



Level 2, State Library of Queensland, Cultural Centre
PO Box 3488, South Brisbane, Qld 4101

t 07 3842 9922
f 07 3842 9920
e qldwriters@qwc.asn.au

{ qwc.asn.au }

QWC RESOURCE SHEET # 5

Manuscript Development and Manuscript Assessment

What is Manuscript Development?

Manuscript development is the process of working, alone or with a mentor, to re-write and improve a manuscript to publishable standard.

Who can help me with Manuscript Development?

There are a number of manuscript development programs around Australia for developing writers. QWC runs a manuscript development program in partnership with publishing company Hachette Australia. Selected participants can work closely with publishers and an author mentor to develop a work in progress. Check QWC's website for details of this program www.qwc.asn.au.

Varuna Writers House in the Blue Mountains, NSW, is a national writers centre that offers a range of manuscript development opportunities www.varuna.org.au.

QWC's Editorial Consultancy Service offers members an opportunity to discuss their projects face-to-face with a respected editor or author at a low cost (\$150 for 90 minutes). This is not a manuscript appraisal nor an edit, but a session that will provide the information you need to have your project reach the goals you have in mind. Telephone sessions are available for regionally located members.

Some private service providers also offer manuscript development for a fee. You can see a list of these in the Writers Services section of The Australian Writers Marketplace www.awmonline.com.au.

What is Manuscript Assessment?

Manuscript assessment is done by a professional manuscript appraiser, who will read, evaluate and report back on your manuscript's strengths and weaknesses. You would usually receive a simple written report, around 2 pages in length.

Is a manuscript assessment the same as editing?

No. A manuscript assessment is a one-off contact between you and the assessor, which generally occurs after editing but before submission to a publisher. You receive your manuscript back from them and rework it to the best of your ability as per their suggestions. An editor will work with you all the way through your rewrites, reading your new sections and advising you on them.



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Do I need to get my manuscript assessed before I send it out?

No, but keep in mind that you should be very confident about the quality of your work before you send it out to an agent or a publisher. You may find an external opinion is a useful benchmark for you and therefore it may well be worth the investment.

Are there pitfalls to avoid when engaging a manuscript assessor?

Yes. Firstly, be clear on the reasons why you are investing in an assessment. A manuscript assessment is a paid, commercial service. It is unlikely you can use it as a “stamp of approval” when submitting to a publisher or literary agent. The very fact that you have paid for the assessment means publishers will mistrust the independence of the report. Publishers and literary agents are rarely, if ever, swayed by a manuscript assessment that accompanies an author’s submission.

QWC recommends you check with any would-be appraiser as to exactly what you will receive in exchange for your money, and that you note that a good appraisal is not an endorsement or introduction to a publisher. Appraisals can be extremely helpful if you are using them to fine-tune your manuscript and to improve your writing.

Finally, be aware that paying for an assessment isn’t the only way to get a second opinion about your manuscript. You can also try cheaper or free methods, such as joining a writers group or forming a relationship with a trusted “writing buddy”.

How do I find a manuscript assessor?

Manuscript assessments are available from many organisations. Refer to the Writers’ Services section of *The Australian Writer’s Marketplace* (AWM), which is available from QWC for \$43.95 Members/\$49.95 Non-members; or an online subscription can be purchased at www.awmonline.com.au. It can also be accessed at most libraries.

What is the cost of a Manuscript Assessment?

Costs vary, but manuscript assessors’ websites should carry details of their rates of pay for particular jobs. For example, assessment of manuscripts up to 30,000 words may cost \$500 (plus GST); up to 80,000 words may cost \$600 (plus GST); up to 100,000 words may cost \$650 (plus GST), and so on. The Australian Society of Authors (ASA) also sets rates of pay – for further information, go to <http://www.asauthors.org/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=ASP0016/ccms.r>.



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