

## Accreditation in proofreading: prospectus

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### General notes

If you are thinking of applying for accreditation, you are strongly advised first to read and digest all the relevant information available from the SfEP website:

- general information on accreditation, Registration and fees
- this prospectus, which includes information on the British Standards Institution's marks for proof correction (BS 5261C:2005), the curriculum and rules for the accreditation in proofreading test, and information on making an application
- [Accreditation in proofreading: guidance for candidates](#).

The accreditation test impartially assesses perceptiveness and all-round proofreading competence. If, after checking the curriculum and rules, you realise that there are gaps in your knowledge, we recommend that you undertake further training. We do not expect perfection in candidates' performance, but our tests are more searching and wider ranging than those typically sent out by publishers, and you must pass on all 12 items of the curriculum. You owe it to yourself to prepare adequately.

### *Are you ready for the test?*

To gain accreditation, you must show that you possess the required proofreading skills and knowledge, and that you can apply them efficiently and expeditiously. For a quick diagnostic check, read the curriculum for the accreditation test.

- If you're **not yet a fully trained proofreader** and some of the curriculum seems daunting, you clearly need more training and practice; taking the test now would be an expensive mistake.
- If you're **a professional, working proofreader**, the curriculum will look familiar – a list of things you do by second nature. You're certainly ready to contemplate taking the test, though it would be prudent to prepare yourself beforehand.

You must curb any bad habits, such as using non-standard correction marks or messy handwriting (see [Accreditation in proofreading: guidance for candidates](#)); you would be wise to check that your standards of accuracy haven't slipped and that your pace of work isn't below average. A face-to-face course might be useful, and you should certainly review the fourth edition of *Butcher's Copy-editing* (by Judith Butcher, Caroline Drake and Maureen Leach), which is the recommended reference for the test, and read the [SfEP proofreading notes](#) (also available from the SfEP office) *before* the test package arrives.

- If you're **neither a novice nor a fully fledged professional**, it won't be easy for you to assess whether or not you're ready to take the test. Unfortunately, the only self-help proofreading exercises we know of are in Nicola Harris's *Basic Editing* (2 volumes, 1991, Book House Training Centre/Publishing Training Centre), now out of print. If you can get hold of both volumes, do the exercises in Unit 2 'blind' and then look at the feedback in Volume 1 to assess your results. Don't be surprised if you weren't 100-per-cent successful

(no proofreader is perfect!). However, if you're to gain accreditation your slips must be very occasional, and you should bear in mind that the accreditation test is longer, more diverse, and generally more challenging than these exercises or the tests sent out by prospective clients. Remember, too, that you have to work the test at a professional pace, so if you've not managed to complete the Harris exercises without serious pauses to check the proof-correction marks, spellings, etc., you should certainly get more practice.

### *Training and practising for the test*

It is very unlikely that SfEP's one-day courses, 'Introduction to proofreading' and 'Proofreading problems', or any other short introductory training, will be sufficient for a newcomer to meet all the requirements in the accreditation test curriculum. Nor is it likely that the recommended reference for the test (the fourth edition of *Butcher's Copy-editing*), valuable as it is, would, on its own or with the SfEP proofreading notes, provide sufficient training and feedback for a novice proofreader to pass the test.

For a full basic training, we can recommend the Publishing Training Centre (45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ; [www.train4publishing.co.uk](http://www.train4publishing.co.uk)). The PTC's 'Basic proofreading by distance learning' course equates to 30–35 hours' learning, provides an excellent manual, and covers virtually all of the SfEP proofreading accreditation test curriculum.

Once you have the necessary basic skills, you will almost certainly need more practice, ideally with supervision and feedback. Completing SfEP's 'Proofreading problems' successfully will make you eligible for the SfEP proofreading mentoring scheme, which will provide some further supervised work. If you are working alone and can get hold of Nicola Harris's *Basic Editing* (see above), you can use her copy-editing exercises to practise proofreading and will find that the feedback for novice editors is worthwhile reading for proofreaders too.

