



JANICE THOMPSON, AUTHOR

# Turn On Your Self-Editor

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 0 Comments



*Many modern novels have a beginning, a muddle and an end.* – **Philip Larkin**

I'm an imaginative soul. Because I'm so creative, I often miss things—like typos, grammatical errors, and so on. I've learned not to stop in the middle of the writing experience to edit. It's too stifling. However, there is a time and a place to edit after

the free-writing is done and the foundation of the story is laid. I like to go through this process in a more detailed way just before I turn the book in to my acquisitions editor.

That's why I created a "final pass check-list." It gives me permission to turn OFF my creativity and turn ON my self-editor. Going through this checklist makes the acquisitions editor's job much easier. And the copy-editor will be pleased with my efforts when he/she gets ready to go through the document with a red ink pen.

*There is no great writing, only great rewriting.* – **Justice Brandeis**

I usually do several "passes" on a book before what I call "the final pass." A good friend of mine, who happens to be multi-published in a variety of genres, does twenty-seven passes on a book before it goes to the editor. Twenty-seven! (Wow!) I'm pretty sure she would agree with the quote below:

*Writing is rewriting! The willingness to revise, excise, even decimate great chunks of a first draft distinguishes writers from wannabes. Authors are those who do it well. Hemingway's conclusion to A Farewell to Arms required thirty-nine drafts. Hemingway missed the deadline and was pressed to explain the problem. "Getting the words right," he replied. ([Self-Editing for Publication](#))*

Why is it so important for the published author to present the editor with a clean manuscript? Easy. As we discussed in the last lesson, you want to give her the best possible manuscript because it makes her job easier. She's the one who's going to take the fall with the publishing board, (the higher-ups at the publishing company) if this book flops. So, she's particularly interested in making sure you've got all your ducks in a row. And speaking of those ducks...

# The Final Pass

Here are some things you should do/look for on your final pass-through. Many of these can be incorporated as you go along, but some will have to wait until you're done.

## 1. Read it aloud.

I catch all sorts of typos and grammatical errors when I take the time to do this. And these days, if I don't feel like reading aloud, I'll run my books through a text reader. There's something about hearing the words that raises all sorts of red flags.

## 2. Check your verb choices.

Stick with active verbs as much as you are able. 3. Check for sensory elements. You want the reader to see it, taste it, feel it, smell it and hear it.

## 4. Check for run-on sentences.

It might be time to trim things down a bit!

## 5. Kill off adverbs (-ly words).

You can do a search of the document to find these.

## 6. Check structure/length of paragraphs.

The pacing of your story depends, at least in part, on the length of your paragraphs. In a literary piece, longer paragraphs might work. But in a fast-paced story, shorter, choppy paragraphs work best.

## **7. Check names for consistency.**

If she's Sue on page two, she'd better be Sue on page 222.

## **8. Word count.**

It important to keep track of your word count because publishers are looking for specific book lengths.

## **9. Double-check your "hook" (opening line/paragraph).**

Your opening line should be powerful and effective.

## **10. Check your timeline.**

Make sure the story flows in the correct order.

## **11. Eliminate prepositional phrases.**

You are probably using these without even realizing it.

## **12. Cut the flab.**

If you need to trim back on your word count, kill off the unnecessary flabby bits.

## **13. Check for beginning, middle and end.**

Every story needs an effective beginning, middle, and end.

## **14. Does your story arc come full-circle?**

Bring it around!

## **15. Check for symbolism.**

This is a lovely way to give your story depth.

## **16. Kill off clichés.**

They bug editors like the plague.

## **17. Get rid of repetitious words.**

Do you have pet words? (I do!)

## **18. Check for ebb and flow.**

Draw your reader in with highs and lows.

## **19. Check your plot-line.**

Have you added the necessary twists and turns?

## **20. Get someone else to read your manuscript.**

Ask someone who will be honest, but not cruel.

## **21. Show, Don't Tell!**

Keep things active, not passive!

## **22. Check dialogue vs. narrative.**

There should be a lovely balance of the two.

## **23. Use appropriate character traits.**

Mannerisms, speech, clothing, hobbies, etc.

## **24. Make sure the characters' ages are clear.**

Variety in ages is good, so make it clear.

## **25. Run spell check.**

Duh.

## **26. Use grammar check.**

You can check for grammatical errors this way.

## **27. Check for good vs. evil.**

Every story needs good guys and bad guys.

## **28. Reach a stopping point.**

Editing could go on forever. There could always be a word in need of tweaking or a phrase in need of striking. But at some point, you must say, "Okay. This is it. The book is done." After all, when the book sells, several editors will go through it again, and you'll have yet another opportunity (perhaps months from now) to do this all over again.

## **The Copy Editor**

Much of what the copy editor does is listed above. So, if you take care of these things for her, she will thank you. She's also looking for a well-constructed timeline of

your story, so consider preparing that in advance so that she has it in hand as she begins the editing process.

See how easy it is to work hand in hand with your editor? What a fantastic team you will make. And when you've got great teamwork, you have the possibility for more and more books to come. Happy editing, everyone.

## **RECOMMENDED READING:**

*On Writing Well* By William Zinser

*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Renni Browne and Dave King

*The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr., & E. B. White

*The Elements of Grammar* by Margaret Shertzer

*Words on Target* by Sue Nichols



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