

Manuscript Development

Once you've edited your manuscript to the highest level you can attain, it's ready to be published, right? Wrong. You've gone as far as you can on your own, but it would be extremely rare for an author to make it into print without the help of external feedback. Even when a publisher accepts your work your manuscript will be put through rigorous editing before it goes to print.

After a writer has worked closely with their words for an extended period of time, it becomes difficult to see which sections are working and which aren't. A fresh, objective opinion is often what's needed to continue improving the work.

Manuscript Assessment

Manuscript assessment services will examine your manuscript for weaknesses and strengths, the quality of the writing and publishing potential. For those able to afford it, assessment can be a great way of improving your skills as a writer and obtaining constructive comments on your work. You can even send your assessment report – if favourable – to publishers and agents to pique their interest. See our Resource Sheets on Getting Published and Literary Agents for details about how to approach publishers and agents.

The Australian Literary Agents' Association recommends writers find an assessor via the [Australian Writer's Marketplace](#) as it contains the largest available directory of services for writers. Make sure you understand exactly what services are being offered before taking on an assessor.

The NSW Writers' Centre also provides manuscript assessments at the centre with a Skype option for regional members. For more details see [manuscript assessments](#).

Costs of Manuscript Assessors

Assessors' individual websites should provide details of their rates. There is no standard rate for manuscript assessment, so it's important to shop around to make sure you are receiving a reasonable price.

If you want to reduce assessment costs, you might give only a part of your manuscript to an appraiser for comment.

Manuscript Development and Mentorships

Many writers' organisations provide opportunities for manuscript development through programs such as fellowships and mentorships, in which an experienced author works with you to improve your manuscript. Some of these programs, such as the [Varuna](#) fellowship programs and the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) [award mentorships](#), are selective. Selective programs have the advantage of being less expensive and more prestigious for participating writers. The NSW Writers' Centre's free weekly electronic newsletter, *Newsbite*, publishes information about upcoming mentorship and manuscript development opportunities for writers.

The NSW Writers' Centre runs an extensive, paid [mentorship program](#), which is available to members on application. Our mentors specialise in a range of areas including fiction, non-fiction, memoir, poetry, scriptwriting, speculative fiction and writing for children and young adults.

Some manuscript assessors also offer mentoring as one of their services. As always, when choosing a mentor service make sure you investigate several options and be clear about what you can expect for your money.

Writers' Groups

Many writers find it useful to join or form a writers group. A writers' group is a regular gathering of writers with similar interests and level of experience to share and critique each other's works-in-progress. You may be surprised by the insight other writers can provide. An objective perspective is the one thing you, as the writer, will always lack. Members of your writers' group can spot flaws and suggest techniques for improvement that you may have missed.

Critiquing other writers' works-in-progress will also help you improve your own skills as a writer. Thinking critically about other writers' work, spotting problems and thinking about how to solve them will help you do the same for your own writing. The NSW Writers' Centre offers free meeting space for member [writing groups](#).

Courses

There are a number of [courses](#) available, both at the NSW Writers' Centre and through other writers' centres and organisations, to help you improve your skills as writer and self-editor, and some specifically designed to guide you through the novel-writing process.

Further Resources

Australian Literary Agent's Association <www.austlitagentsassoc.wordpress.com>

Australian Society of Authors <www.asauthors.org>

Varuna, the Writers' House <www.varuna.com.au>