

Quick guide to writing for educational resources

Publishing companies are constantly looking for new authors to help them with their publishing plans. But working with publishers can seem an obscure process for authors. This document provides a brief guide for first-time authors to help them understand what to expect when they take on their first writing assignment.

Introduction to the publishing industry

There are several aspects of the publishing industry that are completely unknown to first-time authors. The team that works on a single resource can seem impossibly large, or it can appear as though just one person is managing every aspect of your project. In some cases one person is the author's point of contact and everything else happens behind the scenes, out of the author's sight. On other projects, the author is in contact with multiple team members and can be unsure who is responsible for each part of the project. Furthermore, the project itself can seem never-ending, if the author is unaware at the start of the phases of development that their resource is about to undergo.

The stages in the publishing process

First-time authors are often unaware of the long process that is undertaken to publish a book. Many resources spend a year in development and production before they are ready to go for printing. This is to ensure that the finished product is of the highest possible quality, to ensure it meets customers' high quality expectations. Here the main stages are explained.

Stage	Explanation
1. Commissioning	The first stage in the publishing process involves the Commissioning Editor/ Publisher commissioning the author to write the resource. They will agree an author brief and raise a contract for the author to sign.
2. Writing	During this stage, the author writes the resource. Depending on the length of the materials to be written and the urgency of the project, this phase can last between one and six months. On average, three months are allotted for writing time.
3. Reviews and editing	Once the manuscript has been submitted, it may go to reviewers to carry out certain checks. ¹ Alternatively it might go directly to a copyeditor to check for errors. The copyeditor may have queries for the author to address. The copyeditor also prepares the manuscript for typesetting.

¹ For information about each of these reviews, check out my article on this subject on my website at: <https://www.sarahlustigeditor.co.uk/post/reviews-of-educational-resources>



4. Typesetting	The stage at which the manuscript is laid out in the interior page design. The page size is set at the printing size and additional front matter, such as a title page and imprint page, are added to the book. The manuscript is usually submitted as a Word document. After it has been typeset it is referred to as 'proofs' and will be provided as PDFs.
5. Proofreading	Another opportunity for errors to be found and corrected. The proofreader checks that the design has been implemented correctly. Depending on the schedule for the resource and its requirements, the proofs may go through three stages of proofreading. In rare cases, they may have additional rounds of proofreading.
6. Endorsement	Many educational resources are endorsed by an exam board as fit for their curriculum. This stage is sometimes carried out early in the resources life cycle and sometimes towards the end, once the text has been finalised. The endorsement review process often identifies corrections to be made to the resource. The Commissioning Editor/ Publisher will tell you whether this stage applies to your project.
7. Printing	Final proofs are signed off by the Commissioning Editor/ Publisher and sent to the printers. Printing can take between six weeks and three months, depending on the printing location.
8. Reprints	After the resource has been published, it may go into reprinting. This happens once the first run of printed copies has been sold. Further copies must be printed to satisfy customer demand. At this stage there may be an opportunity to make corrections to the text that have come to light since publication.

This workflow describes the process for a printed resource, but most of this also applies to any digital product. Instead of typesetting, a digital product is sent for building – the stage at which the digital product is created.

Any author taking on work with a publisher should expect to be involved in the project throughout its life cycle – which could last nine months to one year. There are times when an author has less involvement, such as during typesetting. During any checking stage, such as copyediting or proofreading, the author should anticipate being called on to answer queries.

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The roles of key stakeholders

There are several stakeholders who make up the team of people that turns a raw manuscript into a printable book. It can be confusing to determine who is responsible for which parts of the process. Different publishers have different workflows, so there is no definitive list that could explain everyone's roles. However, most teams are made up of roughly the same roles, with the same functions, which are outlined here.

Role	Explanation
Commissioning Editor/ Publisher	Has overall responsibility for the project, including for the schedule and budget. They commission the author to write the resource and will be their main point of liaison.
Project Editor	Responsible for the editorial quality of the work. They may take over as the author's point of contact after the manuscript has been finalised and has started the process of copyediting and typesetting.
Designer	They oversee the design work, including the cover, illustrations, the interior design of the resource and typesetting.
Digital Project Manager	The DPM works on any digital aspects of a resource, such as an eBook or interactive resources.
Typesetter	The typesetter lays out the book in the design it will be printed in.
Copyeditor/ Proofreader	The editorial professionals who read the book for errors and make corrections to it. They are usually managed by the Project Editor.

There are other team members that the author may or may not have contact with throughout their time on the project. These include the Production Manager, who is responsible for the printing stage; the Marketing Manager, who creates the marketing plan for the resource; and the Permissions Manager who manages the process of requesting permission to use third-party text and photo items.

At different organisations you might find that these roles have different job titles. For example, some publishers use the title 'Product Manager' for their Commissioning Editors/ Publishers. You should be able to identify the person's role from the description here. If you are unsure about who is responsible for what on a project you are working on, ask the Commissioning Editor/ Publisher to provide you with a breakdown.