

Editing your manuscript – Second Draft and Beyond

Your second draft (and beyond)

You've edited the draft of your novel/non-fiction book and prepared the next version. It's looking okay. You're a little closer to the finish line. It's still not great, but it's okay.

So, what's next? You guessed it. You need to edit it. This edit is more comprehensive than the first draft edit, and the manuscript should be ready to show your writers group (or person you get to review your stuff) once done.

Leave your manuscript along for as long as you can. Give yourself at least two (preferably six) weeks before starting the edit

Before you get started you need to ask yourself some hard questions:

1. What are your major writing issues?
2. What words do you overuse?
3. Do you use too many adverbs?
4. Are you weak on description?
5. How's your spelling?
6. Are your sentences too long?
7. Are there specific things that you want to change about the story?

You will need to add your personal “to look for” items into the checklist below.

When editing the second draft (or third, or fourth, etc.) work from a print copy first and then make changes electronically.

If you are not good with commas and punctuation then read the text out aloud. Do this anyway.

Take your time. Do a little everyday (I recommend a chapter a day). Read every line. Check every word.

Use the checklist below for each chapter. Print out one per chapter!

Enjoy.

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Before you start

- Print out the book if you only have an electronic copy
- Get a red pen ready
- Plan how long you have to edit the work and plan to do a little everyday.

First Things First

- Read the chapter through from start to finish.
- Read it through again making notes on anything you want to change.
- Read it out aloud. Mark up any missing commas and other punctuation.

Structure and Story Development

- Does this chapter/scene flow on seamlessly from the last chapter?
- Do the scenes flow seamlessly into each other?
- Does this chapter/scene flow on seamlessly into the next? Do you want it to?
- Does every section/sentence contribute to the story?
- Read it out aloud again. Does the dialogue flow well? Is it all required?
- Dialogue should be contained. You shouldn't need to say what the speaker feels.
- Speaker should be obvious. You shouldn't need to say who said what every time?
- Are scenes adequately described? Can you see the scene play out in your head?
- Have you described sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and tactile sensations?
- How does the chapter/scene move the plot forward?
- Has the chapter achieved what you wanted it to in terms of plot development?

Character Development

- Adequate description of the characters? Can you tell what they look like?
- Are characters consistent across scenes and chapters?
- How does your hero/heroine develop in this chapter?
- How do your other characters develop in this chapter?
- Are all of the characters needed in this scene/chapter/story?
- Has the chapter achieved what you wanted it to in terms of character development?

Spelling and grammar

- Run a spell check (carefully! Don't change anything without double checking)
- Are all character and place names spelt correctly and consistent across the book?
- Check for words like hear/here, They're and there.
- Do an 'ly' search. Remove adverbs and replace with full descriptions if needed.
- Check for words you overuse (your personal list)
- Check for use of contractions – Do you want them? E.g. He's instead of 'He is'.
- Is the punctuation consistent? (E.g. use of "")

Formatting

- Check that the font is the same, and same size throughout the document
- Check that page breaks are the same between chapters
- Headers and footers check (do you have odd & even differences?)
- Page numbers running in order
- Page set out consistent – line spacing, margins, indents, dialogue