

# Techniques for Self-Editing and Revision

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Self-editing is an important skill for writers to have. Even if you are hiring or working with an editor/publisher/agent, it's useful to do self-editing prior to sending it to them. That way they can focus on helping with developmental or larger picture editing and not be bogged down in the details of grammar or typos.

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**Remember, while self-editing is GOOD PRACTICE, nothing beats a second pair of critical/trained reader eyes.**

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## 7 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

### 1. The Look: Formatting and Presentation.

Unless a specific literary agent or editor tells you otherwise, double space your writing, keep 1-inch margins and use a clean 12-point standard style font such as Times New Roman.

### 2. The Hook: Strong Opening. Start & Stay Strong.

Start strong and don't stop starting strong. Ensure that your first page/first few pages establish a scene, create conflict or generate a mystery – and maybe even all three if possible. Drop the reader in the present narrative moment. Make the story vivid and filled with tension.

### 3. The Show: The Art of Showing VS Telling.

Give the readers sensations and emotions and show them the colors, smells, tastes, textures and actions that demonstrate what's happening. Don't tell us Jack wasn't able to forgive Susan for cheating on him. Show Jack reacting to something Susan says or does in a way that reveals his distrust and disgust. Don't give readers the 4. Provide them 2 and 2 and they'll put them together.

### 4. The Character's Voice: Trust "Said."

"Said" is an invisible word in dialogue attribution. Characters might occasionally have "exclaimed," "coughed," "sneezed," "yawned," "spat," "tittered,"

"laughed," and "ejaculated" words. But sometimes when a word like that stands out too much, it SLOWS down the reading. For every dialogue attribution, look at the use of "said" 9 times out of 10.

### 5. The Map: Avoid Giving Stage Directions.

Unless it's relevant to the scene and action, avoid over-insertion of descriptive stage direction in how the characters are acting. Readers can use their imaginations to flesh out those details. Beth can most certainly get into her car and drive away without us having to explain how she unlocks the door, opens the door, slides into the seat, closes the door and inserts the key in the ignition. Of course, if there's a homicidal maniac chasing her, each of those steps is critical.

### 6. The Modifier: Reduce use of Adverbs/Adjectives

An adverb is something that might be making a verb that's "not quite right" stronger. Why not look for adverbs or adjectives and see if there's a way to replace them with precise and concrete verbs and nouns. Did Beth jump quickly headfirst into the back of a very large pickup truck? Or did Beth dive into the back of a huge pickup truck?

### 7. The Action: Choose Active VS Passive Voice.

A lot of "was" or "were" is a sign of passive voice. What's more immediate? Beth's purse was stolen by Martin. Or Martin stole Beth's purse. One tip on using active voice is putting the subject first in the sentence.

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## TIPS FOR SELF-EDITING / REVISING

- Print it Out
- Read twice, Edit Once
- Read it Aloud
- Line by Line

## THINGS TO AVOID / WATCH OUT FOR:

- Throat-clearing
- Redundant words/phrases
- Point of View Shifts in a scene
- Similar Character Name Confusion