

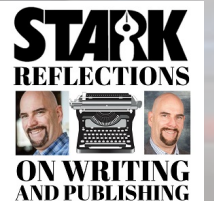
# Techniques for Self-Editing & Revision

Mark Leslie Lefebvre

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# WHO IS MARK?

- Bookseller since 1992 – Mall, Big Box, Indie, Campus, Online, eBook
- Former President of Canadian Booksellers Association & Board Member of BookNet Canada
- Former Director of Self-Publishing & Author Relations for Kobo (Created Kobo Writing Life)
- Director of Business Development for Draft2Digital
- Presented on publishing/writing throughout Canada and the United States, in UK, France, Germany and Italy
- National, local television, radio, print as author & industry rep
- 1st Published Short Story (1992) - 1st Self-Published Book (2004) 1st Traditionally Published Book (2006)
- Author of more than 25 books
- Editor of 8 anthologies
- Serial collaborator and gigantic book nerd

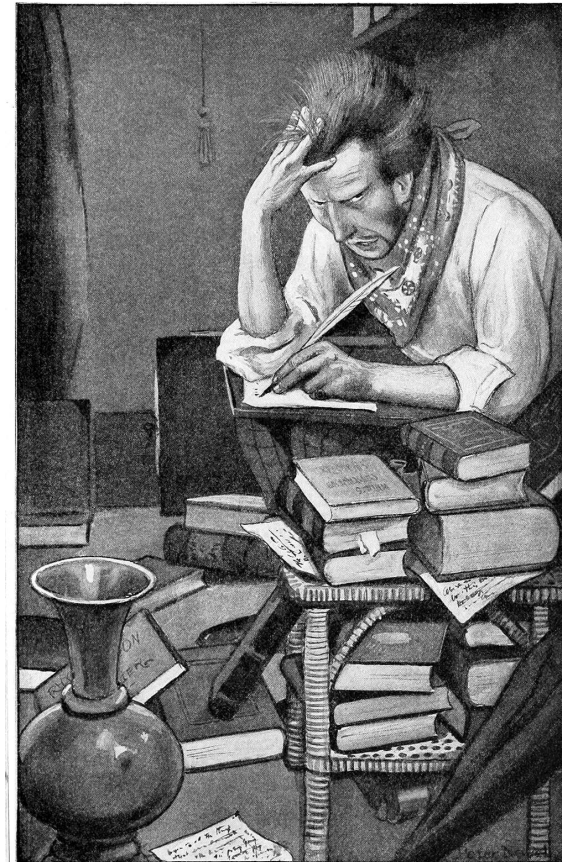


# Overview

- All writers need an editor, a second set-of-eyes at least one layer removed from the creation of a piece of writing, in order to bring an unbiased third party perspective to a piece.
- However, prior to working with an editor, a writer should be able to revise and self-edit.
- Even when the writer is writing to submit a book to an agent, editor, or publisher.
- This ensures the manuscript is handed to the reader as polished as possible.

# Writer Tools

- A writer uses tools such as paper, pen, typewriter, computer, dictionary, thesaurus, grammar guides
- Although writing itself is often seen as a solitary act
  - A good writer is part of a team
  - An important part of that team involves an editor, OR editors





