

The Dreaded “E”

How Do You Learn To Self-Edit?

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The same way you learn to write: practice, read critically, and pay attention to outside critiques. Which can not only help you improve your work, but teach you how to critique yourself.

Grammar checking is important. Fact checking is important. Clarity of thought and action is important. Remember: **spell check doesn't catch everything.**

Five Tips to approach self-editing and improve your writing

1: Attitude is everything

2. Put some distance between you and your work

3: Read like a reader, not like an editor

4: Limit your first edit

5: Now, edit. Take it apart.

At this point, you're ready to correct errors and improve the language and organization:

- Correct typos, spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- Make sure you've used the most appropriate words — the biggest or most technical word is seldom the best word.
- Check for redundancy. Delete words, sentences, and even whole paragraphs, if necessary.

Ten Rules of Self-Editing

1. Presentation

Editing should make your work come across as more _____.

A tip on presenting your work effectively: _____

2. Start strong

A tip on starting strong: Ensure that your first pages establish a scene, create conflict, or generate a mystery – possibly all three.

3. Show vs. tell

A tip on making sure you show: Use strong verbs. Choose specific, significant details. And don't tell readers how to feel – give them 2+2 and let them come up with 4 on their own. This works.

4. Kill it! Along with roaches, ants, and leeches

These are some of my most popular self-editing suggestions I give to help other writers. A friend told me, "This has completely changed how I write."

A tip on the bugs in your writing: Search for them. Get rid of as many as possible. When you can't derive a different word choice or punctuation, then the bug IS your best choice.

5. Trust "Said"

In order to avoid said, writers' characters have spat, coughed, sneezed, yawned, yelped, caterwauled, slumped, shaved, demurred, shrilled, twitted, twittered and ejaculated words. These words stand out, but only for the amusement these story-stopping lines created.

A tip on using dialogue tags effectively: _____

6. Avoid stage directions

Assume a reader understands that the human body requires lots of muscles, joints and parts moving in tandem to accomplish any physical task. That's a given. Don't write "Sarah unbent her elbow as she reached out her arm and uncurled her fingers, pinkie to thumb, over the doorknob of the door leading down to the farmhouse cellar," if the point is merely to communicate that she's opening the door she has opened three times a day for the last 20 years to retrieve canned peaches or laundry. Go with "Sarah went down to the cellar."

A tip on avoiding stage directions: Here's one place where telling is more effective than showing. Be choosy with your details. Pretend, too, that you have to pay 15 cents for every word in your story.

7. Avoid adverbs and too many -ing words

Stephen King claims that the road to hell is paved with adverbs (those pesky -ly words).

A tip on avoiding adverbs: _____

A tip on avoiding adverbs: _____

8. Choose active versus passive voice

If you see lots of "was" or "were" words, you're probably using passive construction.

A tip on using active voice. _____

9. Pay attention to spelling

Don't blindly trust spellcheck. _____

A tip on spelling better: _____

10. Use writing and editing partners.

Important note: seek out people who will give you intelligent, reasonably objective critique—which could mean not your relatives, your spouse, or your friends—and to remember that **not all advice is useful**. One of the most important aspects of dealing with any critique is:

A tip on writing partners: _____

Editing Checklist

1. ___ Interesting first sentence
2. ___ Multiple word usage (list them) _____
3. ___ Change in sentence beginnings. Don't start all sentences with noun/verbs
4. ___ Sentences that are too long (3 lines or more)
5. ___ -ly words
6. ___ to be verbs
7. ___ -ing words
8. ___ floating body parts
9. ___ Show, don't tell
10. ___ Double spaced/typed
11. ___ Indented paragraphs
12. ___ Indent dialogue
13. ___ Roaches!
14. ___ Sentence started with or ends with "it" (leech word)
15. ___ Words to get rid of: just, then, _____
16. ___ Sat doesn't need a down. She sat, not she sat *down*. Stood doesn't need up; nod/head
17. ___ Toward, backward, forward, does not have an "s"
18. ___ Watch for too much use of the word "as"
19. ___ Avoid words such as "start, begin, begun"
20. ___ Watch for clichés
21. ___ Watch for time references; "suddenly, in a little while, for a moment"
22. ___ Misspelled words
23. ___ POV, does the Point Of View change at the wrong time
24. ___ Filter words (felt, watched, heard, saw, look)
25. ___ Right amount of beats (do you need to add or remove any)
26. ___ Have you created tension on each page

Books to help my writing and editing process:
