



# ADD POWER TO YOUR SELF-EDITING

## Why should I edit my work?

Once I have a first draft, then the actual real work for me begins, because then I can begin to see the novel as a whole and see what needs work. I do tons of rewriting; it's where a book becomes a book. *Gillian Flynn*

First, set your manuscript aside. When you pick it up again, you will see it with fresh eyes.



While your story is resting, answer these questions:

- What is the theme or premise? Does it carry throughout the story?
- Who are your core characters? Are they introduced in the beginning?
- What is your opening image?
- What is the inciting incident? Does it happen close to the beginning?
- What emotions and goals drive your Main Character through the story?
- Does your protagonist have a weakness, and your antagonist have a reason for being bad?
- Did you hit all the plot points or beats?

If you are missing any of these, plan on how to write them in.

After a week or two of rest, it's time to edit your manuscript.



First is a high-level view of your story. As you read your manuscript, look for the following items:

- Does your story start at the right place? Stories start when the action starts.
- Does the story flow have good pacing? Cut out what impedes the flow and strengthen where the pace slows.
- Are there scenes without settings or settings with too many details?
- Note who is in the scene, who is not, and what their positions and actions are so everything is consistent and logical.
- Does the dialogue have purpose, show conflict, create tension, advance the story, and reveal more about the character?
- Is there emotion and tension in every scene to drive the story forward?
- Show instead of telling what the characters are feeling by internal sensations, body language, and actions.
- Is there any head-hopping?
- Delete scenes and chapters that add little or nothing to the flow of the story.
- Delete info dumps by blending the information into the narrative in small bits, using just enough to help the reader visualize settings or characters or to create tension.
- Rewrite or adjust your manuscript to include all the changes determined by the questions listed in the previous section.

The broad overview of your story will help you tighten the story's structure and message. Use your experience as a reader to shape your story into something your readers won't be able to put down.



Now it's time for a close-up look at your manuscript. Delete, rearrange, rewrite.

Be heartless in your editing. As Stephen King said, "Kill your darlings." Edit with a reader's eye and make your manuscript new, fresh, and powerful. Start by deleting these mistakes writers often make in the first draft:

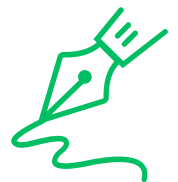
- Delete clichés and replace them with something fresh, or twist the cliché to make it new or unusual.
- Delete echoes (words repeated in close proximity) and replace them with synonyms or reword the sentence.
- Delete passive writing, be-verbs (is, are, were, was, am, be, being, been), and rewrite sentences that start with *There* or *It*.
- Watch the punctuation and spellings throughout. The colorful zigzags are there to help you.

Following is a list of the most common overused words and phrases. Do a search for them throughout your manuscript and eliminate, rewrite, or rephrase as many as possible. Space is left in the table to personalize it with your own redundant words and phrases.

that	just	always	stand up	sit down
even	really	so	all	always
my/her/his own	sort of	kind of	start to	begin/began to
though	although	next	both	often
very	some	maybe	well	suddenly
now	actually	many	a lot	probably
certainly	then	would	could	it
this	those	them	that	things
there	bile rose	fire in chest	breathed	sighed
the next day	hand through hair	rubbed chin	rolled eyes	crossed arms

Eliminating the baggage will make your story lighter and flow faster, keeping your readers engaged.

You're getting close to being done. Add the fine points to make your story shine.



Rework the elements that draw the reader along, push the plot, and make your characters come to life.

- Rework the first sentence so that it has a great hook.
- Do the same for the first paragraph. It should set the tone and reveal the theme of the story, the time, the place, the main character(s), and journey the reader is about embark upon.
- Does each chapter end with something unresolved or unanswered?

- Is there enough emotion in your story to show how the plot is impacting the characters in body and mind?
- Are your settings clear enough for the reader to visualize where the characters are?
- Strengthen word choices so they convey emotion as well as actions.
- Is every question and mystery resolved by the end of the book?

Read your manuscript again as if you were reading it for the first time.



Imagine yourself as an agent. Is your book ready for critique?

- Have you answered all the questions at the beginning of this worksheet?
- Are internal thoughts, dialogue, emotion, action, and settings blended together well so that your reader is transformed into the story?

If the answers to the last two questions are yes, then your manuscript is ready for others to see. Beta readers will help you refine the story in case you overlooked plot holes or missed tying up all the loose ends. After the beta readers are done and you've addressed their concerns, a professional editor will take it to its final form.



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