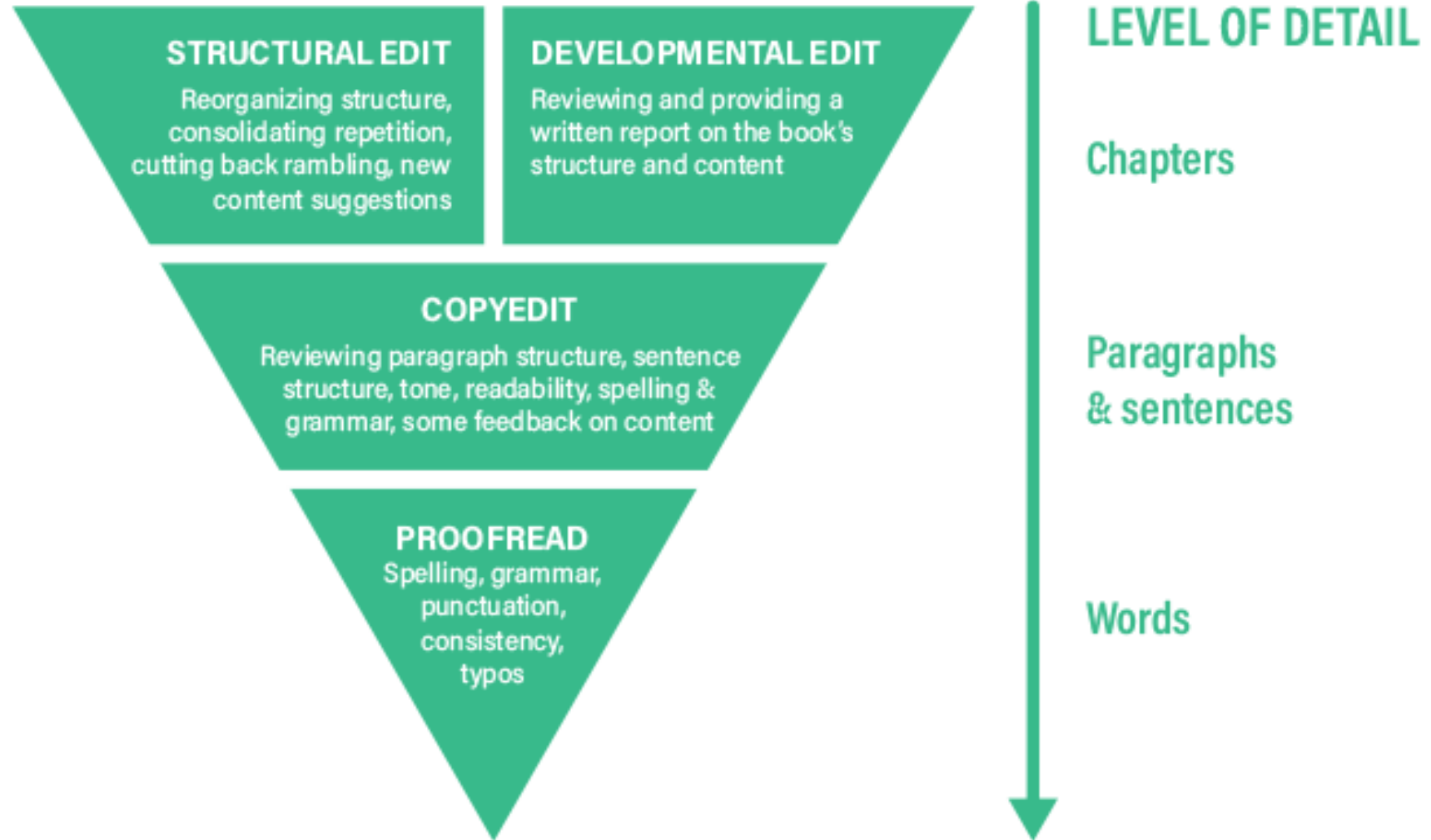
# Definitions (High Level)

- Editor: A person who is in charge of and determines the final content of a text.

Types of Editing:

- **Developmental Editing** (AKA: conceptual editing or manuscript appraisal).
- **Evaluation Editing** (AKA: manuscript critique or structural edit).
- **Content Editing** (AKA: substantive editing or full editing).
- **Line Editing** (AKA: stylistic edit or comprehensive edit).
- **Copyediting**
- **Proofreading**

# Types of Editing



# The Benefit of Self-Editing

- It assists you in stepping back and looking at your writing with a different perspective / more critical eye.
- It can help you identify, target and fix some of your automatic writing habits or weaknesses.
- The process can help you refine what you want to say/were trying to say or express.
- It can help you distill your narrative and refine and focus the impact of your writing.
- It will help you determine where to expand or where to cut/trim your text, as needed.
- It can help you tighten plotting and enhance characterization and dialogue.
- Can assist with your viewpoint of the overall pace of your story arc.

