

DANG BLASTED EDITORS!

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The publishing house accepted my manuscript, which led me to believe my novel was good to go, soooooo why did it return from the editor with more red on it than a spill at the blood bank? The focus of this newsletter is to help you get the red out before you send that manuscript in. I earn my living as a developmental editor, and people often ask me what I look for while editing. This workshop is a great place to start understanding the mind of an editor.

Content:

Types of Editing

The Process—What happens to the manuscript once it arrives at the publishing house.

Content/Developmental Editing

Bonus—The Wrong Way

Types of Editing

- Developmental editing—Main focus how the story is told. Plot, characterization, pacing...
- Copy editing—Main focus is flow of the story—word reduction, cut repetition, grammar, punctuation...
- Proof reading—grammar, punctuation, syntax

THE PROCESS (Below is the MINIMAL process. Most publishing houses have extra sets of copy edits and proof reading. Please refer to my workshop Where's My Manuscript for full details on this section.)

- Submission
- Acquisitions editor
- Reader evaluations
- Editor evaluations
- Acquisitions editor decides
- Developmental editing
- Copy editing
- Typesetting
- Proof reading
- Author final proof
- Off to printer
- Printer ships books to distributor
- Distributor ships books to the bookstores

CONTENT/DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

1. What to do when you receive a manuscript full of RED
 - a. Remember the editor is objective, quite distant from the work. He/she is not there to slam your work, but point out issues.
 - b. Read all of the comments and be angry, hurt, whatever, but do not contact the editor.
 - c. A day or two later, go back and read through the comments, this time take notes on what areas you need to change.
 - d. If you do not agree with the editor on this issue or that.
 - i. Contact the editor and tell them what you don't agree with and what you were trying to accomplish. This is after you have waited the two days and written notes. Authors see the book that is in their head instead of what is on the paper. If you explain what you were trying to do, the editor can help you accomplish your goal or they may agree with you.

LET'S GET THE RED OUT!!!!

As you are writing your novel, have this little editor in the background to keep you from weaving too many issues into your novel. Now don't let this editor take over. While writing the creative you should be in charge, but the little editor should have some say so. After you complete your novel, let it sit at least a month, then go through it with your internal editor on full blast.

Let's start with the simple

1. Grammar/Punctuation—Take a grammar/punctuation class every few years. Many colleges have continuing education classes. I'm an editor and take one every five years to refresh my skills.
2. Transitions—from one speaker to the next, one paragraph to the next, one scene to the next...Are yours smooth, jarring, jump around from one thought to the next. It is easier for someone else to see these issues in your work. Along with smooth transitions, look for choppy or sentences that run on for days. Remember when people are angry, they tend not to use contractions. And in the heat of battle it is better to have shorter more choppy sentences. Sorry, there is no magic formula. You must find that happy medium again.
3. Repetition
 - a. A word or phrase—Make a list of words you have a tendency to repeat. Train that little editor in you to avoid these words in your future writing. In your present manuscript, use the find and go through and change the offending word when possible (delete, rephrase) of course you don't want to cut whatever the word is out completely. Find the happy balance.
 - b. Sentences beginning with pronouns or proper names. While writing, try not to begin your narrative sentences with pronouns. Pick any page of your manuscript and circle the first word of any narrative sentence that starts with a pronoun or proper name. You may be unpleasantly surprised.
 - c. An idea—One plus two is three. Two plus one is three. This is a form of repetition that stumps many authors and earns lots of red on the page. Sometimes you will need to repeat for added emphasis, but if you are saying something a different way because you think the reader didn't understand you the first, second, or often times third time (smile), then cut the statement the first, second, and third time. Keep the one the reader will understand.
 - i. How to decide when to cut
 1. Sometimes information needs to be repeated. Finding the happy medium is the key. With bits of information you gave the reader early on, you may wish to give a little reminder later.
 2. Ask yourself: Is this new information the reader needs in order to understand the plot better. If not, cut it.
 3. Ask yourself: Is this repeated information that I haven't pointed out in a while. Is this a type of reminder or a second example of a behavior I'm showing the reader to indicate a pattern. Be careful with examples. A few go a LONG way.
 4. Ask yourself: Does this information move the plot forward? If not it can be cut in most cases.
 - d. Body language, for example look, stare, gaze, glare are all ways of looking at someone. Use them sparingly.
 - e. Physiology (eye color, skin complexion). You don't have to continually tell the reader your character has brown, coffee, chocolate....eyes.
 - f. The thesaurus can be your enemy.
 - d. Names—For example: Tom, Thomas, Tommy. I literally edited a manuscript where the author had these three characters. I was soooooo confused by the end of the second chapter I wanted to scream. The reader is learning the world you have built, be careful not to make it more difficult by giving characters similar names.
 5. Speaker tags. Many times you can use body language instead of speaker tags (don't get carried away).

Enough of the easy stuff. Let's get down to business.

