

Self-Editing Tips



After you finish writing your first draft, leave it for a few days or a week before looking at it again. You will read it with 'fresh eyes' and it'll be easier to pick up on things.

Overview and 'Big Picture' Editing

- Focus on the key plot points and expand on details that help develop the plot. Cross out anything that is unnecessary and irrelevant to the plot.
- Are there any plot holes or things that don't make sense? Do all the events tie and link together? Are the scene changes clear and in the right order?
- Is there a clear beginning, middle and end? Does the ending resolve the problem?
- Read your draft aloud. Is it easy to read?
- Is the narrative voice consistent? If you start writing in first person, don't refer to yourself in third person later on.

Spelling and Word Choice

- Use one format / style consistently. E.g. UK or US spelling.
- Are there any words or phrases that are overused, too common, cliché or vague that could be replaced? E.g. nice, said, etc. Use a thesaurus.
- Be careful with homophones. (Words that sound the same but are spelled differently with different meanings.) E.g. bear and bare; flour and flower. Spell check may not pick up on these errors. Use a dictionary to check.
- Homophones along with plurals, contractions and possessives with apostrophes can also be easily confused. E.g. there, they're and their.
- Avoid overly fancy words that might confuse readers. Keep it simple.
- Remove unnecessary / filler words.

E.g. He blinked his eyes twice then clapped his hands. ('his eyes' and 'his hands' are redundant. You can't blink without your eyes, and you can't clap without your hands.)
Change to 'He blinked twice and clapped.'

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Punctuation

- Read each sentence carefully and pay attention to where you naturally pause. Add / remove punctuation marks as you see fit.
- Avoid overusing the exclamation mark to end sentences.
- Make sure that direct speech and quotations are correctly punctuated. Be careful with capitalisations in and out of quotation marks. Check that your dialogue tags are correct.

Grammar

- Use grammar / spell check functions; programmes like Grammarly to help you find obvious errors and mistakes.
- Keep the tense consistent. Although it's ok to mix tenses throughout a story, make sure that it is still consistent within the same sentence.
- Are your pronouns clear? Do readers know who you are referring to? If you have multiple characters being referred to with pronouns in the same sentence, replace one of them with their name to make it clear.
- Subject-verb agreement - singular subjects use singular verb forms; plural subjects use plural verb forms.
- Use active voice over passive voice.

Language and Sentence Structure

- Remove weak phrases or uncertainty in your language.
E.g. 'I was thinking that it's perhaps probably not a good idea to go to the park in this weather.' Change to 'I don't think it's a good idea to go to the park in this weather.'
- Show more rather than tell.
- Vary sentence starters and reduce repetition.
- Are there any sentences that are too long and could be broken up?
- When you read it aloud, do you notice any clumsy or awkward expressions?
- Is the tone of your story consistent? If your story is serious, refrain from suddenly including a bunch of jokes.

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Revising and Reviewing

- Read your story from the end to the beginning. It can also help you pick up on things you hadn't noticed before.
- After making all your changes, read the manuscript again from beginning to end. Repeat the above steps until you are satisfied.

Ask For Help and Feedback

- Ask someone who has never read your story before to read it and see if they can understand the story or pick up on anything.
- Ask someone in your target audience to read the story and give you feedback. Do they understand it? Is it suitable for them? Do they like it? Is the language appropriate for their level?

A helpful tip: Use the text-to-speech function in your word processor or app and have the manuscript read aloud to you. Alternatively, ask someone else to read it aloud while you follow along on the manuscript. Does anything sound awkward or strange? Are there any missing or extra words? Are the words in the correct order?

For picture book authors: If you plan to have illustrations for your book, look for descriptions that could be shown in illustrations rather than be read in the text. Add those to your art notes and trim down your text. (E.g. Jane is a small girl with curly brown hair.)

Self-Editing Checklist



- My use of tense is consistent throughout.
- My use of tone and voice are consistent throughout.
- My sentences and descriptions are concise and to-the-point.
- My sentence structures are varied and not repetitive.
- My manuscript is easy to read and understand.
- The plot has a clear beginning, middle and end.
- I have checked my spelling and have used one style consistently.
- I have asked someone to read my manuscript for me.
- The language is suitable for my target audience.

Notes and Feedback
