



HIRING A FREELANCE EDITOR/FORMATTER

BASIC INFORMATION AND EXPECTATIONS

This document presents answers to some commonly asked questions to help you know what to expect and what to ask when you negotiate with a freelance editor/formatter to work on your thesis.¹ The Naval Postgraduate School does not endorse or recommend particular individuals or companies. We encourage you to consider using online searches to identify those who have experience editing and formatting NPS theses and/or working on academic documents. You may also want to ask faculty members in your department, or fellow students, for information; they may be able to suggest individuals who have provided these services to students in the past.²

¹ If you are a foreign national, editing and formatting services are provided free of cost. Please contact us (see useful links).

² Please note: we refer to all final project reports as theses, whether they are theses, dissertations, joint applied projects, or capstones.

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A. BASICS

The decision to hire a freelance editor and/or formatter hinges on practicality: Do the benefits outweigh the costs? Although the thesis is intended as a means for the student to demonstrate his or her own subject knowledge, research ability, and writing skill, every writer, no matter how practiced and experienced, could benefit from the input of skilled readers; every writer, no matter how computer-savvy, could use help with fine-tuning the thesis' final appearance. Certainly, any writer—despite the best intentions—could run short of time and need help to meet a deadline.

The following questions and answers are offered to help you to decide whether hiring a freelance editor and/or formatter is right for you, and, if it is, how to benefit the most from such an arrangement.

1. What is editing?

Editing addresses *how the thesis reads*. Editing services range from simple proofreading, through copy editing, up to the most detailed review of content and organization, which is referred to as structural editing.

a. Proofreading

It may be that all your thesis requires is a careful read-through for misspelled words and incorrect punctuation. “**Proofing**” points out typos, repeated words or paragraphs, missed words, or use of the wrong word (e.g., profit vs. prophet; boarder vs. border; affect vs. effect). Proofreading is the lightest form of editing and, therefore, is the least expensive.

b. Copy editing

In general, **copy editing** involves proofreading, plus checking for correct use of grammar and consistency of word use, as well as clarifying the meaning of sentences or words. It does not include reorganization or major rewriting. You can expect a nice clean copy from your copy editor. Copy editing will not produce a flawless thesis (which is likely hypothetical, in any case), since a “perfect” document would take many iterations, cost a lot, and require a subject matter expert in your field of study as well as a writing specialist.

c. Structural editing

Assessment of the content, organization, and flow of your thesis falls under **structural editing**. If you want this sort of editing, you must request it from your editor. While your proofreader or copy editor may point out some structural issues to you if she or he happens to catch them, you should not expect that your editor will address the structure of your thesis *unless you have specifically requested it*. Please note, structural editing takes longer and will cost more than copy editing.

2. What is formatting?

Formatting addresses *how the thesis looks*. In essence, your formatter will make your thesis look exactly like an NPS thesis. This means the proper application of formatting styles to headings, paragraphs, figure/table captions, images, quotes, list of references, etc. Along the way, your formatter may notice and point out obvious errors in your text, but formatters are not editors.

3. What about references?

Either editors or formatters may review and clean up your in-text citations and list of references if you ask for this extra service. Note that agreeing to check and format references to your chosen citation style (e.g., Chicago, APA, IEEE) does NOT mean that the editor/formatter will look up all of your sources to find missing information (page numbers, publisher, or date, for example). You can expect your editor/formatter to work ONLY with the information you provide. **Your editor CANNOT insert missing quotation marks for you, identify and fix inadequate paraphrasing, or ensure your thesis will receive a clean iThenticate report. This is your responsibility.** You should also know that working on references takes time and costs more; the more cleanup required, the more it will cost.

4. Does the same person do everything?

Most people edit only or format only. Thus, if you want both services provided, you may need to hire two different people. If you hire an editor AND a formatter, you will work with the editor first. Then, when the editing process is complete, you send your thesis (without track changes or comments) to the formatter.

5. When should I send my thesis to the editor/formatter?

Send your thesis to the editor after you and your advisors have settled on the content. If you send it to the editor and then make major changes to your thesis text, you may need to have it edited again, which would cost more and take more time. Once the editing is complete, then your thesis is ready for formatting. Formatting is the final polish and should be done just before the thesis is sent to the thesis processor for review.

Talk with your advisors and department chair to find out if they want to review your thesis one last time before they sign off on your thesis. This is often a good idea, because the editor may have inadvertently changed the meaning of your text.