We strongly recommend SfEP's one-day course 'Proofreading for accreditation', which covers most of the accreditation curriculum and provides valuable feedback.

### *Further guidance*

To help you prepare for taking the test, we have produced an informal guide, [Accreditation in proofreading: guidance for candidates](#). Consider this as essential reading. If you do not have access to the internet, you may obtain a copy from the SfEP office.

You will also need to know the correct marks for proof correction. By arrangement with the British Standards Institution, the SfEP office can supply copies of BSI marks BS 5261C:2005.

## Accreditation test curriculum

Accreditation in proofreading is awarded by the Society to those who have satisfactorily completed a proofreading test set by the Accreditation and Registration Board. The test consists of:

- part(s) of a set of page proofs to be proofread against copy
- some pages of proof to be read 'blind' (without copy)
- a set of short questions on proofreading (each answer limited to 60 words).

### *Curriculum for the test*

The 12 items of the curriculum appear in **bold** below. Notes after each item give background information and some warnings. Candidates must pass in all 12 items to gain accreditation.

#### **1 Follow the brief (including the test instructions)**

This includes straightforward observance of instructions *and* the ability to interpret and comply with the requests in a proofreading brief (e.g. 'Please point out any serious errors, but don't alter the author's style').

#### **2 Use the current BSI marks (BS 5261C:2005) correctly and neatly**

Candidates must expect to lose points, or even to fail, if they repeatedly use wrong or outdated symbols or if their correction marks are not clear and efficient.

#### **3 Use colours correctly (red for typesetters' errors, blue for other errors, pencil for suggested changes and queries)**

We ask candidates to follow the colour code given in BS 5261C:2005; we are looking for accuracy and adherence to the conventions and the ability to discern whether an amendment is so likely to be right that it can be written as a blue correction rather than a pencilled suggestion or query.

#### **4 Find and correct general typographical errors (e.g. wrong font; inconsistencies of spacing, type size or heading style)**

Candidates do not need typographical training, but should be able to spot clear differences between fonts (even if they cannot name them), spaces and type sizes (even if they cannot specify measurements or point sizes). They should also be able to discern the normal style and layout of features such as footnotes or displayed quotations and point out any deviations.

#### **5 Find and correct an acceptable proportion of typesetters' errors**

These are red-ink corrections, found by comparing the proof with the copy, and include not only literals in text but also the wrong interpretation of instructions on the copy such as 'Start all chapters on a recto' or 'Fill in page numbers when known'.

The 'acceptable proportion' and the grading of this item have been determined for each test by comparing the scores of a number of pilot proofreaders working under test conditions.

#### **6 Find and correct or query an acceptable proportion of authors' and copy-editors' errors**

These are blue-ink corrections and pencilled corrections, queries or comments. Proofreaders should be able to spot authors' errors that are apparent to a careful general reader – for example, obvious gaps in the text or *non sequiturs*; inconsistencies in facts, names or numbers mentioned more than once; improbable statistics (such as a mountain measured in a few thousand centimetres or a prime minister whose death is dated only 15 years after his birth). A basic level of general knowledge is expected, particularly as reference books or the internet may be consulted – subject, of course, to the requirement to complete the test in a

reasonable time. Candidates will not be penalised for lack of specialised knowledge, though they may be required to check numbers or unfamiliar types of text (such as a short passage in a foreign language) against copy.

Copy-editors should, of course, have dealt with authors' errors before proof stage. They should also have removed gross errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling, and corrected any inconsistencies in the treatment of alternative spellings, hyphenation etc. Proofreaders must have enough knowledge to find such errors if they have been missed by copy-editors.

The 'acceptable proportion' and the grading of this item have been determined for each test by comparing the scores of a number of pilot proofreaders working under test conditions.

### **7 Check all maps/figures/tables against copy; ensure that they are consistently styled, correctly numbered and well positioned**

Candidates do not need detailed typographical knowledge, but proofreaders should be able to spot obvious flaws such as a reversed picture, a table that is far too wide for the page, a figure that is far from the text it illustrates or which is not on the same spread as its caption. Candidates gain points if, having noticed such flaws, they are able to suggest good solutions. They must check the typesetter's work against the copy they have been given, and are expected to point out any obvious errors in the copy, such as gaps in the sequence of figure numbers or inconsistent treatment of table headings.

