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The Book Doctoring Option: When Revision Guidance Isn't Enough

Writers sometimes reach a moment where they know a manuscript isn't quite working but also know they don't have the time, distance, or confidence to fix it on their own. That's usually when the question comes up, sometimes sheepishly and sometimes with great relief: Can someone just do this for me?

The short answer is yes, we can. Many of our [editors](#) are also professional writers, with the experience and skill set to take the baton and carry a manuscript or book proposal from its current state all the way to the finish line. The longer answer depends on the kind of help you're looking for and the scope of work required.

What Is a Book Doctor?

A book doctor is an editor who has been given permission not just to advise and polish, but to revise in a more substantive and impactful way. Instead of pointing out what needs to change—or focusing primarily on style and prose—a book doctor makes the changes directly: reworking structure, rewriting passages, cutting or expanding material, and reshaping the manuscript so it functions as it should. This work usually follows some form of critique or diagnostic review, in which the manuscript's potential has been assessed and its challenges and priorities clearly identified.

Book doctoring is, at heart, a hands-on process. The editor steps into the role of the writer and works inside the manuscript itself, actively improving it while keeping the author's voice, goals, vision, and intended audience firmly in view.

How Book Doctoring Differs from Developmental Editing

Most writers are familiar with [developmental editing](#), which focuses on the big-picture elements of a book. In fiction, this includes plot, pacing, character development, structure, point of view, and narrative momentum. In nonfiction, it addresses organization, clarity, flow, argument, tone, and suitability for the intended readership.

A developmental editor provides detailed feedback, margin notes, and a comprehensive editorial letter explaining what's working, what isn't, and how the author might approach revision. What they don't typically do is implement those changes themselves.

That distinction matters. Developmental editing is about revision guidance and strategy; book doctoring is about execution.

Which Approach Is Right for You?

Many authors want feedback they can act on independently. They prefer to keep their hand firmly on the tiller of the revision process and enjoy reworking the manuscript themselves. For these writers, developmental editing is the ideal fit.

Others reach a point—often after receiving a critique from us or feedback from beta readers—where they understand what's not working, but don't want to spend months trying to fix it, or worry that they may lack the distance or objectivity to do so effectively. In those cases, handing the revision process over to a book doctor can be both efficient and freeing.

A book doctor doesn't just suggest solutions. Our role, when working in this capacity, is to deliver a revised manuscript. That may involve reorganizing chapters, rewriting scenes or sections, tightening language, cutting material that weighs the book down, or writing new passages to fill gaps. Because this work requires deep immersion in the manuscript and careful attention to authorial voice, it is more time-intensive—and therefore more expensive—than a traditional developmental edit.

Can the Same Editor Do Both?

Sometimes, yes. Many of our editors have the ability to both diagnose problems and fix them. That said, not all editors offer book doctoring, and not all projects are well suited to moving directly from a developmental edit into this kind of work. How we approach the process depends on the needs of the manuscript and the goals of the author.

Our client services director, [Ross Browne](#), can help you navigate the decision to transition from critique or developmental editing into book doctoring, and ensure that you're paired with the editor here who is best qualified to take on the work.

It's also worth noting that many writers underestimate the scope of revision until they see it laid out clearly. That's why the decision to consider a book doctor often follows a high-level manuscript critique or evaluation, which can help clarify the most effective path forward before committing to a larger editorial engagement.

How Book Doctoring Compares to Line Editing

[Line editing](#) comes later in the editorial process, once the manuscript's content and structure are settled. A line edit focuses on sentence-level craft—flow, clarity, rhythm, word choice, and consistency of voice. Grammar and mechanics are often addressed along the way, though full copyediting typically follows.

Book doctoring, by contrast, addresses both substance and style and should take place before any final polishing. While a book doctor may naturally refine language as part of the revision process, this does not eliminate the need for line editing or copyediting down the road. It should, however, significantly reduce how extensive those later stages need to be.

There's No One *Right* Choice

Developmental editing, line editing, and book doctoring aren't competing services; they serve different needs. The best choice depends on how you like to work, how much time and energy you have, and what your manuscript requires in order to become the book you envision.

And if none of these options feels quite right, there are other possibilities to explore, including collaboration or full-book ghostwriting.

No matter the route you choose, investing in the right kind of editorial support can transform both your manuscript and your experience of finishing it.

How Much Does Book Doctoring Cost?

Pricing for book doctoring varies widely, depending on the nature and scope of the work required, the condition of the source material, and the type of manuscript in question. A careful review of the manuscript, along with a conversation with the author, is essential to determining cost, timeline, and process. (This can be arranged by contacting Ross Browne in our [Tucson office](#).)

A Final Note

Because book doctoring services fall under the category of work-for-hire, you can engage a book doctor without giving up any ownership rights, sharing author credit, or ever having to publicly disclose the editor's role in the development of your book.

For More Information or to Get Started

Please contact Ross at (520) 546-9992, at rsb@editorialdepartment.com, or via our [online welcome center](#).