

The Joy of Self-Editing

Hitting Delete Before Your Editor Does

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- Just as you “become” the main character to write a novel, feeling what she/he feels, take yourself out of author-mode and “become” an editor.
- Aim for clarity above cleverness.
- Consider every glitch you find one less glitch a reader will find. Or an editor!
- Read it aloud. Ask a friend to read it aloud in your presence. Read it as if seeing it for the first time.
- Set it aside for a week or more, then read it fresh.
- Read it as if you knew nothing about the subject or location. Read it as if you’re an expert on the subject.
- Read other works similar to yours and watch for the differences in style. Are your differences purposeful, rebellious, or do they show lack of experience?

Self-Editing Check List

Watch for the obvious: Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation, Facts, Quotes, Format, Style

1. Unnecessarily repetitive or redundant words/phrases
2. Repetitive sentence structure
3. Imprecise pronouns
4. Lack of varied sentence length or inappropriate for the story pacing
5. Confusing viewpoint switches
6. Mixed or confusing metaphors
7. Weak opening sentence
8. Weak closing sentence
9. Unclear takeaway value
10. Misplaced modifiers
11. Sagging sentences that cause the reader to lose interest
12. Trivia that doesn’t matter to the story, or facts of interest only to the writer
13. Lack of style continuity
14. Too little white space
15. Cute-isms that grow tiresome
16. Too many word pictures
17. Heavy use of adjectives, adverbs, or adverbial phrases
18. Speaker attributions that are impossible or don’t match the dialogue
19. Is the reader well-grounded in the time and place?
20. Are the reader’s senses engaged?
21. Is an action or action beat overused?
22. Is the chronology accurate?
23. Would it pass the test of a list of contest score sheet questions?
24. Tired clichés
25. Is there a smooth or appropriate transition from chapter to chapter?
26. What’s your story’s believability factor?
27. Does every scene advance the plot?
28. Have you inadvertently used insider information your reader won’t know?
29. Have you made the story easy to market?
30. Is it painfully predictable?