6. My thesis is CUI or classified. Can I still work with an editor/formatter?

Unfortunately, no, **only theses approved for public release may be sent to freelancers for editing and formatting.** Freelance editors/formatters are private citizens and, as such, should NOT have access to CUI or classified documents. If you need help along these lines, contact the Graduate Writing Center at writingcenter@nps.edu or (831) 656-3682 to work with a writing coach who is cleared to work on restricted theses (see the Alternatives section of this document for more information). Remember, though, that writing coaches teach you writing rules; they do not edit or format your work.

7. I am using LaTeX; can I still work with an editor/formatter?

Freelance editors do not have the LaTeX software. There are ways around this, however, from providing your editor a hard-copy printout to converting your text from LaTeX to Word format for your editor's use. Alternatively, you could send a PDF of your thesis to an editor, who could mark up edits in the PDF. You would then have to transfer the edits into your LaTeX file. If you use LaTeX and plan to work with an editor, you should discuss with the editor what format you will be sending.

Freelance formatting in LaTeX is limited.

B. FINANCIAL

You are responsible for identifying potential editors/formatters, checking their references, and fully discussing and agreeing to the scope of work, timeline, and cost parameters before any work is done. Drawing up a simple contract is the best way to avoid misunderstandings. Many freelance editors and formatters have such a contract template. *Read it carefully before signing it.* The following questions and answers can help you begin negotiations and keep the lines of communication open throughout the process to avoid sticker shock at the end.

1. How much does editing/formatting cost?

Each thesis is somewhat different, so costs vary; generally, editors/formatters charge between \$45 and \$55 an hour. The typical thesis takes between 10 and 20 hours to copy edit and format. Please note that the cost increases if your thesis:

- is longer than usual (100 pages or more)
- needs more than the usual amount of work
- has a lot of footnotes and references (hundreds) and/or your footnotes and references need a lot of work
- is rushed (editors/formatters may charge extra for last-minute, short turnaround requests)

2. I want an editor/formatter; what is covered?

Ask what is covered when you talk to your prospective editor/formatter. NPS employees are *not* involved with, nor liable for, any phase of your transaction. Before you hire any freelancer, you need to be very clear what services are to be provided, the timeline, and the estimated cost. Here is a list of questions to ask (in addition to any others you may have):

1. What services are provided (e.g., editing [proofreading, copy, or structural], formatting, references)?
2. Will the editor/formatter make corrections, particularly to references, required by your thesis processor? If so, will you be charged extra?
3. How does your editor/formatter charge (i.e., hourly, per page, flat rate)?
4. How long will it take? Note: this will likely be an estimate—exact time is hard to predict.
5. Can the editor/formatter start immediately? Will the editor/formatter be unavailable at any point between now and the deadline?

6. How much will it cost in total? Clarify whether you are receiving an estimate (which is reasonable, since it is hard to tell exactly how long a thesis will take to edit/format) or a set price.
7. When is payment due? Is a check okay or does she or he require cash only?

3. I paid someone to do my references; there should be no corrections requested from my processor, right?

The quality of the references you gave your editor/formatter to work with will affect the final product; most students can expect about a 90 percent solution. Citation styles, particularly Chicago Notes and Bibliography style, have a lot of little details to track. In addition, there are some types of sources that are more obscure than others, and so they are more difficult to cite and reference properly. Make sure that when you negotiate to have your references fixed you verify whether your editor/formatter will make corrections using results of your final thesis processing review, if necessary. We inevitably find some errors to fix.

4. If the copy edit isn't flawless and the citations still may need corrections, why should I hire someone?

Only you can decide whether to work with an editor and/or formatter. That said, an editor/formatter is a fresh pair of eyes to see the things that you may have missed, including things that your thesis processor will mark for you to fix. In particular, fixing references can be very tedious and time consuming. Near the end of the quarter, with your final deadline looming, it may well be worthwhile paying someone for help, be it with editing, formatting, and/or reference style, so that your thesis moves more smoothly through the thesis processing review.

A majority of students who hire an editor/formatter are pleased with their investment. Remember, your eligibility to hire an editor/formatter means your thesis will have unlimited distribution: a more professional and polished work will enhance your credibility.

C. TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Use of an editor and/or formatter is optional and is to be completed *before* the thesis finalization process begins. It is your responsibility as the student to submit your thesis to the TPO for review on schedule. The following commonly asked questions deal with some of the more technical aspects of the submission process.

1. Can my editor/formatter use my SharePoint site?

While some freelance editors or formatters may happen to be NPS employees, they cannot use their NPS privileges or access to aid in their freelance work. You will need to email a Word version of your thesis to your freelance editor/formatter. When it is complete, *you* will upload it to SharePoint for thesis processing review.

2. I used citation management software (e.g., Zotero, EndNote, and citefast, among others), so my references don't need any work, right?