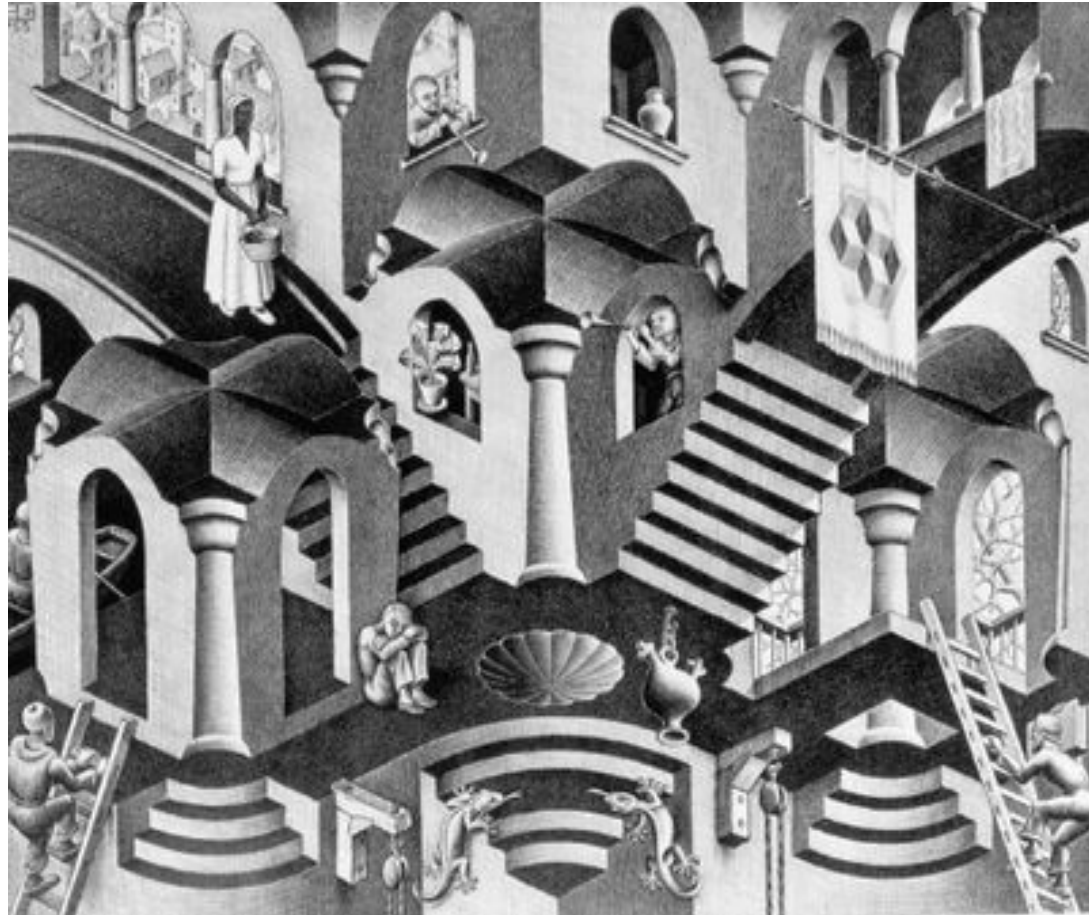
# When To Self-Edit / Work on Revisions

- When self-editing, it's important to be able to step back and approach the piece of writing with as much distance / perspective as possible
  - It might make sense to try self-editing only after stepping away from the writing for a period of time. (It might be a few hours, a few days, or a few weeks)
- Ideally, it's best to edit a piece when you're not entirely immersed in the process
  - Being able to see the writing from the POV of a reader, and NOT the writer, can help you with finding errors and communication issues that might not be evident when you're completely engaged and immersed



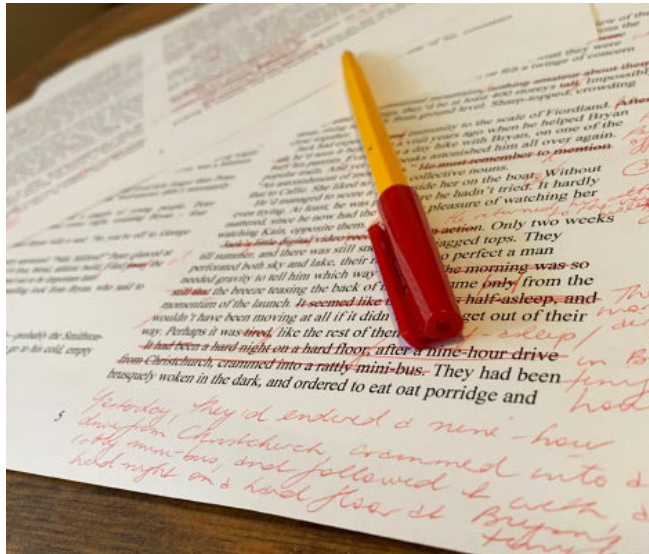
# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- TIME / DISTANCE
  - The Reader's Perspective
  - Different Personal Perspective



