

Self-Editing 101

Summary: Give your writing shape and professional polish! Join Susan Forest from the Calgary Association of Freelance Editors for a dynamic workshop on revision and editing.

"Good writing is contagious: you catch it by reading good writing."

Why self-edit?

It takes many ingredients to make Burger King great but the secret ingredient is our people.

a woman without her man is nothing

Where does Self-Editing Fit in the Writing Process?

Idea, development, drafts, revision, self-editing, external editing, formatting, publication

Revision

Non-fiction; essay, formal letter:

Thesis: what do you want to say? Put it succinctly into one sentence or paragraph

Argument: What arguments will you use to make your point?

Evidence: what facts support each argument?

Fiction:

Thesis: what do you want to say? Not stated directly, but you need to know it.

Argument: What characters' situations (problems, obstacles, motivations) illustrate your point?

Evidence: What scenes dramatize the character's struggle?

Self-Editing: Words and Sentences

How to Start

Read the text aloud.

to someone else; change margins, print copy

Note where you stumble

ABC

Keep a checklist

ABC: Accuracy: Have you said what you want to say? Is your information there?

ABC: Brevity: "The best style is the style you don't notice." Somerset Maugham

ABC: Clarity: The most important.

Characters declare conclusions: Dell's face went from white to red in an instant. **He was no doubt mad, and Kelly had no intention of angering him further.**

Explaining too much: He peeked through the blinds **to see who was inside the room.**

Point of View Flab: Thought, Felt, Heard, Saw, Noticed

Gentrifying words: "I never write 'metropolis' for seven cents when I can write 'city' and get paid the same." Mark Twain

Hedging: Seemed, sort of, kind of, perhaps, a bit, started

Said bookisms Whispered, Cried, Shouted, Snorted, Spat, Ejaculated

Repeating words: Sighed, Stood, Eyes, Odd

Redundancy: Rise up – If something rises, it's going up; Dash quickly – To dash is to do it quickly; Absolutely certain; Combined together; Clearly apparent; Appointed as Fall down; Exact same; Respond back; Skip over

Adverbs: "The road to hell is paved with adverbs." Stephen King

Adjectives: The big, tall giant

Gerunds Words that end in "ing." "He was sitting at the table" is stronger as: "He sat at the table."

Weak verbs: The past perfect tense and its evil facilitator, the word, "had," will always rob a scene of its vital immediacy. We came to a decision — We decided

Dangling Modifier/Absolute Phrase Powering down the court, the basketball popped out of his hands. She sang about ballet shoes and tutus, the sun going down.

Passive construction "If you can add "by zombies" after the verb and the sentence makes sense, you have used the passive voice." Rebecca Johnson: "She was killed (by zombies)." "Zombies killed (by zombies) her."

William Safire's Rules for Writing

1. Do not put statements in the negative form.

2. Remember to never split an infinitive.
3. It is incumbent on one to avoid archaisms.
4. The passive voice should never be used.
5. Proofread carefully to see if you words out.
6. If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
7. Never use a long word when a diminutive one will do.
8. Unqualified superlatives are the worst of all.
9. A writer must not shift your point of view.
10. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
11. Don't overuse exclamation marks!!
12. Avoid trendy locutions that sound flaky.
13. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
14. Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.

Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.

Racing her horse through the park, she skipped into the restroom to wash her face.

16. Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixing metaphors.
17. Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.
18. Always pick on the correct idiom.
19. The adverb always follows the verb.
20. Last but not least, avoid cliches like the plague.

(Source: The New York Times)

Self-Editing: Technique

“Typos and bad grammar are like shabby clothes. The story may be great, but few notice.”

Tense: Pick one. Default for most modern fiction: past tense, but present tense is also acceptable.
Default for most non-fiction (eg: essay, business letter): present tense

Spelling: “i before e except after c, and when sounding like "a" as in neighbour and weigh or on weekends and holidays or all throughout May, and you'll always be wrong no matter what you say.”

Brian Reagan

Homonymms

I have a spelling checker.

It came with my pea sea.

It plane lee marks four my revue

Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your sure reel glad two no.
Its vary polished in it's weigh.
My checker tolled me sew

Punctuation: Canadian or American spelling? Numbers spelled out up to twenty. Don't use misspellings for dialect.

Dialogue

“This is a presentation,” he said.

He said, “This is a presentation.”

“This,” he said, “Is a presentation.

“This is a presentation.” He pointed to the screen.

“This is a presentation.”

Punctuation: Apostrophes Possessives: ownership: John’s car; the girls’ car. Contractions: joining two words: Can not = can’t. It's its, stupid.

Punctuation: Colon Signals something is coming: A list (The people were: Sam, George, and Frank); An important idea

Punctuation: Semicolons: Joins two complete sentences: "You have a green car; green cars are the best." Not used with a conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet): "I have a blue car, but I don't like blue cars." As a super-comma, in lists: I drove my car through Calgary, Alberta; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Toronto, Ontario.

Commas: "To my parents, Sophie and Andrew" has a different meaning from "To my parents, Sophie, and Andrew."

Comma Splices Two sentences joined by a comma, such as: "He ate lunch, he had a nap." Read your work aloud. Where your voice stops, put a period, not a comma.

Commas, Hyphen, dash, parentheses Yikes, that was fast. Yikes -- that was fast. George, my boss, ate last. George -- my boss -- ate last. George (my boss) ate last. The boy, running down the street, yelled to me. The boy -- running down the street -- yelled to me. The boy (running down the street) yelled to me.

Seeking Editorial help Because you are too familiar with your own work, find someone who is skilled and is not afraid of hurting your feelings. Remember: you are the author

Format:

Nonfiction Usually uses block paragraphing (no indentation, and a space between paragraphs):
Business letter, Essay, Report (often uses headings)

Fiction Check publishers' websites. Paragraphs are indented, with no space between each; Text is double-spaced, 12-point font (Courier, Times New Roman often preferred); write on a single side of the page. Use 1" margins.

Resources

Rand, Ken, The Ten Percent Solution

Strunk, William, and White, EB, The Elements of Style

University of Chicago Press, Chicago Manual of Style (for non-fiction)

Exercises

Revision

Cats never demand that you play with them or take them for walks. Cats are better than dogs. Cats spend hours washing themselves, and they always bury their droppings. They are independent, they are fun to play with, and they keep themselves clean. Cats love to play with simple things like string or the light emitted by a laser pointer.

Words:

He has come to the conclusion that felines have unrivaled perfection and are better than dopehead dogs. "They are not dependent," he chortled. He was delighted when he said it. They are fun to have played with, and somehow to always keep themselves delightfully clean. A cat-lover, he is!! Cute, cuddly, lovable, delightful cats never demand that you play with them or take them for walks. I can see that cats love to often play happily with simple things like string or, flicking over the walls and furniture like a hyperactive hummingbird, try to be playing with the light emitted by a laser pointer. Hours are spent by cats washing themselves, grooming themselves and licking themselves in order to keep themselves scrubbed clean, and they always their droppings.

Technique

"Cats are better than dogs,"
he said.

"I do na think so." I point to the dog traveling at my heal.

He disagreed, "They are: independant, theyre fun to play with; and they keep themselves clean."

My dog protects me and my neighbours, so I told him he was wrong. "Cats never demand (that you play with them)", he pointed out, "or take them for walks?"

"I like to play wit' me dog's. I 'ave 2 of them."

"Cats love to play -- with simple things like string; wool or the light emitted by a laser pointer." He kept arguing, even though I made it clear its inconcievable that a dog that was superior to a cat. "Cats spend hours washing themselves, they always bury their droppings."