1. **Opening Hook:** You need to grab your reader early on, hook them. Make them want more. Also, saying you need an opening hook is slightly misleading. Yes you need an opening hook, but you must also keep the interest of the reader throughout. Interesting does not mean fast paced. With a fast or slow paced book, there must be some element, some emotional investment the readers have made into the plot and characters that keeps them wanting to read on.
2. **Characterization:** Think conflict and character development. Refer to my workshop Character Cake for greater details.
 - Is the character well rounded: Physiology, Sociology, Psychology, Family background, History, Motivation. What is their main character trait. What does this character want more than anything in the world and what is he/she willing to do to get it? Who stands in the way of the character from accomplishing his/her goal(s). How does this character overcome obstacles to get what he/she wants in the end?
 - Fight the urge to tell everything about a character in big chunks. Spread it out. Develop the character.
 - Don't have your characters make blatantly obvious mistakes because you are trying to get to a certain plot point. Step back and try to be honest with yourself, then create a scenario that is more believable.
 - Don't have your characters do something out of their character to move your plot forward. If your character does something out of character, there must be a reasonable explanation, cause...
 - The why's behind your character's behavior must be revealed.
3. **Continuity:**
 - Loose ends (I highly suggest you have others read your manuscript with an eye for loose ends.)
 1. Be careful with who you have read your manuscript. Friends and family are often too close to you to give an HONEST opinion.
 - Keep track of the timeline of the story. Making a calendar to go along with the scenes may help.
 - Be careful of inconsistencies
 1. In characterization
 1. Physiology (make an index card with the basics of your main characters. Height, complexion, eye color, hair style...)
 2. Make sure if your character uses a particular dialect, it is consistent.
 3. There have to be reasons behind characters changes in behavior/attitudes. For example if your character is a penny pincher in the worse sense, you have to give the reader a believable reason why this penny pincher would go out with her friends on a shopping spree and actually spend freely without care.
 4. Were there any inconsistencies? Did the writer intrude himself into the story?
 2. In the plot. Did you show an event, then later in the book the event was different. For example had a bank been robbed early in the book and three people killed, then later in the book you refer to the bank robbery and say 7 people were killed?
 - Setting—With rooms, places that you plan on using quite a bit. Make an index card with a quick description so your carpet doesn't change into a hardwood floor between scenes. I've actually seen this happen.
 - Point of view (POV). Limited or unlimited
 1. Unlimited Point of View means you can see inside more than one characters head during the course of a scene—one characters perspective. This is called head hopping. Be VERY careful with unlimited. Too much head hopping is a major flaw.
 2. Limited Point of View means you can see into only one characters head If you have been using limited and need to pop into another characters head for one line, don't do it. Use body language, tone of voice to give the reader insight into what the other person is thinking.

Note: Some folks get confused on what exactly perspective is. What is being in a character's head? Sooooo, let's say you have two characters: Cody and Sharon. In unlimited point of view, if Cody and Sharon touch something hot, in the internal thoughts and narration, the author can write that it felt hot to Cody and Sharon. In Limited

point of view, you must pick a point of view character—choose whose perspective you will be writing the scene from. Let's say we want Cody to be our perspective character. So when Cody and Sharon touch the hot item, in the narration Cody can think about how hot it is or the narrator can mention how hot it was to Cody, but for Sharon, the author must show her reaction to touching something hot and the reader must interpret the meaning.

4. **Most used types of Point Of View**

- First person (I)
 1. Do not head hop
 2. You do not have to maintain the same perspective character for the entire book. You can switch per scene or chapter if you'd like. Just don't change within the scene.
- Third person limited (he, she)
- Third Person Unlimited. (he, she)
- You must set the type of POV you are using early. Occasionally there is a combination of POV. For example, let's say you are writing a murder mystery. In the scenes where you have the killer doing his/her dirty work, you might want to use first person from the killer's perspective. In other scenes, the investigation, use third person POV limited. Or you may want to do the opposite and have scenes with the main investigator be first person from his perspective and scenes without him being third person. Combos are difficult to pull off, but can be done.

5. **Dialogue:**

- Does the dialogue sound natural for that particular character?
- Does each character have his/her own voice or do your readers know the characters by the speaker tags?
- Does the dialect you add distract from the novel or add flavor. That happy medium is needed.
- Are your characters talking in the great white void? They need to be somewhere doing something at all times. You have to draw the scene for the reader. Do you have paragraphs and paragraphs of dialogue without weaving in body language (actions/reactions) and/or setting.
- How does this dialogue move the plot forward? If it does not move the plot forward, cut it.
- Are you using dialogue to cram in back story?

6. **Plots:** Is the main plot CLEAR and believable. If it is clear, then write a three page synopsis double spaced. Is the main plot fully developed? Are the secondary plots fully developed? Are there minor plot lines that should be cut? Avoid fluff. It is better to come in under word count than put a bunch of fluff in your novel.

7. **Setting:** Do your research and give your novel a feel for wherever place it is set, whatever season...

- Chase Calendar of Annual Events 2003 ISBN 0-07-139098-7 list events that happen all over the country and lots of contact information.
- <http://www.wunderground.com> weather any city in US and History. It also does many foreign countries.
- Have your people somewhere doing something at all times. Say no to talking heads.
- Do not place your setting in one lump at the beginning of the scene. Weave in setting and body language.

8. **Show versus Tell:** That's a whole topic in itself. You want to put your reader right there in the action. Show them what happens. Draw it out for them. Don't tell it. Please go to my workshop on Showing Vs: Telling for a little more guidance.

9. **Passive Voice versus Active Voice**

- You want to place your reader in the scene, make them feel they are there watching it. Passive vs: active voice will have to be a workshop on its own. For now, be careful of weak verbs. Avoid verb+ing, was, were, had, as.

10. **Pacing:**

- Do the plot and subplots move fast enough to keep my attention? Do they move slow enough for me to absorb and appreciate what has happened?
- Are we skipping from plot to plot too much? And are the transitions smooth?
- If using flashbacks, are they smooth? Did you lose your reader in time?

11. **Conflict:** Conflict drives the story.

- Is there conflict?
- Are you making the conflict more complicated than it has to be, thus convoluting thing?
- Did the conflicts come to reasonable conclusions?

Okay, I reckon that's enough for you to digest for now. I hope this little view into an editor's mind helps you out.

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