### **8 Make or suggest adjustments to minimise the effects of added and/or deleted material at page proof stage**

Detailed typographical knowledge is not required, but proofreaders must be able to cope with straightforward changes of lineation or pagination and should be aware of the way these may entail changes to headings, footnotes, running heads, cross-references etc. Having drawn attention to such problems, candidates will gain more points if they suggest good solutions.

### **9 Check page numbers, running heads, cross-references, prelims etc. and make or suggest necessary changes or improvements**

Proofreaders must have a basic knowledge of common treatments of such features so that they recognise any obvious anomalies (e.g. a title page falling on a verso, an appendix set in larger type than that used for the main text).

### **10 Find and draw attention efficiently to matters needing consideration by others (e.g. report problems succinctly to the desk editor; draft pertinent queries for the author; point out possible effects of changes on the index)**

As with item 9, basic knowledge of publishing practice is needed; equally important are imagination, common sense and accuracy.

### **11 Answer correctly a set of short questions on proofreading**

The questions may cover any item in the curriculum. Reference books or the internet may be used. Each answer must be clearly expressed in fewer than 60 words.

### **12 Complete the three sections of the test in a reasonable time**

What constitutes a 'reasonable time' has been determined for each test by comparing the times declared by a number of pilot proofreaders working under test conditions.

When choosing the date for their test, candidates should ensure that they will have a weekend or several evenings free to complete the test during the allotted two weeks. There is more advice on timing in *Guidance for candidates*: 'Some dos and don'ts'.

## *Grading*

Candidates are awarded grades on each of the 12 items:

A = very good; B = good; C = satisfactory; D = poor; E = bad

You must score at least C in *all* items of the test in order to gain accreditation.

## *Notes*

- 1** The essential reference for the test is the fourth edition of *Butcher's Copy-editing* (by Judith Butcher, Caroline Drake and Maureen Leach), supplemented by the SfEP proofreading notes and the proof-symbol chart BS 5261C:2005 (*Butcher's* provides only a shortened version of the chart).
- 2** You may use reference books or the internet but are not expected to carry out extensive research.
- 3** You should treat the test as if it were real work and should not spend longer on it than you would on a comparable proofreading job undertaken in-house or for a commercial client paying by the hour.

## Rules for the accreditation test procedure

- 1 Before receiving the test, candidates must pay the required fee in full and sign the following declarations.
  - (a) I have read and understood *Accreditation in proofreading: prospectus*. I agree to abide by the test rules and to accept the decision(s) of the Accreditation and Registration Board.
  - (b) I declare that the completed test I return will be my own unaided work and that I shall make an honest report of the number of hours I spent working on it.
  - (c) I undertake not to disclose any details of the test I take or to copy it or to show it to anyone.
  - (d) I agree that, if I am awarded accredited status and if a complaint is subsequently received from a client about my work as a proofreader, I shall co-operate with the Accreditation and Registration Board in any investigation of the complaint, in accordance with regulation 6.4 of the Accreditation and Registration Regulations (see *By-laws of Society for Editors and Proofreaders Ltd*).
- 2 You will receive the test papers by post (Special Delivery). By opening the inner envelope you commit yourself to returning the completed test within 15 days. If you do not meet the deadline, your test will be invalid and you will have to return all the test material, reapply and pay the full fee again before receiving another test.
- 3 The test papers must *not* be copied by any means or shown to or discussed with anyone else, either before or after they have been completed by you.
- 4 You may use reference books or the internet, but must *not* seek help from other persons or attempt to compare the test texts with other sources.
- 5 The test must be returned complete with all documentation, an honest report of the number of hours spent working on it, and a signed declaration that it is your unaided work and that all other rules have been complied with. It must be posted by Special Delivery (or an agreed alternative) on or before the fifteenth day after it was received.
- 6 Your test result and your grades for each curriculum item will be made known to you as soon as possible. If the required standard has not been reached, you may apply to take another test but will have to pay the full fee again. Your test paper will not be returned or shown to you, and neither your paper nor your grades will be discussed with you.
- 7 If you break these rules, you will be disqualified and may not retake the test except at the discretion of the Accreditation and Registration Board. In exceptional circumstances, a breach of the rules might not lead to disqualification, but a further test can be taken only on payment of the full fee.