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

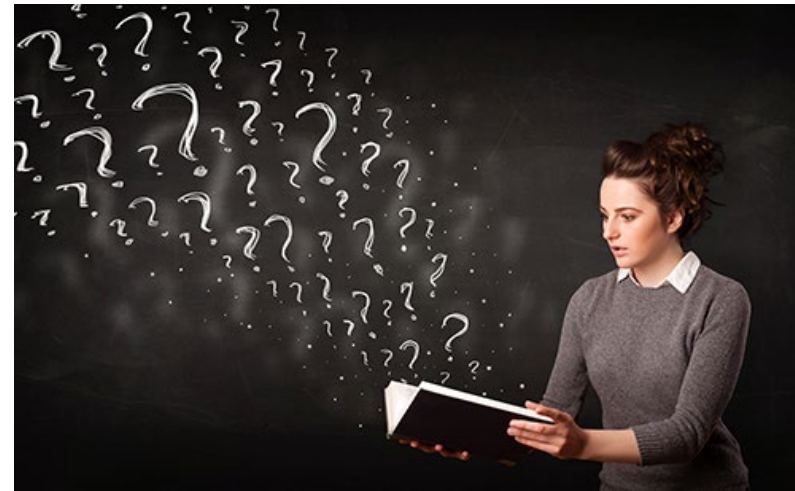
- PRINT IT OUT
  - The page reveals things “hidden” on a screen
  - Tactile experience triggers different part of the brain
  - Ability to make notes (red pen)



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- READ IT ALOUD

- The ear catches phrases, sentences difficult to roll off the tongue (roll off the mind)
- Word choice, similar sounding words/names
- Like printing, uses a different part of the brain



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- DON'T BE AFRAID TO BREAK IT
- DON'T BE AFRAID TO "KILL YOUR DARLINGS"

"In writing, you must kill your darlings."

William Faulkner

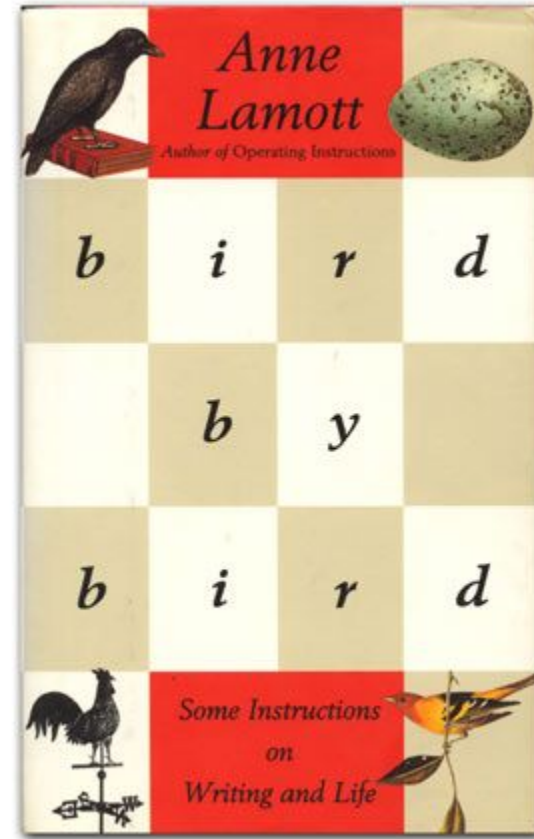
"Kill your darlings, kill your darlings, even when it breaks your egocentric little scribbler's heart, kill your darlings."

