

Feasible timelines and expectations for consultants



The following table outlines some key consultancy tasks and how much time is needed. We hope this will help organisations more accurately plan and budget for consultancy support. These timescales are based on the extensive experience of EENET and its consultants, and reflect what a high-level, experienced consultant may be expected to achieve.

The table obviously does not give estimates for every type of work we do, so please contact us if you would like to discuss something that has not been listed.

We encourage organisations to consider the potential extra time needed when consultants are working in their second language, or when consultants have disabilities, or when they are working in particularly difficult conditions (e.g. if there is an expectation of a report being written in the field, where the living/working conditions are challenging, unstable or unsafe).

Task	Timescale	Notes
<p>Preparing for a training workshop</p>	<p>1 day of preparation for each day of training</p>	<p>This is our usual formula for preparing a tailor-made training. Preparation time may be shorter if we are using an existing training manual with which we are familiar. Or preparation may be longer if there are particularly complex requirements.</p> <p>Preparation tasks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Optional) developing a pre-training questionnaire and analysing results to understand better the trainees needs and existing experience – may require additional day of work • Scheduling the workshop sessions • Writing the outline (often for approval by the client before fleshing out) • Writing each session in detail – key messages, details of how activities will be facilitated • Preparing PowerPoint slides • Preparing tools to be used in the sessions • Preparing handouts

Task	Timescale	Notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making copies of materials • Liaising with translators (where relevant) • Purchasing/collecting materials (pens, post-its, etc)
Analysing data from field research	1 day of data analysis for each day of field work - minimum	<p>This is an average formula. Each piece of research (scoping, evaluation, etc) is unique and will involve its own unique set of data collection methods and varying amounts of data.</p> <p>Data analysis days typically involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering together all evidence (written notes, audio recordings, materials collected, by ourselves and others involved in the research) • Organising the evidence (filing, categorising, labelling, etc) so that all forms of evidence are easily located during the later stages of work • Sorting photos (e.g. removing unusable images, labelling and filing images that could be used in research outputs, cross-checking that usable images have required permissions) • Chasing up any gaps (e.g. following up with clients for documents that have been promised, or for translations of flipcharts etc) • Transcribing audio evidence so that there is a written copy • Typing up handwritten notes and flipcharts • Coding evidence (e.g. reading all evidence and marking it to show which research questions it relates to) • Creating a data matrix (e.g. often we take all the coded snippets of evidence and organise them into a table according to research topics or emerging themes) • Developing initial lines of argument, highlighting possible recommendations, etc, for use when we start writing

Task	Timescale	Notes
<p>Literature reviews</p>	<p>Average reading speed is considered to be 200 words/minute (based on reading English as your mother tongue)</p> <p>BUT – when we are reading for a literature review we are not just reading for fun. We need to identify salient data/quotations; understand technical information; cross-reference with other things we have read; copy/paste sections into our notes or data matrix, and so on. Therefore we cannot assume 200 words/min.</p> <p>If we assume – maximum – 100 words/min we can read the following:</p> <p>6,000 words (15 x A4 pages) an hour 42,000 words (105 pages) a day</p>	<p>Have you heard the question “how long is a piece of string?!” This is what a literature review is like. It is very hard for us to quantify a lit review without knowing the boundaries. We need to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we just reading organisational documents (reports, proposals, etc) that the client will give to us? • Or do we also need to do substantial searching for documents online or contacting third parties to identify or gain access to materials? • Do we need to access academic library collections? <p>Extra time is clearly needed if we have to search for documents, rather than just reading materials we are given.</p> <p>Using the calculations in the left column, it may fair to expect a consultant to read (and digest and make notes on), for instance, two 50-page documents a day.</p> <p>Often we are presented with dozens of organisational documents and given, say, 2 days to review them. In such circumstances we will not be able to do thorough literature reviewing. Instead we may just:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word search to find if/where key terms are mentioned, and then read the lines, paragraphs or page where these terms appear; • Select chapters that seem most relevant; • Read executive summaries, recommendations and conclusions. <p>It is vital to remember that if a written report of the literature review findings is needed, then this requires additional days, on top of the searching/reading/analysing time. See below for details of report writing speeds.</p>

Task	Timescale	Notes
Report writing	<p>2,000 words a day is the average writing speed that we aim for</p> <p>That means writing a 50-page (20,000 word report) report would take 10 days.</p> <p>This may not necessarily include final editing and proofreading which should always be budgeted for separately</p>	<p>This is based on an average writing speed that is commonly used in the publications industry. Obviously, someone writing a novel (creating a story from their imagination) may write substantially faster, but report writing usually involves a great deal of reference to data and other sources, and requires plenty of thinking time, so it is not just 'pure' writing and therefore happens at a slower pace.</p> <p>It is vital to remember that thinking time is a valid and indeed essential part of any research, analysis and writing process.</p> <p>Also remember - the writer of a report is not always in the best position to edit and proofread their own work.</p>
Substantial editing	<p>1,000 words an hour</p> <p>This means to edit a 50-page (20,000 word) document may take 20 hours (3 days) for the first round of editing.</p>	<p>Substantial editing is when we re-organise content, rewrite sections of text that is badly written, insert new text/explanations. In some cases it can involve a complete re-write, so that the evidence is the same but it is presented totally differently.</p> <p>It is not possible to estimate accurately as each document is unique, in terms of the standard of writing and complexity of technical content. Therefore, a substantial edit could take much longer than estimated here, if the original text is in very poor condition.</p> <p>Most substantial editing work needs more than one round of editing. Therefore, budgets should be calculated on the basis of 2 or more rounds of editing, with client review in between. Second and subsequent rounds of editing should ideally be done at a faster speed than the first round, however.</p>

Task	Timescale	Notes
Copy editing	2,000 words an hour, for the first round of copy editing. Some documents will require more than one round of copy editing to 'catch' all the problems – especially if it needs to be prepared to publication standard	<p>Copy editing is where we 'polish' a text. We make small changes to grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc. This is much more 'light touch' than the substantial editing described above.</p> <p>2,000 words/hour is an average speed, again based on an average quality original text (good English, not incredibly technical or academic, etc). On some documents we may only achieve 1,000 words an hour – although we are probably then getting into substantial editing/rewriting, if the original is that poorly written and hard to read.</p> <p>It is vital to note that additional time is usually needed for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-checking references • Cross-checking abbreviations and acronyms • Formatting (e.g. assigning correct level headings, fonts, etc) • Raising queries for any content that is unclear or seems erroneous, and then actioning the responses received • Cross-checking against house style guides (i.e. when organisations provide rules for their preferred punctuation, spellings, format etc)
Proofreading	3,000 words an hour	<p>Proofreading is the final stage of a publication process. At this stage we are just looking for mistakes that have slipped through the net in previous copy editing or editing stages. We may also be checking that a designer has correctly put all the text in the right places, has been consistent with styles, and so on. At the proofreading stage, we should not be making changes to the content, just correcting errors.</p>