

TLC Free Reads FAQs

What is the TLC Free Reads Scheme?

The TLC Free Reads scheme is an Arts Council England-funded initiative that offers free access to TLC's core services to writers who under normal circumstances might not be able to afford them. This includes bursaries for manuscript assessment, developmental editing, submission package reports, mentoring, membership to the Being A Writer community, TLC Events and Courses. Each year the scheme supports 100 writers editorially, and hundreds more through courses and events.

Who is The Literary Consultancy?

The Literary Consultancy (TLC) is the UK's longest-established editorial consultancy, pioneering manuscript assessment and advocating for industry-level editing for all writers. We have helped thousands of writers to develop their work, with hundreds going on to find readerships and accolades: major book deals, theatre tours, poetry prizes, digital serialisation, and more.

In 2001 TLC received a small pilot fund. This enabled the provision of the first bursaried [manuscript assessments](#) for talented writers on low income. The scheme has since been expanded and is now known as the TLC Free Reads Scheme. The scheme is delivered in partnership with twenty-two literature organisations across all regions of England. It is the only Arts Council supported national bursary scheme for low-income and marginalised writers giving free access to high level professional editing services, supporting these writers with the development of their work.

What TLC services are offered via Free Reads?

Manuscript Assessment

Writers are provided with an editorial report by a professional editor, hand-matched by the TLC team and tailored to your writing. The report focuses on key areas for development in the manuscript. You will also receive documents to help you prepare for receiving the report, and to help you implement the feedback. TLC's most popular editorial service, and the one most frequently offered via Free Reads.

You can read more about manuscript assessment [here](#).

Submission Package Report

We will match you with a TLC Industry Editor who will read your first 8,000 words, synopsis, and 'Dear Agent' letter, providing you a written report and mark-up or commentary on your submission material. This service is for writers who have a completed and edited a manuscript already, and are looking to refine and polish their submission to maximise their chances of success.

You can read more about Submission Package Reports [here](#).

Editor One-to-one

For post-feedback support, trouble-shooting, or generating ideas, book in a one-hour session with a TLC Editor. One-to-ones are also popular with writers who have had an editorial service and need support with incorporating edits. We will provide you with goal-setting worksheets and a recording of your session, so you can watch back at any time.

You can read more about Editor One-to-ones [here](#).

Chapter & Verse Mentoring

A total of five year-long mentorships per year are awarded on a bursary basis. These are allocated via specific partnerships. At present these partners are: Creative Future, Wasafiri Magazine, SABLE Lit Mag, Shape Arts and Poetry School. Please be aware that Mentoring is not offered by regional writing development partners through their Free Reads open applications. If you would like to find out more about being considered for Chapter & Verse Mentoring via Free Reads, please contact the TLC office.

You can read more about Chapter & Verse Mentoring [here](#).

Am I eligible for a Free Read?

TLC Free Reads has grown into an offer for writers that aims to facilitate access to professional and creative development opportunities to writers who would otherwise be unable to afford to pay for the service. The core demographic is therefore low-income, talented writers who are resident in England. As part of its commitment to supporting the widest range of literary voices possible, TLC is particularly interested in submissions from writers who feel under-represented in the publishing world, or those who feel they face barriers which make access to these opportunities difficult such as cultural background, mental health, or disability. As the scheme is funded, we are required to collect anonymised data to ensure eligibility criteria are met, but if you have any questions about your eligibility that you would like to discuss with us in confidence, please feel free to get in touch directly on info@literaryconsultancy.co.uk. If you have a question about the application process, please get in touch with the organisation delivering Free Reads in your area in the first instance.

If you are not eligible for the TLC Free Reads scheme but would benefit from a reduced rate for TLC's professional editorial services, we have been offering a [Supporter/Supported scheme](#) since 2021. Writers wishing to donate 5-10% on top of their fee automatically support those who would benefit from 10% off, no questions asked. We are incredibly grateful to those writers who have signed up as Supporters and delighted that so far, we have been able to accommodate every writer's request for 10% off who has needed it, thanks to your continued generosity.

What constitutes 'low-income'?

Current UK government guidelines suggest that low-income (household) equals 60% of the median household income. This is only a rule of thumb, but is a helpful guideline when assessing applications. According to the latest figures this would put the national low-income threshold at roughly £18,000 per annum income, with the London low-income threshold £23,000 per annum and below. For the purposes of the Free Reads scheme we are referring to your earnings in the last full financial year.

There are some helpful calculations [here](#) to show how these margins are measured by the Government across the country. If you are a full-time student or pensioner, or in receipt of any kind of Universal Credit, you are eligible to apply for a TLC Free Read. You may also submit HMRC self-assessment paperwork to show you are low-earning if you are self-employed and not in receipt of income support.

