

IPEd guidelines for editing theses

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IPEd guidelines for editing theses (the *Guidelines*) outlines the nature and extent of services that professional editors may ethically provide when editing a student's thesis and the responsibilities of editors, students and supervisors relevant to editing. The *Guidelines* applies to all forms of theses. The *Guidelines* refers to the [*IPEd standards for editing practice, third edition 2024*](#) (the *Standards*).

Context

A thesis enables a research student to demonstrate their capacity for independent research and to present their research within the context of other scholarly work.

Supervisors may encourage students to have their thesis professionally edited before submission to improve its readability, clarity and consistency. Students may contract editors to copyedit and/or proofread their work.

The *Guidelines* has been developed by the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) to provide guidance to students, supervisors and editors to maintain the integrity of thesis editing. Students, supervisors and editors should also be aware of any university-specific guidance on thesis editing and the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Amendment (Prohibiting Academic Cheating Services) Act 2020*.

Scope of editing and proofreading of theses

Editors should explain clearly the extent and nature of services they are offering when editing theses and draw students' attention to the *Guidelines*. Supervisors and students need to understand the role of an editor and the scope of the editorial services delivered.

Supervisors are responsible for providing their students with editorial advice on:

- matters of content, substance and structure
- interpretation of the research literature and data

- use of illustrations and tables
- use of language, including clarity, voice and tone, grammar, spelling and punctuation
- use of technical and specialised terminology.

Supervisors may also assist with copyediting and proofreading. The *Standards* explains the different aspects of editing practice, such as substantive editing, copyediting and proofreading, under “The fundamentals of editing”.

Services professional editors may provide

Professional thesis editing services should be restricted to copyediting and proofreading, as described in the *Standards* under “The fundamentals of editing” and detailed in Part D (Language and illustrations) and Part E (Completeness and consistency). On matters of content, substance and structure (Part C of the *Standards*), editors may draw attention to any issues they encounter but may only offer examples or comments to guide the student.

Copyediting services may include editing language and illustrations to achieve:

- clear expression (e.g. removing ambiguity, wordiness and needless repetition)
- clear and logical connections between phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and sections
- correct use of grammar, syntax, spelling and punctuation
- appropriate use of idiom, style, tone and inclusive language
- correct formatting of citations and references for sources and quoted material
- appropriate use of technical and specialised terminology, including discipline-specific terms, abbreviations and units of measurement
- clear, consistent and accessible presentation of illustrations and tables.

Proofreading services may include checking the final thesis to ensure:

- completeness and correct placement of all parts of the thesis
- accuracy and accessibility of cross-references, citations and hyperlinks
- consistency, accuracy and completeness of textual elements
- consistency in the use of language, style, terminology, numbers, symbols, shortened forms, capitalisation, italics and other mechanics of text
- consistency in the presentation of lists, illustrations, tables and captions
- consistency and correction of problems in the format and layout
- conformity of references and citations to the specified style.

Services editors should not provide

Editors should not make corrections to the content, substance or structure of the thesis (Part C of the *Standards*), although they may note issues for the student's attention. The editor is not responsible for identifying issues of content, such as checking facts, references to others' work, plagiarism and AI-generated content. However, if issues of this type are identified, the editor may advise the student to check their university's guidance and to seek advice from their supervisor.

Selecting and engaging an editor

Students should select an editor with appropriate expertise and experience. IPED has a [directory of professional editors](#) that can help students find a suitable editor. Universities may also have lists of editors. Supervisors may wish to guide students in selecting an editor. IPED members are bound by its [Code of Ethics](#) and follow the *Guidelines*.

When enquiring about editing, it is helpful for the student to provide the following details to the editor:

- name of tertiary institution
- thesis title and subject area
- thesis length (total word count)
- preferred editing schedule and/or due date
- parts of the thesis to be edited and their word count
- any other specific requirements.