## **Appeals, complaints and accredited status**

### *Appeals*

If you wish to appeal against a decision of the Accreditation and Registration Board, you should request an appeal form from the accreditation administrator either by email ([administrator@sfep.org.uk](mailto:administrator@sfep.org.uk)) or by post.

Completed appeal forms must be received by the SfEP within three months of your notification of the Accreditation and Registration Board's decision. The appeal fee should be enclosed with the appeal; this payment will be refunded if the appeal is upheld. Appeals will be handled in accordance with regulation 7 of the Accreditation and Registration Regulations (*By-laws of Society for Editors and Proofreaders Ltd*).

### *Complaints*

If the Accreditation and Registration Board receives a complaint about the work of a member with accredited status, the complaint will be dealt with in accordance with regulation 6.4 of the Accreditation and Registration Regulations (*By-laws of Society for Editors and Proofreaders Ltd*).

### *Accredited status*

Accredited status automatically entitles you to advanced membership. However, accredited status automatically lapses if your subscription to the SfEP is not maintained. Lapsed members are not entitled to claim accredited status, to use the accredited status logo on their stationery or websites, or to use their accreditation certificate to promote their business.

Accredited status may be withdrawn in accordance with regulation 2.7 of the General Regulations (*By-laws of Society for Editors and Proofreaders Ltd*).

## Making an application for accreditation in proofreading

- You must be a paid-up member or associate of the Society.
- You can opt for your test paper to be posted to you on a date that we nominate (fixed-date route) or, for a higher charge, you can choose the date of dispatch (option route). In both cases, you must apply at least four weeks before you wish to receive your test.
- You must use the official application form for accreditation in proofreading. Make sure you fill in your choice of dispatch date and return it by post with a cheque payable to SfEP for the correct fee. Allow 14 days for your application to be acknowledged.
- If you live outside the UK but in Europe, you must pay a surcharge of £10 to cover the additional postage and administration charges. If you live elsewhere overseas, please contact the SfEP office ([administrator@sfep.org.uk](mailto:administrator@sfep.org.uk)) before making an application.

### *Choosing the dispatch date of your test*

When choosing the date for your test, you should ensure that you will have a weekend or several evenings free to complete the test during the allotted two weeks.

- **Fixed-date route** The fixed days for tests to be dispatched under this route are normally the second Wednesday of every month.
- **Option route** We cannot dispatch tests at weekends or on bank holidays. You are advised not to ask for dispatch on a Friday unless you accept the uncertainty that you may receive it either on Saturday or on Monday.

You will be told as soon as possible whether or not we can send your test on the date you have chosen. If we cannot, you will normally be given a choice of alternative dates; however, if the scheme is oversubscribed and we cannot offer you any dates within four months, your money will be refunded and you will be advised when to apply again.

Tests are normally dispatched by Special Delivery, and your test should therefore reach you on the day after it is dispatched. You must return it, by Special Delivery, within 15 days of receiving it; that is, if it arrives on a Thursday, you must post it back on or before the Thursday two weeks later. Note that other mail or courier services can be used for delivery and return of your test, but only by prior arrangement with the SfEP office ([administrator@sfep.org.uk](mailto:administrator@sfep.org.uk)).

After agreeing a date for your test to be sent to you, you can, if necessary, contact the accreditation administrator ([administrator@sfep.org.uk](mailto:administrator@sfep.org.uk)) at least 24 hours beforehand and ask for a postponement. You may have to wait to be offered an alternative date.

### *When you receive your test*

Whichever route you choose, if you are unable to start the test when you planned to do so and you return the inner envelope unopened as soon as you receive it, you may be sent another test at a mutually convenient future date (not necessarily straight away). You will incur a charge of £30 to cover the cost of the extra administration and postage involved.