- Stephen King



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- BIRD BY BIRD
- LINE BY LINE
  - A good editor will go through a manuscript line by line rather than sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph.
  - Sometimes reading backwards can help you spot inaccurate details, word use, errors, etc

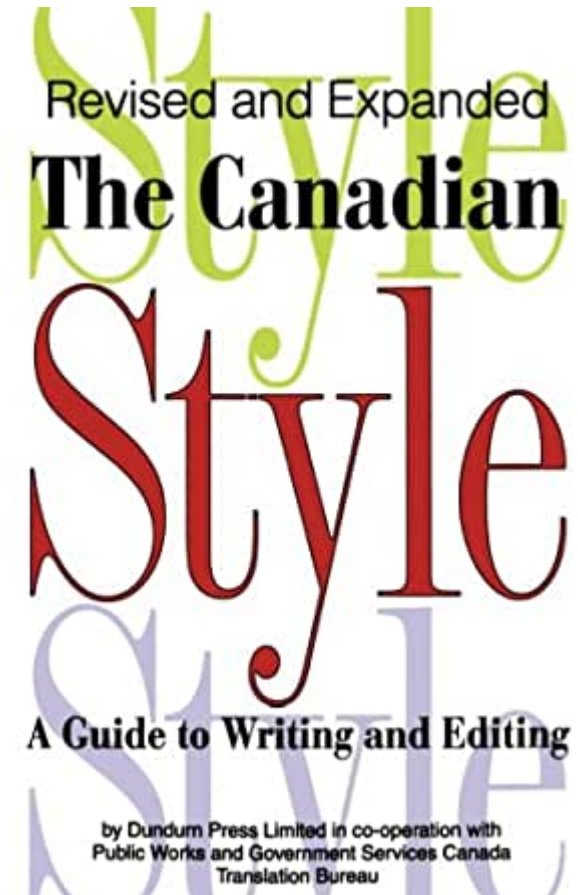




# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- **HAVE SOME STYLE**

- It's possible to learn the skills that professional editors come equipped with
- AP Style, Chicago Manual of Style, The Canadian Style.
- Follow the proper guidelines laid out and add them to your editing checklist:
- Commas in the right place? Are words properly italicized or quoted?
- Knowing what to look for can not only expand your editing experience but help you become a better writer.



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

- EMBRACE RE-READING

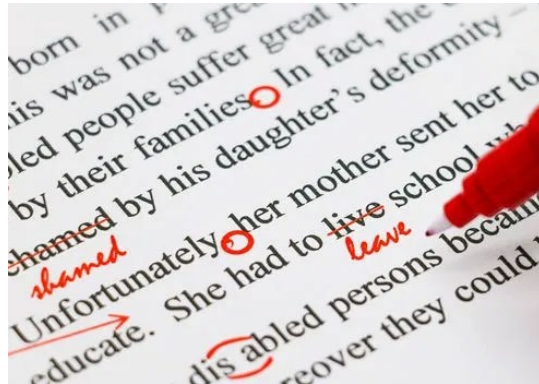
- Editing isn't a one-off process
- You'll likely need multiple read-throughs in order to find all of your weak sentences, grammar mistakes, punctuation errors, and spelling errors.



# Techniques, Tips, and Ideas To Help With Self-Editing

## • THE FINAL PROOF

- Save the proofreading for last.
- Proofreading is the very last step you should take when self-editing.
- As you go through your piece, you'll be re-writing sentences and paragraphs, so searching for grammar errors or doing a spell check **before** your final draft will only waste more time.
- It's okay if you spot errors along the way (you don't have to ignore them), but don't make it the first step you take when tackling your own editing.



# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE LOOK

- 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.
- Manuscript FLOW makes a difference

All authors bring their own bias to a book they write. Just like all readers, in turn, bring their own bias. These biases are based on personal experience, upbringing, and the circles one engages in. I wanted to briefly share a few biases of mine here so you could apply the proverbial grain of salt to my advice, suggestions, and perspective. I'm sure that many of them will become apparent, but why not start off ensuring you know where I'm coming from. **Traditional Publishing** is not a dirty word to me. I started writing in my early teens and started submitting my writing to different markets for short stories when I was fifteen years old. This was in the pre-computer days of typewriters and large manilla envelopes and SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope). Self-Publishing existed, but not in the way it does today. My books have been both self-published and traditionally published and I continue to be open to both, depending on the specific book or project. My bias is that you should also be open. Because, as we'll see, that's part of my larger definition of what it means to be truly WIDE. In addition, while we're on the topic, I am likely to occasionally use the term "publisher" and "author" interchangeably. For example, if I talk about how a retailer interacts with publishers, I'm using the term inclusive to denote traditional publishers, indie-authors who are self-publishing direct, and third-party distributors who provide indie-author titles to the retailer.



All authors bring their own bias to a book they write. Just like all readers, in turn, bring their own bias.

