Self-Editing Checklist

Dear Author,

You've completed your first draft and are ready for self-editing, but where do you start?

I highly recommend walking away from your manuscript for at least a month in order to refresh your perspective and ability to catch more details that need fixing or enhancing. I also want to mention that self-editing in no way replaces professional editing. The reality is you are too close to your own work to fully edit it yourself. You *will* miss details, no matter how good of a writer you are and no matter how many times you read through your manuscript. After all, even editors hire other editors for their own writing materials (yep, I hired someone else to proofread my own book *Horse Cents*)!

But by beginning with self-editing, you will push your book to new heights and save money on professional editing in the long run. By making your editor's job easier and allowing them to focus on things other than the obvious plot hole or missing period, you're narrowing the scope of work and time required of them.

It's also worth noting that it is impossible to focus on everything at once, so during this process, you are going to perform several rounds of self-editing, focusing on different elements each time.

For more information on self-editing, be sure to read my Tips for writers article titled Self-Editing Checklist.

Your editor,

Mandi Summit
Red Quill Editorial LLC

P.S.: When you're done writing, Let's Discuss Your Manuscript and secure your spot on Red Quill Editorial's calendar!

Self-Editing Checklist

LARGER ELEMENTS

- ☐ Narrative Arc
    - ☐ Is there a clear beginning, middle, and end?
    - ☐ Is the central conflict clear?
    - ☐ Are the stakes raised as the story progresses?

- ☐ Plot Holes
    - ☐ Does everything follow through to a satisfactory conclusion?
    - ☐ Are there any major inconsistencies with the plot?
    - ☐ Is the worldbuilding consistent?

- ☐ Character Development
    - ☐ Are the characters relatable and believable?
    - ☐ Do the key characters all have depth of backstory, personalities, motivations, aspirations, etc.?
    - ☐ Are the character profiles woven in rather than an info dump?
    - ☐ Is there enough conflict?

- ☐ Character Arc
    - ☐ Does the protagonist grow or change in any way throughout the course of the story?
    - ☐ What does the protagonist want most in life?
    - ☐ What is holding them back from achieving this?
    - ☐ Is what they want the same as what they need?

- ☐ Proper Pacing
    - ☐ Does the story share necessary information and still maintain the reader's interest?
    - ☐ Is there any unnecessary filler that can be removed?
    - ☐ Are the scenes solid?

- ☐ Are the stakes for the central conflict raised as the story progresses?
- ☐ Are the lengths of the sentences and paragraphs varied?
- ☐ Do sentence structures and beginnings vary?
- ☐ Are there any subplots to keep the narrative full and interesting?
- ☐ Is there mostly active voice vs. passive voice?

☐ Consistency
- ☐ Do any details change throughout the story?
- ☐ Is the timeline presented in a logical order?
- ☐ Is the narrative voice consistent?
- ☐ Does the point of view remain consistent?
- ☐ Does the tense change during the story?
- ☐ Have facts been checked?

MID-LEVEL ELEMENTS
☐ Telling vs. Showing
- ☐ Is the reader experiencing most everything firsthand?
- ☐ Are said bookisms used sparingly? (intoned, hissed, inquired, lamented, etc.)
- ☐ Are strong verbs used more often than adverbs? (very, really, definitely, obviously, etc.)
- ☐ Are you showing the emotion through body language, action, and dialogue instead of telling it in the dialogue tag? (He said adamantly, boldly, threateningly, gushingly, questioningly, dismissively, etc.)
- ☐ Are there any cliches that should be removed?

☐ Filler words
- ☐ Are filler words used sparingly? (just, felt, realized, really, very, kind of, and then, like, a lot, etc.)
- ☐ Is there any repetition that can be removed?

☐ Filter words
- ☐ Are filter words used? (saw, heard, listened, smelled, felt, watched, looked, knew, decided, wondered, realized, etc.)

- [ ] Could your story benefit from removing these and writing it directly in your POV character's voice instead (first- or third-person limited POV)?

- [ ] Organic Dialogue
    - [ ] Read all dialogue out loud to ensure it sounds natural.
    - [ ] Does each character have a unique voice?
    - [ ] Are names overused?
    - [ ] Do characters tell each other things they should already know?
    - [ ] Are there any lengthy monologues?
    - [ ] Are there any confusing paragraph breaks or is it clear who is saying what?
    - [ ] Are said bookisms used sparingly?
    - [ ] Are dialogue tags and anchors intermixed to break up a repetitive feel and show how the characters are reacting?
    - [ ] Is something summarized in the narrative that would be more interesting in dialogue form instead?

SMALLER ELEMENTS

- [ ] Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation
    - [ ] Check for errors.
    - [ ] Are words spelled correctly?
    - [ ] Does every sentence have proper concluding punctuation?
    - [ ] Is dialogue placed in quotations, including closing quotations?
    - [ ] Are commas used too much? Not enough?
    - [ ] Are proper nouns capitalized?
    - [ ] Are the right words used rather than their homonyms?
    - [ ] Are there any dangling modifiers?