

Quick guide to editing for educational resources

Educational resources are a thriving area of publishing, where skilled freelance editors and proofreaders are in constant demand. With the advent of digital resources, the landscape of the industry is constantly changing. But the need for editorial professionals is unremitting, since content, no matter what the format, always need to undergo quality control checks.

Types of resources

There are several different types of educational resources, both print and digital, each with different uses. It is helpful to have an awareness of them, when approaching freelance work in this industry.

Digital

There are already many types of digital resources available, with new ones being created all the time. Below is a breakdown of the most common types currently in existence.

Type of resource	Explanation
eBooks	An eBook is some form of a print textbook hosted on a digital platform. It might be an interactive eBook or it might be a simple PDF.
Online courses	A course that is hosted entirely online, usually on a password-protected site. The course materials might be static or interactive.
Interactives	The term 'interactives' is used to refer to any type of educational resource that students can interact with. This includes activities, such as quizzes.
Websites	A website might be used to host educational materials.
Static resources	Any resource that does not respond to student interaction, for example PDFs.

Print

Printed textbooks have a long history in the industry. Although digital resources have surged in recent years, there is still significant investment in, and customer demand for, printed resources. Below is a list of the main types and their functions.

Type of resource	Explanation
Student books	A student book is meant for student use in the classroom, with teacher guidance.



Teacher books	Teacher books usually offer teachers guidance on delivering the course. They often accompany a student resource.
Workbooks	Workbooks are for students to use independently, inside or outside the classroom. They contain lots of activities for students to complete.
Revision guides	Revision guides are for students to use independently, outside the classroom to prepare for their exams.

Features of educational resources

Educational materials often make use of several features. These features, and the names for them, vary between different resources. However, there are several features that are common to many educational resources.

- Learning objectives – tell the learner what they should know or be able to do once they have completed that section of the text.
- Activities and cases studies – opportunities for the learner to test their progress and apply what they have learnt to real scenarios.
- Tips and hints – help learners to avoid common pitfalls or give them advice for their exams.
- Glossaries – contain definitions of key subject vocabulary.
- Summaries and checklists – used at the end of chapters or sections to summarise what learners should now know or be able to do.
- Exam practice – sections in which students can practice exam-style questions.
- Sample student answers – especially useful for essay-style questions to model for students how to write successful answers.
- Curriculum-specific features – these will be unique to each course or series.

Additional checks in educational resources

Educational resources tend to follow the same workflow as other published materials: commissioning, writing, copyediting, typesetting, proofreading and printing/ digital upload. There are some checks unique to these resources.

At development stage (a stage added after writing, before copyediting) an educational resource may undergo several reviews.

- Teacher review – to check the materials will be suitable for students.
- Subject-specialist review – to check for any erroneous material pertaining to the subject matter.
- Language review – to check that the language level of the resources is appropriate for the students targeted.
- Cultural review – to check that the materials are appropriate for the intended market and do not contain culturally offensive content.

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For more detailed information about each of these reviews, check out my article on this subject on my website.¹

There may also be some additional checks undertaken during the production stage, when the manuscript is undergoing copyediting, typesetting and proof-reading.

- Answer checking – when any answers are checked against the questions to ensure that they are correct.
- Fact checking – usually only carried out on specific subjects, such as history.
- Endorsement review – in which the content is sent to an exam board for a review that will determine whether the exam board endorse the final product.

Editing for the learner

One key feature that sets educational resources apart from fiction or other areas is that it is expected that the reader will be lacking in knowledge or understanding of the subject matter. It is essential for editors to be aware of this while they work. A good editorial brief for an educational resource will tell you something about the learner the content is aimed towards. Keeping this learner in mind will help you to make sensible decisions about changes that need to be made to the content. Key to this type of content is clarity. If you don't understand it, then a student certainly will not.

Making use of the learner mindset

Many editorial professionals working in this area have preferred subject areas, such as maths, if they hold a relevant maths qualification, or Spanish, if they have some degree of language fluency. At higher levels, subject knowledge is essential. For example, an A level Biology textbook would need to be edited by a copyeditor with some experience in this field, probably a degree qualification.

However, at lower levels or for entry-level materials in a particular subject, lack of background knowledge can in fact be an asset. The copyeditor or proof-reader should embrace the learner mindset – putting themselves in the place of the student who will make use of the text. It will enable the editorial professional to question what doesn't make sense and to highlight areas where the instructions might be lacking in detail or clarity. Once they have finished their work, the copyeditor or proofreader should feel, like the student, that they have learnt something. This is one of the greatest tests of an educational resource. Editors who work in this area will benefit from the variety of subjects and be inspired by the many opportunities to learn something new.

¹ <https://www.sarahlustigeditor.co.uk/post/reviews-of-educational-resources>