These biases are based on personal experience, upbringing, and the circles one engages in.

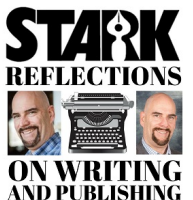
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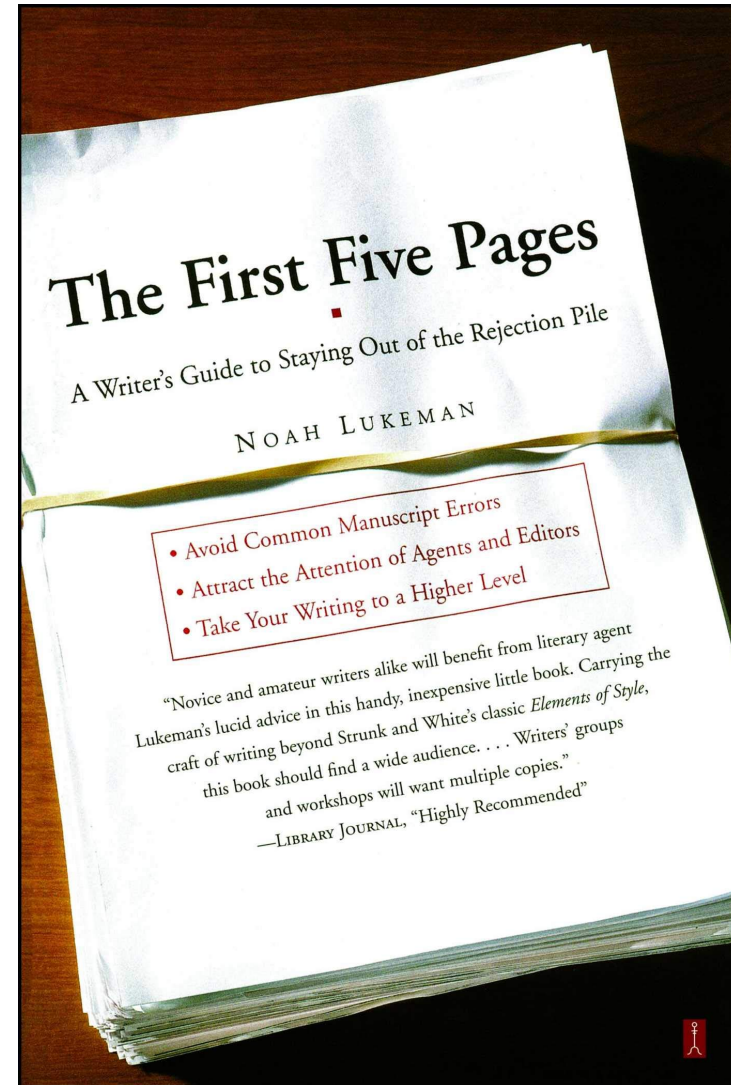
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# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE HOOK
  - Strong Opening. Start & Stay Strong
  - Ensure that your first page/first few pages establish a scene, create conflict or generate a mystery –maybe even all three if possible.
  - Drop the reader in the present narrative moment. Make the story vivid and filled with tension.
  - The FIRST 5 PAGES





# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- ON WITH THE SHOW

- The art of showing, not 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.

# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE SAID – A COMMON DIALOGUE ISSUE
  - Trust the word “said”
  - It’s invisible
  - 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.



# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE MAP

- Avoid giving “stage direction”
- Unless it’s relevant to the scene and action, avoid over-insertion of descriptive stage direction in how the characters are acting.
- Let readers use their imaginations to flesh out common process 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.

# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE MODIFIER

- Avoid overt use of adverbs and 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?

# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE ACTION

- Choose **active** versus **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.
  - Martin stole Beth’s purse.
- One tip on using active voice is putting the subject first in the sentence.



# The Octopus Arms of 8 Things to Look out For

- THE LETTERS

- Check and double check spelling
  - Is your audience 100% Canadian or will there be Americans reading it? They don't KNOW that centre is the way we spell center. (Cater to the lower denominator because they'll think you spelled it wrong – Canadians and British folks will know the difference)
- Sometimes the spelling is right, but the context is wrong
  - This is a tough one to catch
  - This Sentence has all the words spelled correctly. But it's garbled: "Ant Sarah is form Ottawa."