We understand that in the current cost of living crisis, loss of income has affected many communities and individuals particularly hard. If you are eligible on this basis, please simply submit a one-paragraph statement outlining your circumstances. This information is completely confidential, but is a necessary requirement of our funding relationship with ACE, to show that the scheme is genuinely serving those most in need. You can find out how we store personal information in our privacy policy [here](#) or at the bottom of this page.

If you have any questions about your eligibility that you would like to discuss with us in confidence, please get in touch directly by sending us an email: info@literaryconsultancy.co.uk. If you have a question about the application process, please get in touch with the organisation delivering Free Reads in your area in the first instance, as application processes may vary.

What kind of writing can I submit?

TLC accepts submissions of: prose (fiction and non-fiction), short stories, children's fiction including picture books, poetry, scripts, and screenplays. We are unfortunately unable to accept academic works for manuscript assessment. **Please note that TLC coordinates the Free Reads scheme, but each of its delivery partners will have its own application process.** If there are any restrictions on what can and cannot be submitted to individual delivery partners, this will be clearly outlined in the application process, so please read this carefully. Please do not submit your work directly to TLC for a Free Read.

Will I get my whole manuscript read?

TLC receives a grant for Free Reads which is awarded on an annual basis and distributed between partners at the beginning of each financial year according to various criteria including need and reach. This funding is currently secure until April 2027. Our 22 Free Reads delivery partners are trusted organisations who work with writers across England. Each partner will have their own way of allocating their budget and we ask that writers please respect this; their decisions in these matters are final.

We cannot guarantee that each writer awarded a Free Read will receive a full manuscript assessment as our aim is to support as many writers as we can. Please do not be disheartened if you do not get selected; the process is highly selective, and we encourage you to apply to as many opportunities as you can.

For further resources and links that might be helpful for low-income writers, please see [this page](#) on the TLC website.

Who will read my work?

If your work is selected by your regional delivery partner for a Free Read, the work will be handed to TLC and you will from that point on be in the care of TLC and its in-house team. The team will assign you a reader from its list of 90 professional readers. All TLC readers are given training and guidelines to support them in their delivery of the feedback, which aims to be personalised, market-aware, and suited to your level of work and aims and aspirations. We encourage you therefore to fill in the details on your Application Form carefully, to ensure we can send the most up-to-date information along to your reader. It might be important to note that TLC's editorial feedback seeks to give every writer access to rigorous professional attention of the kind they would receive if working with a publisher. This kind of professional feedback is very different to peer feedback or writing group critique, and it can be a sensitive process. At TLC our commitment to you is to take you seriously, and engage critically with your work so that you can develop your creative practice with confidence, and a clear idea of where you are.

Will I get to talk to my TLC Editor?

Objectivity is the cornerstone of TLC's manuscript assessment offer. We firmly believe that for this kind of intervention to work at its best, the reader needs to be free to make an independent assessment of the work in hand. We also believe that honest feedback is the best kind of feedback for a writer's creative development in the longer term. For this reason, all feedback is monitored by TLC, quality-checked and proofed in-house, and reports are sent on to you by TLC. You are welcome to send a covering note with any specific questions at the point of being awarded a Free Read, should you wish to. If you have questions following your report, please be in touch with the TLC office in the first instance and please may we kindly ask you keep these brief to respect the Editor's time.

How long does the whole process take?

TLC receives submissions from our regional partners via our online uploader. Please note that this may happen after you have been informed of your success. Once it arrives with us, a triggered email is sent to inform you of safe receipt at the TLC office. TLC then aims to match submissions to a TLC Editor within 1-2 weeks. Once the work has been assigned, the process of receiving feedback takes around 4-6 weeks. Please refer to your delivery partner's application process for a sense of their submission wait times, which you will need to incorporate into your timeframe for receiving feedback. If you have requirements which are time sensitive, we strongly recommend you speak to your delivery partner before submitting.

Will TLC help me get published?

If a TLC Editor finds that a Free Reads manuscript is at a very high standard and they think there may be a potential market for it as well, then we ask the writer to do the necessary revisions and send it to our office where the TLC office will reassess the manuscript. If TLC finds that they can support a quality manuscript, we will try to place it with an agent. This is only ever done with the writer's full knowledge and consent and there is no charge for this service. TLC will never recommend that a writer seek an assessment or editorial service if their only interest is in being published. Whilst we are proud to have supported hundreds of writers onward to publication, our main aim is to help writers create sustainable, self-aware practices which allow them to thrive, and produce the best possible writing. If you are interested in learning more about TLC's founding ethos, you may wish to read 'Is Anybody Reading Me', available as a free ebook [here](#).

If you have any further questions about TLC ACE Free Reads, you can contact the TLC office on info@literaryconsultancy.co.uk

See also:

[How to Apply](#)

[Submissions Rules & Guidelines](#)

[TLC's Privacy Policy](#)