're giving thanks. And besides, most everyone sends end-of-year gifts, so you'll get a jump on them and be remembered because of it. Don't forget the thank-you note with the gift.

The Truly Gifted

Food in general is a fabulous gift. A fruit basket is good; a fruitcake is not. Here are some wonderful and convenient recommendations:

- The Manhattan Fruitier Company, www.manhattanfruitier.com, has an Exotic Fruit Basket with fruits you can't even spell (you proofreader you). And it comes with a quaint little booklet detailing the fruits. It's a great gift because no one is allergic to it, and the whole office can sit around oohing and ahing while paging through that little booklet trying to figure out where the heck a Cherimoya is from. They ship nationwide.
- Harry & David, www.harryanddavid.com, is always classy. Their Royal Riviera Pears are the juiciest thing this side of Cirque du Soleil.

- Organic Bouquet, www.organicbouquet.com, features stunning fresh organic and green label flowers, fresh organic gift-packed fruits, and gourmet organic gift baskets. Prices are competitive and all gifts are socially and environmentally responsible.
- Check out www.IthacaFineChocolates.com for Art Bars, which are delicious, organic, Fair Trade chocolate bars that feature an art reproduction by a regional adult artist or an international child artist on a collectible card inside the wrapper. Ithaca Fine Chocolates aims to promote artists and support art education by bringing together the luxuries of fine art and exquisite chocolate for inspired enjoyment.

Setting Up for Success

Setting Up Your “Office”

So what do you *really* need to get started?

Well, I'll put it in print for all my past employers to incriminate me with: When I began proofreading, I had NO SUPPLIES. In fact, the one lone publisher I worked for preferred granite pencils to colored pencils, so all I did was keep a few retractable pencils on my dining room table. I was too lazy even to invest in a sharpener, hence the nifty retractable feature. But as my jobs and subsequently my expertise grew, I gradually acquired some useful supplies.

Lauren Demming

Compare the overhead and initial outlay in the business to any other. It's really next to nothing. You can get by with just a pencil. However, there are a few things you might want to consider as you begin your new career. No matter how small your space, make it easy on yourself from the get-go by having a place for everything: pencils, erasers, and dictionary. Get a few hanging files

for all the new contacts you'll be acquiring. A write-on, wipe-off calendar for upcoming projects and due dates can be fun to pin on the wall—and can ensure that you won't miss a deadline.

Here are a few useful supplies, in order of appearance:

- **Ticonderoga Red Checking Pencils (in Carmine)** They sharpen easily, stay sharp, and erase. You can find them at Staples or, if you're lucky, your local stationery store.
- **Regulation-size two-pocket folder** It's great to work at home, but with a busy life, sometimes you have to be on the move. Despite what anyone might tell you, this is a job you *can* take on the road. When you're out during the day, slip some loose pages from a project into a regulation-size two-pocket folder. Try Oxford Esselte folders that you can buy in any university or college bookstore. The pockets are low and the cardboard is laminated for sturdiness. These folders fit about forty pages each. When you have a free five minutes, read a page.
- **Miniature, canary yellow Post-Its, size 1 ½ x inches** These are for posting queries to the editor. This way the editor can just un-stick them from the page after they've been answered. You might also get some pink, green or blue to use for other purpose (notes to yourself, unresolved issues, etc.), so if you have to page through a project a few times, any comments to yourself will pop out immediately. Or use them when you're in transit and want to remind yourself to recheck something once you're back at home.
- **Granite pencils** If you have a long query to write, it's much easier and neater if you do it on the Post-It with a granite pencil. Also, should a manuscript arrive single-spaced (a major no-no, but it happens), the no. 2 pencil makes precise markings in a tight spot.
- **Webster's Eleventh Collegiate Dictionary** In editorial parlance, this is called "*Web Eleven*." It is the granddaddy of all dictionaries, and usually the editor's Bible. *Web 11* is pretty terrific, too—each definition includes the word's date of origin. If you're reading a sci-fi novel that takes place before the Depression and the protagonist sees a "flying

saucer,” *Web 11* will tell you that since the phrase came into usage in 1947, it wouldn’t have been plausible in 1920. (Catch one like that and your editor will love you!) Check out <http://www.m-w.com> for a cheaper version—as in, free.

- ***The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th Edition*** This is one hefty tome, chock full of detailed grammar rules. You can easily survive as a freelance proofreader without “*Chicago*,” but you’ll notice that every so often, an editor will refer to it. Just so you know what they’re talking about, go rummage around your local bookstore and check out this \$50 book. If you think you can use it, buy it secondhand on eBay.
- ***Words into Type*** This is a solid little book—more concise and user-friendly than *Chicago*. If you just want a rulebook of grammar and presentation, this is short and snappy.

Show Me the Money

Ah, the moment you’ve all been waiting for. Getting paid! So, what do you bill, how do bill, who do you bill? It’s all here.

The industry standard

Most proofreading is calculated on an hourly rate.

“Introductory” proofreading rates usually begin at \$12 per hour, and range up to \$25/hour for standard publishing houses. If you are working consistently for one house, or if you have specialized knowledge about a specific topic, your rate may be up to double that. If you are given a rush project, or you’re working for a company that has an impressive budget (such as an advertising agency), the rates can be even higher.

Familiarity Breeds ...

Editors have some flexibility with the rate they offer to pay and are more likely to be generous with their “repeat” proofreaders. The pay scales will even differ from editor to editor in the same publishing house. If you are offered a higher rate over time (what we jokingly refer to as the “friendship rate”), you’re in good stead.

