

Author:  
Title:

Date:



# Self-Editing

## An Overview

*Welcome! And congrats on finishing your book!  
Even if you're not quite finished, learning more about  
editing and how to structure and tighten your story will  
be incredibly helpful as you go through.*

*After all, the more you practice, the more you will  
internalize, and the less editing you'll actually have to do  
because you'll start doing and being aware of these things  
in your first drafts.*

*In this guide I'll take you through my self-editing process.  
At times I'll refer to feedback from critique partners or  
beta readers, but if you don't yet have feedback, don't  
worry--you can get some, and/or come back to those  
parts later. This is self-paced, after all*

*So let's dive in and get editing!*



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# Global Edits

First things first.  
Does the story work?

*When you start editing/revising, you're going to have multiple drafts. This means you don't have to be afraid of skipping ahead to fix a plot issue before doing line-edits on chapter one. Trust me, you don't want to spend time line-editing a chapter that might get cut later.*

*Use these points to go through your story, and make sure the structure is sound.*

1. Does your story start at the most effective point? (Does it establish what "normal" life looks like, before the "weird" sets in?)  
(This doesn't have to take long.)
2. Does your story hit all the important beats and points of a story structure guide? (I love either the 3 Act Structure, or the Beat Sheet from *\*Save The Cat Writes a Novel*, by Jessica Brody.)
3. Does your hero change? Do they and the other characters develop from who they were at the start of the story into someone else?  
(Not all changes need to be positive, but there must be a change for the reader to care about.)
4. What did your first readers and beta readers say about the story? Did it make them feel the emotions you expected and wanted? Or did they have reactions you didn't anticipate?



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# *The First Pages*

## The First Chapter, or the First 10 Pages

*This is the section of your book that will often go out with your query letters, so it really needs to sing. Best foot forward, and all that.*

*Apart from the line-editing, there are a few things that should always be present in your first few page:*

1 A solid hook.

Does your first page draw the reader in? Does the first line make an impression? Think of what you look for when purusing the bookshelves of your favorite bookstore.

2. A problem is introduced.

This doesn't necessarily have to be the Main Problem of the book, but some probably usually arrises for the protagnist here. It may even be the main problem of the story, but on a smaller scale.

3. Give the reader a reason to care

Why do we care about this character and their story? You don't have to lay it all out on the table right away, but you do want to make your character relatable/sympathetic/likable.

4. Make a promise to the reader.

What kind of promise? Well--what kind of story will this be? Funny? Romantic? Heartwarming? Tragic? Redemptive? Think about your favorite books--there's likely some indication of how it ends right there from page one. This is your tone, your voice as a writer.



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# *Pacing and Flow*

## Chapters, Scenes, and Order of Events

*Here are a few important things to remember as you go through your global and structural edits:*

1. Chapters are a pacing device.

Use them to either keep your readers turning the page, or to let them have a moment to reflect.

(If you write really long, epics that can't be read in one sitting, using your chapters as a way to give your readers natural stopping points is a good idea.

2. Think about the emotional beats of your story.

If your story has been moving downwards, getting grim and dark as your characters move through the world, you may want to give your readers a high point after a while to bring things back up again.

Conversely, if you know something devastating is about to happen, then having a high point right before it makes that emotion fall later feel all the more weighty.

3. Refer to those structures again.

Is there a scene that would be better off coming earlier? Or later? Do you need to add a scene so that the plot can build properly to the climax you are aiming for?

4. Are there any scenes that need to be cut?

If a scene doesn't do anything to move the plot forward, or develop the characters, then it likely has no place in your book. Sometimes, if you have 2 scenes on the chopping block, you may be able to combine them into one more powerful scene that works and pulls its weight.



