

Getting Rid of the Parts Readers Skip – Dan Walsh *(Or...How to Create a Page-Turning Novel)*

My favorite writer's quote is by NY Times bestselling author Elmore Leonard, who said:

"In your writing, try to leave out the parts readers skip."

- Have you ever done that? Skip over large sections of a novel when it gets bla-bla-bla, and start reading where the real story picks up again?
- If it happens too much with a book, I put it down for good (and I certainly won't buy another book by that author).
- My goal when I write, and especially when I edit my work, is to get rid of all those "skipping" parts before I turn my manuscript in.

The Uphill Climb for all who want to be published

- Typically, there's no fast track to getting published with a traditional publishing house.
- Having said that, I believe one of the **greatest obstacles to getting published is NOT the writing part**. It's what happens *after*, as we try to get our book ready for the market.
- The Self-Editing part:
 - Herein lies the problem...a serious one. We don't possess the ability to see ourselves, or our work accurately (the flawed lens).
 - "There is a way that **seems right** to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Prov 14:12, NIV)
 - "All a man's ways **seem right** to him, but the LORD weighs the heart." (Prov 21:2)
 - Some have used the word "Blindspot" to describe this human condition. A Blindspot is something that is true about us that we either cannot see at all, or don't see very clearly.
 - If we will do 2 Things regularly, we can overcome this self-deception in our writing.
 - Accept that this is true—that it's a fact—and work harder at trying to discover what your blindspots are.

- Recognize that others see our blindspots, often very effectively, and seek out their input in a humble way.
- The Reality of “Blindspots” are why we need Editors involved in our writing.
 - WORD OF CAUTION to those who are considering Self-publishing as a viable alternative traditional publishing...DON'T skip the step of hiring a qualified, reputable editor before “going public.”
 - You need help, not for what you see, but for all the things you don't see. Those are the things that will sink your book.
- If you're aim is the TRADITIONAL Publishing model, realized this...you must become an editor before you will get an editor (actually, before you even get a good agent).
- They don't have the time to work with a “diamond in the rough.” It's not enough that you're a “pretty good writer with even greater potential.”
- The plight of agents and editors today is this: So many manuscripts, so little time.
 - They get up to 150 submissions A MONTH and don't get paid a dime for reading them. If they spent just 30 minutes reviewing each one, it would take them 25 hours a week.
 - So they don't. They skim through these submissions, looking for the 5-6 that really stand out, and probably will only offer to represent 1-2 of them. The rest get rejection letters.

More on “the part readers tend to skip.”

- Agents and Editors are readers, too.
 - What do you suppose they do if your first chapter has “skipping parts?”
 - What if the first chapter doesn't, but they start showing up as they read on?
- On the flipside (the positive side)...what do you think they do when a book has no skipping parts?
 - They keep reading...and reading...then ask for more (that's what you want).

- They are looking for a book that will cause them to have the same reaction they know readers everywhere want to have...*a book they can't put down!*
- This is why it's *critical* for us to learn how to Self-Edit, especially how to recognize the Parts Readers Skip.
- Here's a little Research Tip (especially for you who write historical) – Most of your research is for you, not them.
 - For readers, 90% of it is bla-bla-bla.
 - In fiction, research is a spice not a main ingredient.

Recognizing Where and When to Snip (and a little about Why)

- “Descriptions? We don't need no stinking descriptions.”
 - Well, we need some, just not too much. As I've already said, today's reader watches way more than they read (an impatient bunch). So don't describe things everyone already sees in their head.
 - Regarding the Setting...think movie scenes. A setup paragraph (or two) at the most, then dive in.
 - Release more details in tiny doses as the scene moves forward, or in dialogue from things the characters say (but be careful it doesn't sound artificial).
 - Regarding the Characters themselves:
 - Old way – every time you introduce a new character, take a paragraph or two to tell us what they look like.
 - New way – don't do that, anymore (a definite skipping part).
 - A sentence or two, here and there at most, as part of a character's thoughts, or work it in small doses during dialog.
- Showing vs Telling
 - Again, think movie scenes. In movies, you don't have some narrator off to the side interrupting the action with clever observations.
 - RUE – Resist the Urge to Explain (imagine intelligent people are buying your books, who don't need everything explained to them).
- “You gotta get good at Dialog,” he said.

- Make your characters sound like real people saying real things people might really say. Not like proper British nobility or bad actors in B-movies.
- I've stopped reading books early on, just because of unrealistic dialog (and so will agents and editors).
- Read your dialog out loud (or let someone else read it back to you out loud).
- He said/she said....works for me.
 - Don't use "creative" speaker attributions; this is not the place for creative writing. ("Don't go," he fumed. "I love you," she gushed)
 - 95% of the time "said" is all you need. If only 2 characters in the scene, can usually do away with these, too.
 - Use "beats" as often as possible. Ex: Jim opened the door. "Anyone in here?"

Some great books to recommend on this Topic:

- Self-Editing for Fiction Writers – Renni Browne and Dave King
- Write Tight – William Brohaugh
- Revision and Self-Editing – James Scott Bell

A Closing Tip – Instructions for Test Readers or Critique Partners

- Our worst enemy once we think our manuscript is done is not our critics; it's us, and our craving for compliments.
- What I did:
 - Picked a handful of trusted people who chain-read fiction.
 - Asked them to use both a pen and a yellow marker (or the electronic equivalent).
 - Pleaded with them to write or mark the following:
 - Any place you either skipped or were tempted to skip.
 - Anything that slowed the story down or bored you.
 - Any place you had to read more than once to understand.
 - Any dialog that sounded phony or artificial (like bad actors talking).
 - Any ways the ending left you feeling frustrated.

- They will see things as they read, and they will have constructive/negative things to say. It's up to you to convince them you **really** want and need to hear it.