

Shattered Vessels - Editors Report - Sample - Developmental Editing

Editor: Gary Smailes

Completed: Add the date completion

Understanding Your Feedback

Thank you for trusting in my feedback. I have provided professional feedback since 2007, and this report is a short reflection of what you can expect from a full edit.

This feedback **is not a full edit** but is a fair representation of the type of editorial support you will receive in the final edit. Since this is a short extract of your book, I have yet to assess the overall narrative structure, which would be considered in the full edit. The focus is on sentence structure and apparent developmental issues. However, I have still approached the revision intending to provide a frank and honest assessment.

In addition to this editor's report, you will also find the edited manuscript containing two types of feedback: **comments** and **tracked changes**.

Comments

The comments will appear on the right-hand side of the manuscript. You will be able to remove this comment if required; you are also able to add your thoughts to the comments. Many authors find this is an excellent way to fine-tune the rewriting process as they allow you to reflect on the editorial assessment within your manuscript.

While the comments in your sample manuscript are often extensive, the comments will be more developed in the full edit and add greater depth to the overall feedback.

Comments support the thoughts and themes developed in the editor's report. They allow the editor to highlight localized examples and provide 'in situ' feedback. In addition, comments can indicate wider structural issues.

You will often find that problems highlighted in the editor's report will be further developed with real-life examples in the manuscript.

Tracked Changes

Tracked changes are like magic. Once they are turned on, they record everything that happens to your manuscript. You then can go in and 'accept' or 'reject' the changes as you see fit.

The way the tracked changes appear on your machine will vary depending on your machine and software setup. Typically, they will show the original text removed in red and the new text replacing it in black. However, depending on your settings, this will sometimes be the case. For example, in manuscripts requiring a large number of alterations, it is common for an editor to 'turn off' the original text and only show the changes.

If you are having problems seeing the tracked changes, the first place to look is your settings; the two important elements are: 'simple markup' and 'all markup'. If using Word, I suggest you look in the 'review' section of the ribbon at the top of your manuscript and ensure that you have set the markup to 'all markup'. This way, you can see all the possible changes.

Your Editor - Gary Smailes

I am an editor with over twenty years experience in the publishing industry ranging from a lowly researcher, to an editor and even an agented, traditional publisher author. I am also is the founder of BubbleCow and has more than fifteen years of direct editing experience. During this time, I have edited more than 500 novels and worked closely with thousands of writers from many genres.

I have a deep knowledge of the publishing industry, beginning my career working for the world-famous Horrible Histories series, first as a researcher but later as an editor and writer. I have worked as an editorial consultant with a wide range of publishers across the industry.

Editorial Feedback

I wanted to start by outlining some of the things I enjoyed about your extract.

Your writing show a voice that is not only distinct but also compellingly well-crafted. It's clear that you've honed your voice to align with the narrative. Pacing is the heartbeat of a narrative. You've managed the flow of events and information, this careful balance of action, dialogue, and exposition maintains momentum. The characters in your story are not merely names on a page; they are vivid, complex beings with desires, fears, and motivations that readers can relate to or be intrigued by. It's evident that you possess a keen understanding of your genre and the expectations of your target readership. Your manuscript not only fits within its genre but does so in a way that feels both familiar and innovative.

This said, there are a few issues that need to be addressed...

In the opening chapter, there's a need for greater clarity to ensure readers are immediately drawn into the story without confusion. Alongside this, embracing the principle of "show, don't tell" will enhance the narrative's vividness and emotional impact. By demonstrating characters' emotions and the story's events through actions and sensory details, rather than relying on exposition, readers can engage more deeply with the narrative. Effective description plays a

crucial role in this regard, not only in portraying characters and settings but also in enriching the story's world. Descriptive passages should be crafted to immerse the reader fully, utilizing imagery and specific details that evoke a strong sense of place and personality. Additionally, there's an opportunity to streamline the prose by avoiding adverbs, which often weaken the impact of verbs and lead to redundancy. Choosing stronger, more precise verbs enhances the writing's power and clarity, allowing for a more immersive and compelling reading experience. Addressing these areas—clarifying the opening chapter, showing rather than telling, enriching descriptions, and minimizing adverbs—will significantly elevate the manuscript, making it more engaging and resonant for the reader.