# Additional Things to Look Out For

- Throat-Clearing



# Additional Things to Look Out For

- Redundant, Repetitive, Repeated, Re-used, and Redundant Words and Phrases

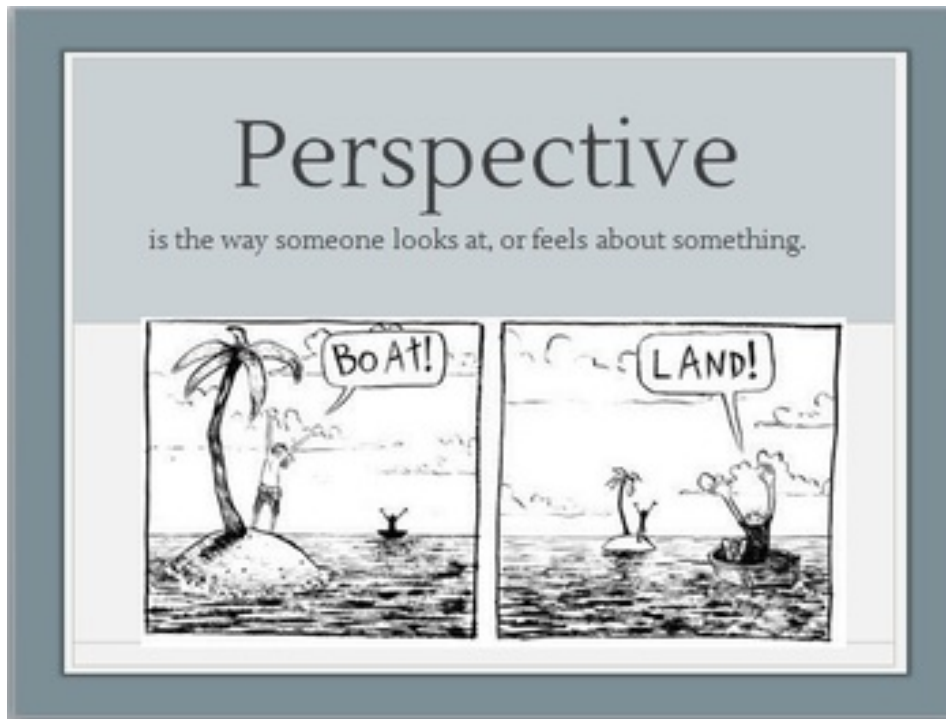
**IN THE DICTIONARY  
UNDER REDUNDANT IT  
SAYS SEE REDUNDANT**

ROBIN WILLIAMS



# Additional Things to Look Out For

- Perspective / Point of View
  - Careful to ensure that a POV doesn't shift in a single scene
  - Each scene is most often told through a specific perspective
  - How WOULD a scene differ if told from another's POV?



# Additional Things to Look Out For

- Similar Character Names / Name Confusion
  - Can slow down a reader. (Example: Sam, Stan both introduced in a short time frame can confuse the person trying to follow)