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# LINE EDITS

*polish your prose*

*Sometimes this can feel like the most daunting part of editing, but sometimes it can be the most fun too! Though I think no matter what it's often the most time consuming.*

*This is where you get to really make your sentences shine.*

*This is also a great time to get a second eye! Especially if you plan on self-publishing.*

## 1. Word Economy.

Don't use 10 words when 5 will do! Pick the most precise word. Ex. Did your character pick up a few flowers, or did they GATHER flowers?

## 2. "Was" Clusters.

This is usually a sign of too much passive voice. See if you can restructure your sentences so they can be presented without "was."

## 3. Vary your sentence structure.

If all your sentences start the same way: He went to the kitchen to... She skipped around the table. Mary clapped politely... Then your prose is going to start sounding robotic to your reader. Change things up!



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# LINE EDITS

*polish your prose*  
*Cont.*

## 4. Dialogue Tags.

More often than not "said" is the tag you're looking for. "Said" disappeared into the text for the reader without distracting them from more important narration. Things like "whispered" or "shouted" MAY be appropriate at times, but you'll likely find that your narration and the dialogue itself does that job for you. A person cannot laugh or chuckle words--that's something that happens around dialogue. (This is stylistic, but if you check your favorite novels, you'll likely see mostly "said.")

## 5. Repetitive words.

Is there a word or phrase you find yourself using over and over again? Did you use the word "propose" 3 times on one page?



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# JUNK WORDS

*Go through your book and see how often you use these words. Are there times when they are useful and can stay? Sure, of course. BUT, 9 times out of 10 you can probably cut these words and your sentence is going to sound stronger for it.*

Just

That

Only

Suddenly

Began to...



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# TENSES

*Past, Present, Future*

What tense have you chosen to write your story in? Past? Present?

Did you stay in that tense the entire time? Are there any slip ups?

If you're writing in Past to describe the present, then you must use Past Perfect to describe the past.

Ex:

She knew this would never work. They had tried so many plans already, and each one had ended tragically.

The first sentence above is using the past tense to describe the "present" in the story, but the second is describing things that have happened in the past.







# DIALOGUE

## *The Punctuation.*

*When in doubt, it's always a good idea to peek inside your favorite books (contemporary), and see how punctuation and dialogue work in different situations. But here are the most common.*

"Oh hi," she said. "I didn't see you there."

"Oh, hi. I didn't see you there," she said.

"Are you telling me," she said, "that the money is gone?"

"Hey!" he said, running after them. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, clutching her book to her chest.

"And that's how I became a vampire." He smiled awkwardly, revealing a chipped fang that made him look like a stray cat.

In general: punctuation goes INSIDE the quotation marks, and if the dialogue is a complete sentence, a comma will precede the tag--unless you are using an exclamation point, or a question mark. Like the last example, you can also skip the traditional tag, and use narrative action instead.

If you have only 2 characters in a scene speaking back and forth, you don't have to tag every single time. If there are 3 or more, you need to be sure it's clear who is speaking each time.



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# CHECKLIST

*For those of you who love to check things off. :)*

- The Hook
- A commanding, and engaging beginning -- with a problem
- Story hits all points of chosen story structure
- Hero(s) changes in a meaningful way
- Reader Reactions -- did they feel what you expected?
- Chapters work to pace the story
- Emotional Beats -- what does the reader feel at each point?
- Superfluous scenes are cut, and any needed scenes have been added in.
- Line edits -- prose is polished, and each word on the page has a purpose.
- Checked for "junk words"
- Tenses remain consistent
- Dialogue, and other punctuation, is correct.



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# WRITING EXERCISES

*Bonus Fun!*

Give these a try as a way to hone your writing skills!



Open up a favorite book, one with an author you would LOVE to write like, and just start typing or writing out a random page.

Doing these lets you feel how that author strings words together, and taps into your own brain in a different way.

Take a scene with heavy dialogue, and remove all narration.



Can you still tell which character is speaking for each line? Or do all your characters sound the same? This can be a great way to explore character voice.

Write a scene with your villain/antagonist as the protagonist.



See what you reveal!

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