Even if you are meticulous about putting in the data, citation-generated reference lists are only about 80 percent accurate. Still, Zotero can be a huge help, especially with managing a large number of sources, saving you time and money. You can negotiate with your editor/formatter for them to make the manual fixes.

3. My editor/formatter has agreed to do the thesis processor's edits, so you'll just send the file back to her, right?

Freelancers work only for you, so *you* must arrange to get the final file fixed and returned to your thesis processor by the deadline.

D. MANAGING THE PROCESS/TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

The closer graduation gets, the busier freelancers may be. Ensure that you have discussed and understand the expected duration of individual steps. For example, the editor not only edits your thesis but may need to review his or her recommended changes with you. If you are having your references fixed, allow extra time in the schedule. Formatting should take place only after you have accepted all of the proposed editing changes; it usually goes more quickly than editing, but still takes time. **Plan ahead!** It is not reasonable to expect—and may not be possible to get—full service at the last minute.

1. I've never worked with an editor/formatter. How can I ensure things go well?

- **You're the negotiator:** While it is good to talk with the editor/formatter, you should be sure to get *all* of the terms, conditions, and details (including cost) *in writing*. Communicate your needs and expectations before you commit.

- **You're the timekeeper:** It is your responsibility to keep the project on track. Make sure that you inform your editor/formatter of impending deadlines and get your thesis to them early enough so they can meet them. Discuss your respective schedules. Some editors/formatters do part-time freelance work in addition to a full-time job—they may have limited availability at crunch-time. If you will be on leave and unavailable at some point, you should mention that, too.
- **You're the author:** Editors/formatters are not subject-matter experts in specific disciplines. It's your job to review all edits, ensuring that your meaning has not been changed. Ultimately, it is your thesis and you are responsible for content, formatting, correctly attributing sources, and references. Only you are responsible for getting it to us on time.
- **You're the customer:** Good communication with your editor/formatter will make the process go more smoothly. If you don't understand something the editor/formatter has done or is requesting, ask! Pay promptly once the work has been completed to your satisfaction—but not before!

2. I had problems with my editor/formatter. What should I do?

Most freelancers are interested in providing quality service, maintaining high standards, and working with you to try to resolve disputes to both parties' satisfaction. Most students are satisfied with the services of freelance editors/formatters, and we rarely hear about problems.

If you are dissatisfied with a freelance editor/formatter you have hired, there is not very much NPS can do. If you have paid the editor/formatter in full, NPS cannot intervene to get your money back. Do leave feedback on the freelancers' website or service site, so others will be forewarned.

E. ALTERNATIVES

Not convinced you need to hire a freelance editor and/or formatter? You're not alone: a majority of students tackle the challenge on their own, and end up with a publishable thesis without hired help, by making use of the resources below.

1. Workshops

Each quarter, the Graduate Writing Center (GWC) offers workshops on topics such as how to build better sentences and how and why to paraphrase and quote sourced material. You can sign up through the GWC website, given below. The Dudley Knox Library also offers workshops on citation management software (such as Zotero) and library resources.

2. Writing coaches

The GWC has coaches available to work with you one-to-one, free of charge. While the coaches will not edit your work, they will work with you on structure and organization and teach you writing and proofreading skills that you can use going forward. Students and faculty have reported that this free service has improved the quality of theses. The GWC encourages students to bring them one chapter at a time and start working with a coach *early* in the writing process.

3. Citation guides

Guidance for citation styles, including online style manuals, is available at <https://libguides.nps.edu/citation> via the Thesis Processing Office and Dudley Knox Library websites; this site is maintained collaboratively by the GWC, TPO, and reference librarians. The library and GWC also have hard copies of most citation style manuals.

4. Formatting instruction

See <https://nps.edu/web/thesisprocessing/templates-forms>. Here, you will find the thesis formatting demo and LaTeX crash course. In addition, the Thesis Processing Office posts the thesis brief online, and you can watch the video and view the slides and brief handouts on its website. This covers how to submit your thesis.

5. Thesis processors

You are welcome to stop by or contact anyone in the Thesis Processing Office with questions (see below). We are here to help!

F. USEFUL LINKS

1. The Thesis Processing Office is located on upper west side of the Dudley Knox Library in Room 268. Our website offers comprehensive information, required forms, templates and tools <https://nps.edu/web/thesisprocessing>. You can also contact one of the thesis processors directly at thesisprocessingoffice@nps.edu.

2. The Graduate Writing Center is located in the center of the Dudley Knox Library's first floor and online at <https://nps.edu/web/gwc>. You can email writingcenter@nps.edu or call 831-656-3682.

3. The Dudley Knox Library website is <https://library.nps.edu/> or call 831-656-2947.