Glenn Head

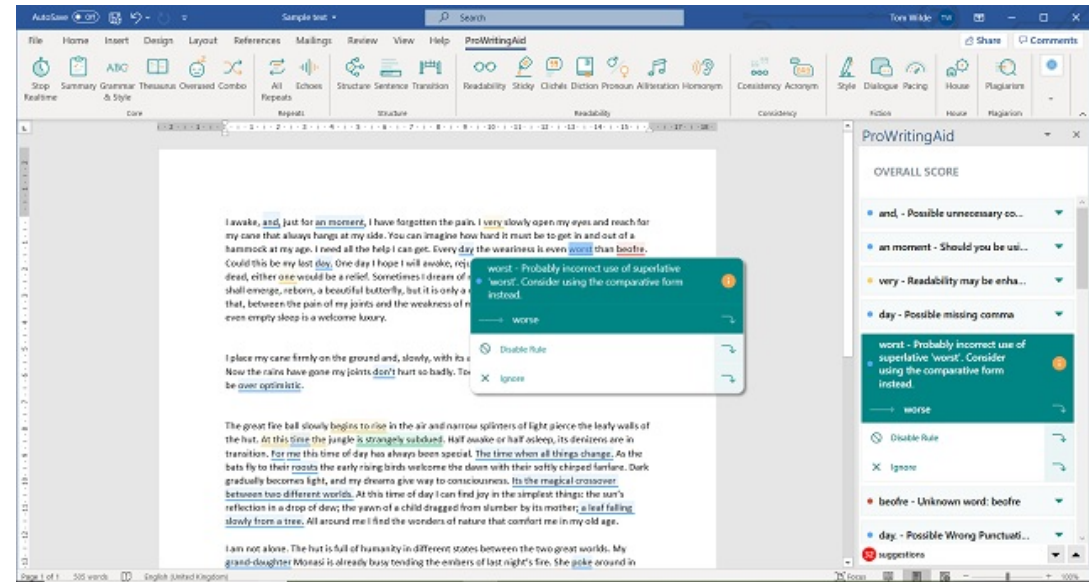


# Helpful and Handy Tools



ProWritingAid

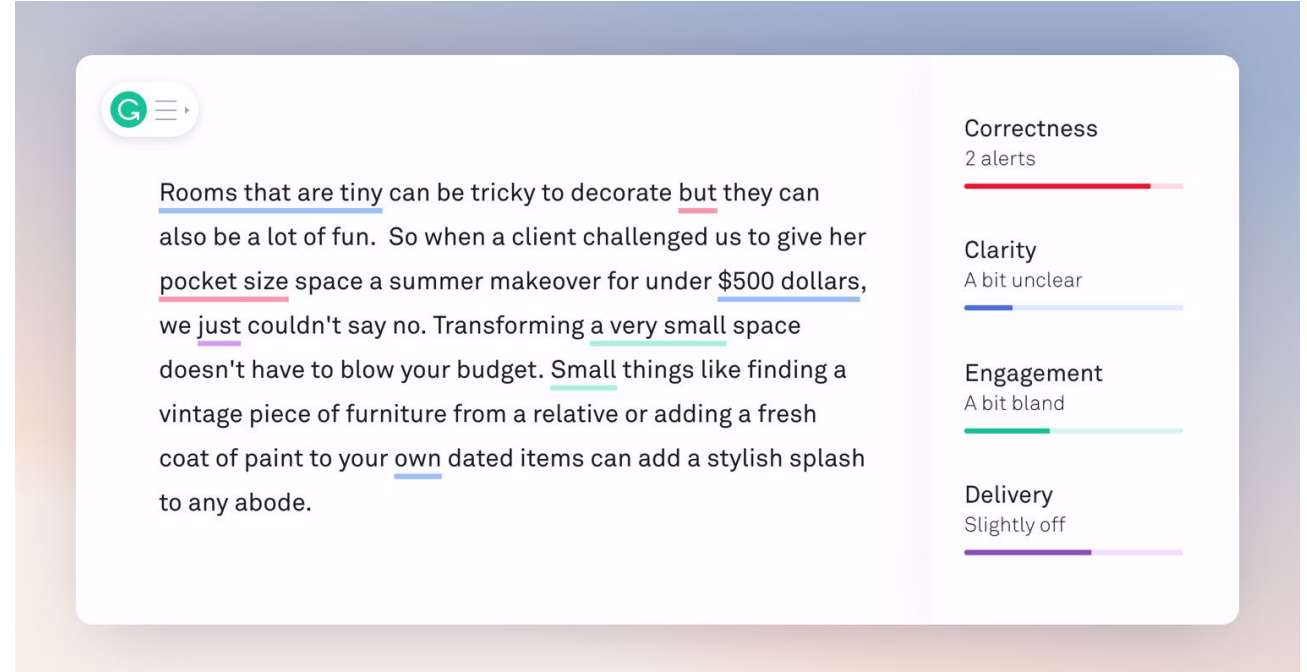
- Pro-Writing Aid
  - Improve your writing quickly and efficiently with 1000s of grammar, spelling and readability improvements delivered in real-time as you write.



# Helpful and Handy Tools



- Grammarly
  - Compose bold, clear, mistake-free writing with Grammarly's AI-powered writing assistant.
  - Firefox Extension



# Info And Resources

## Podcasts

- Stark Reflections on Writing & Publishing ([www.starkreflections.ca](http://www.starkreflections.ca))
- Writing Excuses (15 Minutes) – Craft of Writing ([www.writingexcuses.com](http://www.writingexcuses.com))

Blatant Self-Promotion – Ask for them at Brantford Public Library