Independent companies—non-publishing houses, such as consulting firms, do contact publishers to get the names of good proofreaders. You can make a comparative fortune when you're working for big business—they pay big business salaries! Some freelancers have even become the exclusive proofreader for these sorts of non-publishing companies.

Hourly rate vs. per-page rate

So how do you bill hourly when there's no one to keep you in check: peeking over your shoulder or flicking their gaze up to the clock on the wall in the office? If you're working from home, or on the train, or on line at the post office, or while waiting in the car to pick up your kids, then clocking your hours is nigh impossible. Which is why the hourly rate directly corresponds to . . . the per-page rate.

You can use the per-page rate even if you are given a “flat” hourly rate. Simply ask the editor, “How many pages per hour do you expect from your proofreaders?” This will of course vary according to the size of the font, the layout of lines per page and the kind of content you're reading. However, the typical answer is 10–12 pages. So, every 10–12 pages is an hour of work or \$20.

Now, of course, if you're able to read faster, your rate can multiply. For example, if you read 18 pages per hour on a \$20/hour job, you're actually making \$30 per reading hour. Over time, as you become more proficient at proofreading, you'll make more money in less time.

How to bill

An invoice is a simple one-page document that contains the following information: your name, company name (if applicable), address, phone and e-mail, the name of the company you're billing as well as all their contact info, the name of the project, the date you began and completed work, your hourly rate, how long it took you, and the grand total. You also have to include your social security or federal tax ID number. Most projects from publishers will arrive with an invoice form that you fill out with this information. If the project you are working on doesn't have an invoice, you will need to create one. Here's an example:

Jane Q. Proofreader

Proofreader

111 Proof Road, #1 Cedar Rapids, IA 52403

319-555-1234 (phone)

319-555-5678 (fax)

JaneQ@proof.com

Jean Squares
Imaginary Publisher
100 Printer's Street
New York, NY 10001

INVOICE
#14 of Year 010

RE: Proofreading services rendered

DATE: April 26, 2010

JOBS: *45 Minutes* by Tatia Greenfield
24 hours @ \$20/hour

BALANCE DUE: \$480

SS #: 1 3-45-6789

Payable upon receipt.

After you submit your invoice, your contact at the company will have it approved, and off it will go to accounts payable. Most reputable publishers pay their bills within thirty days.

What if you don't get paid?

Here's an unfortunate story:

One of the first publishers I worked for, Carol Publishing, sent me such entertaining books: on how to learn languages, where to take magical honeymoons, where to go for the best ice cream. The books were fluffy and fun, and I didn't really mind that the company took over two months to pay outstanding invoices. After all, I was pretty new at this and grateful they were hiring me at all. But after a year or two of working for them, I had quite a few editors sending me projects, and my outstanding balance was over \$7,000. And then out of the blue, the company announced that it was going bankrupt. "Substantial creditors" would get paid out first, if there were any funds available to pay them. Proofreaders—actually, all freelancers—were at the bottom of that barrel. I knew I'd never see that \$7,000.

Well, lesson learned, albeit painfully. Bill promptly. Don't let bills accrue. Don't take work unless you've already been paid for the last project, or know that the company has a credible payroll system in place. There have been some proofreaders known to hock a project until they get back pay. Try to avoid this method of extortion please—but if you did the work, you deserve to get paid.

Setting Up an LLC

As the jobs come in, you can expand your business by "legitimizing yourself." Incorporating your business can be very good for your career . . . and taxes. Being the president of a company adds weight and prestige to your business. You're not "just a proofreader" or "just a freelancer." You're a business owner. And you get to choose your very own nifty name. One popular online incorporation company is at www.bizfilings.com—the site is friendly and it walks you through the process. (BizFilings has a great Q&A section as well.) Depending on the state in which you live, incorporating costs between \$70 and \$600.

The LLC is a newer entity, and people are not as familiar with the LLC as a corporation. The LLC does not require as much formality as a corporation. According to <http://www.lectlaw.com>, a limited liability company is “a business structure that is a hybrid of a partnership and a corporation. Its owners are shielded from personal liability and all profits and losses pass directly to the owners without taxation of the entity itself. You don’t need an attorney to set up an LLC.”

The benefits of incorporation are many. First, as a tax implication, owning a corporation lifts you firmly out of the “self-employed/work from home” red flag that the IRS examines so closely. If you own a corporation, you file corporate taxes. So the IRS department that examines your return is putting it next to GE and Microsoft, as opposed to individual tax returns.

When you open your LLC, you’ll also be able to open a matching bank account in your company’s name. (If you have an LLC with a name and a matching bank account, have your payments made out to your corporation.) All your income will flow through your business, so now your expenses will be charged against it as well. Ah, time for you to acquire a business credit card. This will save you the trouble of itemizing your expenses—the credit card statement does it for you. You don’t have to worry about keeping receipts. (American Express is very amenable to handing out cards for small businesses; they’re nice, fancy gold-colored cards. You’ll feel like a million bucks.) Of course, business meals are tax deductible, as are business supplies. (This is true if you are unincorporated as well.)

Wrap Up

Well, there you have it. You've discovered your innate proofreading skills, learned about the additional resources that can get you up to speed, created a résumé that will get you work, and discovered how to track down the jobs—every tool you need to go out and start making a living as a freelance proofreader. After you hit **Part II, How to Do the Job**, you'll have all the skills you need to spend your “work” time reading terrific books. Think how many great things you'll learn, how much fun it will be to make your own business decisions, and how freeing it'll be to make your own schedule.

If you have dreamed about getting out of your job, or making some extra cash for a rainy day, or waking up every morning and choosing what *you* want to do and how *you* want your day to look—using the lessons in *Get Paid to Read* will lead you to that fabulous life.

Get out there, and don't forget to share your successes with me!