Otherwise, open the inner envelope immediately and check that the test papers are complete; contact the accreditation administrator immediately if they are not. Full instructions about this and other points of procedure are included in the package. You should follow those instructions and the procedural rules while you are doing the test and when you come to return it. You must use Special Delivery (or an agreed alternative: see above) and return the package to reach us by the specified time.

### *Your test result*

Your result, including your grades on all 12 items of the curriculum, will be sent to you as soon as possible. If, after eight weeks from receipt of your completed paper, we have not released your result, we will contact you to say when we expect to be able to send it.

Successful candidates receive a certificate and are entitled to use the appropriate Society logo on their business stationery and websites. Accreditation automatically confers advanced membership of the Society.

Unsuccessful candidates are advised to retrain to fill gaps in their knowledge revealed by their grades and to gain more experience before applying to take another test. The procedure for appealing against a test result is described in the section Appeals, complaints and accredited status.

**Application form for accreditation in proofreading**

**If you live outside the UK but in Europe, you must pay a surcharge of £10 to cover the additional postage and administration charges. If you live elsewhere overseas, please contact the SfEP office by email (administrator@sfep.org.uk) or by post before making an application.**

*Declaration of consent under the Data Protection Act 1998*

Your signature on this form indicates consent that this information may be held on a computer and in a manual filing system. This data will be processed by the Society for the purposes of administering the activities of the Society. If you wish to obtain a copy of the data processed, a description of the purposes for which it is being processed and any potential recipients of the data, or any information as to the source of the data, please contact the membership director (membership@sfep.org.uk). Please note that the Society is entitled to charge a fee for the provision of this information.

*I hereby apply for SfEP accreditation in proofreading*

I confirm that my subscription to the Society is up to date (please tick)

*Membership category* .....

*SfEP membership number*.....

**All applicants must complete Sections 1, 2 and 3.**

**1 Personal details**

*Full name (Mr/Miss/Mrs/Ms/.....)*

.....

*Address*.....

.....

*Postcode*.....

*Telephone*.....

*Fax*.....

*e-mail*.....

Have you ever:

- paid to take an accreditation test in proofreading *since November 2001?* YES / NO
- taken part in piloting or preparing accreditation tests in proofreading? YES / NO

If yes, please give brief details (including year(s), if possible):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## 2 Options for taking the test

Please choose your preferred option for taking your test and fill in the dates as appropriate.

- **Fixed-date route (see 'Making an application for accreditation in proofreading')**

I enclose my cheque (payable to SfEP) for £135.

The following fixed dispatch dates are acceptable to me, in order of preference:

- (i) .....
- (ii) .....
- (iii) .....

- **Option route**

I enclose my cheque (payable to SfEP) for £155.

The following dispatch dates are acceptable to me, in order of preference:

- (i) .....
- (ii) .....
- (iii) .....

## 3 Declarations

- (a) I have read and understood *Accreditation in proofreading: prospectus*. I agree to abide by the test rules and to accept the decision(s) of the Accreditation and Registration Board.
- (b) I declare that the completed test I return will be my own unaided work and that I shall make an honest report of the number of hours I spent working on it.
- (c) I undertake not to disclose any details of the test I take or to copy it or to show it to anyone.
- (d) I agree that, if I am awarded accredited status and if a complaint is subsequently received from a client about my work as a proofreader, I shall co-operate with the Accreditation and Registration Board in any investigation of the complaint, in accordance with regulation 6.4 of the Accreditation and Registration Regulations (see *By-laws of Society for Editors and Proofreaders Ltd*).

Signature ..... Date .....

**Please make sure that you have filled in all sections correctly and enclosed a cheque for the correct amount. You are advised to photocopy your application. Send this form together with your cheque by post to accreditation administrator, SfEP, Erico House, 93–99 Upper Richmond Road, London SW15 2TG. Please allow 14 days for acknowledgement.**

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Please do not write below this line.

For office use.

Candidate's test number: PR.....

Test dispatch date .....