Addressing Confusion in the Opening Chapter

The opening chapter of a book sets the tone for the entire narrative, providing the first impression that can either captivate or confuse readers. When an opening chapter jumps between two timelines without clear differentiation or context, it risks disorienting the audience right from the start. This is particularly problematic when readers are introduced to a new story world and are simultaneously trying to understand the plot, characters, and setting.

Challenges of Dual Timelines in the Opening Chapter

- **Confusion Over Clarity:** The initial chapter's jumping between timelines can be very confusing for readers. Without a solid grounding in one timeline, introducing another can fragment their attention and impede their understanding of the story's foundation.
- **Reader Workload:** Readers are forced to work harder to piece together the narrative. The opening chapter should ideally draw readers into the story, not task them with deciphering the timeline. This additional effort can detract from the immersive experience and may discourage further reading.
- **Suboptimal First Impression:** As the entry point into the story, the opening chapter is crucial for hooking the reader. A confusing start is not ideal, as it can weaken the reader's engagement and interest in continuing the story.

Recommended Approach: Splitting the Chapter

To address the confusion caused by the dual timelines in the opening chapter, a more effective approach would be to separate the timelines into distinct sections. This can be achieved by splitting the content into two chapters or by designating one of the timelines as a prologue.

- **Prologue for Setting the Scene:** Utilizing a prologue to describe arriving in France can serve as a powerful tool to set the scene and provide historical or contextual background before diving into the main narrative. This approach allows the reader to become acclimated to one setting or time period before introducing another.

- **Clear Chapter Structure:** Following the prologue, the first chapter can then focus on the second timeline, providing a clear, linear progression that eases the reader into the story's world. This structure enhances readability and allows for a smoother narrative flow.

Show, Don't Tell

The principle of "show, not tell" is a cornerstone of effective writing, especially in fiction. It encourages writers to present story elements in a way that allows readers to experience the story through actions, words, thoughts, senses, and feelings rather than through the author's exposition and description. This approach fosters a more immersive and engaging reading experience, drawing readers into the narrative and allowing them to connect more deeply with the characters and setting.

Rationale Behind "Show, Not Tell"

The rationale for showing rather than telling is rooted in the way stories engage the reader's imagination and emotions. By showing, writers activate the reader's senses and invite them to interpret and feel the story, rather than simply processing information provided by the author. This makes the narrative more vivid and the characters' experiences more relatable. It also empowers readers to draw their own conclusions and form a personal connection with the story, which can make the reading experience more memorable and impactful.

Examples of "Show, Not Tell"

Telling: John was very angry.

Showing: John's fists clenched so tightly that his knuckles turned white. He took a deep, shaky breath, trying to steady his racing heart as he glared at the shattered vase on the floor.

Rationale: The showing example uses physical actions (clenched fists, white knuckles) and internal sensations (shaky breath, racing heart) to convey John's anger. This allows readers to visualize his emotional state and physical reaction, creating a more vivid and engaging scene.

Telling: Sarah was nervous about her job interview.

Showing: Sarah tapped her foot rapidly under the table, her gaze darting around the room. She rehearsed her answers under her breath, barely hearing the receptionist call her name.

Rationale: This example uses Sarah's body language (tapping foot, darting gaze) and behavior (rehearsing answers) to show her nervousness. It draws readers into her experience, making them feel her tension and apprehension.

Telling: The sunset was beautiful.

Showing: The sky melted into a canvas of oranges, pinks, and purples, reflecting off the lake's surface in a symphony of colors. The world seemed to hold its breath as the day whispered goodbye.