Editors will need to see the complete thesis or a sample of the writing to gauge the extent of editing needed and to provide an estimate or quote.

Students should obtain written approval from their principal supervisor to use a professional editor, such as an email, and provide this to the editor.

Ideally, students should engage an editor at least one month before the deadline for submission of the thesis to allow sufficient time for editing and review of the suggested changes. Engaging an editor means committing to using that editor and agreeing with the editor on the following before editing begins:

- timing and schedule for the editing work to be completed
- estimated cost
- method of payment including any deposit
- expectations of both student and editor
- extent of editing.

The editor may set out these details in an email or other form, which, once agreed to by the student, forms a contract. Alternatively, the editor may ask the student to sign a contract. IPed has developed a [draft agreement](#) that can be modified.

Students may also benefit from working with an editor throughout their postgraduate studies, for example, when drafting thesis chapters or manuscripts that will be included in the thesis.

Editing a thesis including publications

A thesis may include work published, submitted and/or accepted for publication, co-authored by the student and others. For this type of thesis, the student should indicate any parts of the thesis that have been previously submitted or published and whether these should or should not be edited. Any university-specific guidance should be followed.

Providing the thesis to the editor and agreeing on the editing process

The student should provide a clean copy of the thesis to the editor and inform the editor of any university requirements or style guide that should be followed.

The thesis should be provided for editing in electronic form, such as a Word document, so changes can be tracked by the editor and efficiently reviewed by the student. The student should discuss the choice of format and style with the editor. The editor should explain to the student any specific requirements of the student during the editing process.

Paying the editor

The cost of editing a thesis depends on a range of factors that affect the time needed for editing, including the quality of the writing and the length, complexity and presentation of the thesis. IPed provides guidance on [indicative costs of academic editing](#), including factors that may affect costs. Students should be aware of costs and plan ahead for funding. Some students may receive a grant from their university to contribute to the cost of thesis editing, but this grant may not cover the full cost. Editors may require a deposit or part payment before starting and/or returning work.

Finalising the edited thesis

The student is responsible for reviewing and checking all changes suggested by the editor and should allow sufficient time for this. Using a professional editor should ensure a thesis is expertly and thoroughly copyedited and/or proofread. However, more than one round of editing may be required. **Students have final responsibility for their entire thesis**, including meeting all their university's integrity and other requirements and guidelines.

Acknowledging professional editing

Students should get permission from their editor to name the editor in the thesis acknowledgements and any preferred wording. Unless the university specifically requires naming the editor, editors may prefer not to be named or prefer wording that clarifies they edited a draft of the thesis rather than the final version, such as “[Editor name] edited a draft of this thesis in accordance with the *IPEd guidelines for editing theses*”.

Links

IPed standards for editing practice (2024) (formerly *Australian standards for editing practice*): www.iped-editors.org/about-editing/iped-standards/

IPed Code of ethics: www.iped-editors.org/about-iped/code-of-ethics/

IPed Editors directory: www.iped-editors.org/find-an-editor/

Working with self-employed editors: A guide for clients: www.iped-editors.org/find-an-editor/working-with-self-employed-editors-a-guide-for-clients/

IPed Indicative costs of academic editing: <https://www.iped-editors.org/about-editing/academic-editing/#Indicativecostsofacademicediting>

IPed draft agreement for academic editing: https://www.iped-editors.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/IPed_Agreement-for-thesis-editing.docx

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Amendment (Prohibiting Academic Cheating Services) Act 2020.

www.legislation.gov.au/C2020A00078/asmade/text

History

The original *Guidelines for editing research theses* was developed collaboratively in 2001 by the forerunners of the Institute of Professional Editors and the Australian Council of Graduate Research and then revised in 2010 and 2019. This edition updates the 2019 *Guidelines*.

The *Guidelines* may be cited as:

Institute of Professional Editors (2025) *IPed guidelines for editing theses*.

www.iped-editors.org/about-editing/academic-editing/