Rationale: Instead of merely stating the sunset's beauty, this example paints a vivid picture of the scene, using sensory details and metaphorical language to evoke a strong visual and emotional response.

Implementing "Show, Not Tell"

To effectively implement "show, not tell," writers should focus on:

- **Sensory Details:** Use the five senses to create vivid scenes. Describe what characters see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.
- **Actions and Reactions:** Show characters' emotions through their actions, reactions, and interactions with others and the environment.
- **Internal Thoughts and Feelings:** Provide insight into what characters are thinking and feeling without stating it outright. Use internal monologue or physical sensations to reveal emotional states.
- **Specificity:** Use specific details and concrete imagery rather than abstract concepts to bring scenes and emotions to life.

By adopting the "show, not tell" approach, writers can create more immersive, engaging, and emotionally resonant stories that captivate readers and leave a lasting impact.

Use of Description

Description is a fundamental element of storytelling that serves multiple purposes: it enriches the narrative, enhances immersion, and supports world-building. Effective description engages the reader's senses, emotions, and imagination, allowing them to visualize the story's world and connect with its characters. Here are some guidelines on how to effectively use description in your writing:

Describing New Locations or Characters

- **Initial Introduction:** Every new location or character introduced in your story needs a description. This doesn't mean an exhaustive inventory of details but rather a vivid picture that captures the essence and distinguishes them from others. For characters, focus on key features or traits that hint at their personality or role in the story. For locations, highlight aspects that set the scene or mood.

Updating Descriptions

- **Reflect Changes:** If a character or setting undergoes significant changes, update your descriptions to reflect these developments. Changes in a character's appearance or emotional state, or alterations in a location's atmosphere or significance, should be mirrored in your descriptions, offering a dynamic view of your story's world.

Significance Dictates Depth

- **Allocate Description Based on Importance:** The more critical a character or location is to your story, the more description it warrants. Main characters and pivotal locations should be described more fully than those playing minor roles. This not only helps to prioritize information for the reader but also adds depth to the narrative's key elements.

Grounding Each Chapter

- **Start with Description:** Begin each chapter with a description to ground the reader in the scene. This sets the tone and context for the chapter, providing a clear image of where the events are taking place or who is involved. A well-crafted opening description can draw readers in, making them more invested in the unfolding story.

Description and World-Building

- **Crafting the World:** Description is instrumental in world-building. It paints the backdrop against which your story unfolds, turning abstract ideas into vivid, tangible settings. Through description, you can convey the history, culture, and atmosphere of your world, making it a living, breathing entity that readers can explore and experience. Use description to show how the world affects your characters and shapes their stories, making it an active element in your narrative.

Tips for Effective Description

1. **Engage the Senses:** Incorporate details that engage multiple senses to create a fuller, more immersive experience.
2. **Show, Don't Tell:** Use description to show what's happening or what a character is like, rather than simply telling the reader.
3. **Be Specific:** Use specific details to create a vivid picture. Generic descriptions fail to capture the imagination in the same way.
4. **Balance Is Key:** While description is essential, balance it with action and dialogue. Over-describing can slow the pace and dilute the narrative tension.
5. **Use Metaphors and Similes:** These can add depth and originality to your descriptions, making them more engaging and memorable.

Avoid Adverbs

Adverbs, often recognized by their "-ly" suffix, modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, ostensibly providing clarity or intensity to a sentence. However, their overuse can be a sign of weak verb choices or an overreliance on telling rather than showing. Understanding why to avoid adverbs and how to effectively minimize their use can significantly strengthen your writing.

Reasons to Minimize Adverb Use

1. **Strengthens Verbs:** Adverbs can act as crutches, supporting weak verbs that fail to convey the action vividly. Stronger verb choices eliminate the need for adverbs, offering clearer and more powerful descriptions. For example, replacing "walked slowly" with "ambled" or "sauntered" provides a more vivid picture.
2. **Shows Rather Than Tells:** Similar to the "show, not tell" principle, avoiding adverbs encourages showing how a character feels or acts through their actions and interactions. For instance, "She said loudly and angrily" can be shown through the character's actions or dialogue, such as slamming a book down before speaking.
3. **Reduces Redundancy:** Often, adverbs state what's already shown through the context, leading to unnecessary redundancy. If the dialogue or action clearly conveys the emotion or manner, adding an adverb is superfluous.
4. **Improves Clarity and Precision:** Adverbs can sometimes add ambiguity instead of clarity. Focusing on strong, precise verbs and concrete details makes the writing clearer and more engaging.
5. **Enhances Reader Engagement:** By avoiding adverbs, writers can craft more engaging and immersive experiences. Readers are invited to interpret the intensity and manner of actions and dialogue themselves, fostering a deeper connection to the material.

Examples Demonstrating Adverb Use vs. Avoidance

- **With Adverb:** He ran quickly.
- **Without Adverb:** He sprinted. *Rationale:* "Sprinted" is a more specific and vivid verb, eliminating the need for "quickly."
- **With Adverb:** She whispered softly.
- **Without Adverb:** She whispered. *Rationale:* Whispering inherently implies softness, making "softly" redundant.
- **With Adverb:** He looked at her angrily.
- **Without Adverb:** His eyebrows furrowed as he glared at her. *Rationale:* Describing physical actions offers a clearer picture of anger than the adverb "angrily."

Strategies for Avoiding Adverbs

- **Use Strong Verbs:** Select verbs that convey the action vividly and accurately, reducing the need for modification.
- **Rely on Context:** Allow the situation, dialogue, and characters' actions to convey mood, intensity, and manner.
- **Edit Ruthlessly:** In revision, challenge every adverb's presence. If it doesn't add significant value or clarity, remove it.
- **Expand Description:** Where necessary, replace adverbs with more detailed descriptions or actions that show rather than tell the intended effect.

Sentence-Level Issues

There were a few sentence-level issues, but nothing I would not have expected to see in a manuscript at this stage in the publishing process. I have corrected these and will do so in the full edit.

Paragraph Indentation

I noticed that the first paragraph of each chapter is indented, while the rest are flush with the left margin. In contrast to standard formatting guidelines, you have opted to indent the first paragraph. However, it is a common practice in publishing to have the first paragraph of each chapter flush left and the rest indented. This style choice maintains consistency and makes the manuscript more visually appealing to readers.

To implement this change, simply remove the indentation from the first paragraph of each chapter and ensure that all subsequent paragraphs have a consistent indentation. This will create a more polished look for your manuscript and align it with established formatting standards.

Use of Exclamation Marks

Throughout the manuscript, I noticed the frequent use of exclamation marks. While exclamation marks can effectively convey strong emotions or emphasis, overusing them can weaken their impact and may be unprofessional or overly dramatic. In addition, excessive use of exclamation marks can disrupt the flow of the narrative and be distracting to the reader.

To improve your manuscript's overall tone and readability, I recommend limiting the use of exclamation marks. Reserve them for moments of high emotional intensity or when it is crucial to emphasize a particular point. By being more selective with your use of exclamation marks, you can strengthen your narrative and create a more balanced and engaging reading experience.

To address this issue, review your manuscript and identify instances where exclamation marks can be replaced with periods or other punctuation marks. Rephrasing sentences to convey the intended emotion or emphasis through the choice of words and sentence structure rather than relying on exclamation marks. This will result in a more polished and professional manuscript.

Chapter Summary

In the full edit; I provide chapter-by-chapter feedback. This allows you to have a visual representation of your story, making any rewriting simpler. It also allows you to identify potential plot issues.

Chapter 1

This chapter sees a split timeline with the main character on the beach in a battle and in France prior to the conflict.

- My main issue is the split between the two timelines. I feel this needs additional consideration and discussion.