Bagman Blues 3 - Editors Report - Developmental Editing - BubbleCow

Editor: Gary Smailes

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Understanding Your Feedback

Before I launch into more detailed feedback, I thought I'd review how the edit has been structured.

You will have downloaded two files:
1. The edited manuscript.
2. The editor's report.

The first is your original manuscript but now contains detailed editorial notes. This is a Word document and contains both comments and tracked changes. If you don't use Word, don't worry; most modern word processing packages have the ability to 'read' Word manuscripts. Alternatively, you can download this excellent word processing software for free - [LibreOffice](). If you are having problems seeing your feedback, just let us know.

Before you dive into the edit, I think it will help if you understand the ethos behind BubbleCow's approach to providing feedback.

The approach is to provide clear and truthful feedback. If we see a problem, this will not only be highlighted. But at least one potential solution is provided. There are two types of feedback, those based on clear editorial best practices (e.g., showing, not telling) and those based on the editor's opinion. When a suggestion is based on opinion, it will be indicated. We see the edited manuscript's role in offering specific, actionable feedback on sentence/paragraph problems. You should be able to apply the suggestions made on a line-by-line basis without any real wider knowledge.

The role of the editor's report is to provide a wider overview of the editing process. This means that if we have made changes to the manuscript that require a deeper rationale, these have been outlined and explained in the report.

One way to consider the two documents is to see the report as the wider instructions and the manuscript as the practical application. You should be able to start each editing session by reading the editor's report before diving into the specific section of the manuscript.

Using 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.

The video below will give you a more in-depth view of tracked changes and comments: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUf-IxzXyVk

Edited Manuscript

When you first open the edited manuscript, you may feel overwhelmed by the number of alterations. This is normal.

The manuscript contains my tracked changes and comments explaining the rationale behind these changes. In some cases, I've re-written passages or removed whole sections, but where I've done so, I've sought to explain my thinking using comments. Where possible, I have also highlighted sections I feel work well.

The real power of tracked changes is that if you disagree with the comment or change, you can just 'reject' what I've said and carry on.

Whenever I've identified a persistent problem, I've stopped explaining any future changes within the comments and have just made the change instead. Where this is the case, I have written an explanation for my rationale behind the changes in the editor's report. You'll need to read the comments I've left and review the changes, accepting or rejecting them as you see fit.

Editor's Report

The editor's report should be read first and is designed to ease you into the editing process by providing an overview and explanation. The aim is for you to use the feedback in both the manuscript and this report as a means of formulating a plan to elevate your manuscript to the next level.

I've split the report into several sections...

Typographical and Stylistic Summary

You'll find a summary of your book's typographical and stylistic details, which lists things such as what form of English your book is written in, how you're writing out times, whether you're using the Oxford comma or not, etc. This section is useful as it collates information and is a future reference. It will also help you enforce a level of consistency in your book.

Strengths and Weaknesses

You'll find pointers that will give you an overview of what I think are the manuscript's key strengths and weaknesses. If they're turning up here, they are some of the manuscript's biggest and most persistent problems and will need addressing before any others. I explain the problem, how it is manifested in your book, and why it is a problem. I'll also suggest at least one possible solution.

Chapter Feedback

This section contains feedback specific to each chapter. The depth and detail of this feedback will vary depending on the issues encountered. This feedback is designed to be actionable but should also be read in conjugated with more general feedback and embedded notes in your manuscript.

Please note: I've approached your book from the point of view of a new reader. This means that I may comment early on but then change my mind. This should give you a good indication of how a reader will be responding to the story and any confusion they may have. It should also help you to see my thinking process. Feedback has indicated that this can be very helpful for some authors.

Summary

Please remember that all the comments and changes come from a place of support, not criticism. I want to make the book the best it can be, as you do. I'm not here to cast judgment or project my own preferences. My role is to help nudge your writing style toward a place that will create the best possible reading experience.

Our goal is to produce better books and better writers.

Finally, once you delve into the feedback, I'd suggest you read the notes and then take a day or two to absorb what I've suggested. If you disagree with any changes, that's fine, but please do take a little time to think them over before getting back to me. If, after this 'cooling-off period'

you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to email me at
gary@bubblecow.com.

Notes on the Edited Manuscript

Below is a list of general comments about your manuscript.

Please note that many of these changes have been made to help in the eBook conversion process. This process often involves using the original manuscript's formatting to help 'set' the formatting of the eBook. However, this can be problematic. I have, therefore, made some changes to help negate any potential future issues.

- I've run a basic spelling and grammar check. I've carefully made the alterations I felt were needed. This is not a proofread but will add some level of consistency to your book.
- I have replaced double spaces with single spaces. This was to eliminate any unwanted 'white space', which is often removed during the eBook conversion process.
- I've set the line spacing to 1.5 lines. This helps with readability.
- I've added page breaks at the end of chapters. This will help with digital conversion.
- Ellipses have been formatted as … (dot dot dot), not . . . (dot space dot space dot space).

Stylistic and Typographical Summary

Below is a list of changes that have been made to help with readability and add consistency.

Language

American English

Numeric Notation

Spell out whole numbers up to (and including) one hundred (e.g., zero, one, ten, ninety-six, 104). Spell out numbers that begin a sentence unless it begins with a year (e.g., "Twelve drummers," "The ten lords a-leaping," "2011's quota for off-season holiday references has been filled.").

Spell out ordinal numbers up to (and including) "hundredth" (e.g., second, sixty-first, 333rd, 1,024th).

If you're juggling a bunch of numbers within the same paragraph or series of paragraphs, be flexible with the number style if doing so will improve clarity and comprehension. For example, use one number style for items in one category and another style for another category: "I read four books with more than 400 pages, sixty books with more than 100 pages, and a hundred articles with less than 4 pages."

Speech Marks

Double for direct, single for reported.

Oxford Comma

No

Narrative Perspective

Third-person Omniscient.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This section contains specific feedback about elements of your book that are immediately actionable. I have strived not only to explain any problems I have encountered but also to provide at least one solution you can apply to your book.

There were several elements I wanted you to consider further. One of these is to avoid the use of 'then' in your writing. You are have an over-reliance on adverbs and if you are able to remove and replace these you will create a more engaging writing style. I also wanted you to think more carefully about moving dialogue out of the narrative summary and writing it out in full.

Avoid Then

Crafting compelling prose often requires a careful balance between clarity and elegance. Overreliance on certain words, especially temporal connectors like "then," can subtly undermine both. Let's explore why moderating the use of "then" in your writing can significantly enhance your narrative's quality.

1. Encourages Show, Don't Tell

"Then" is primarily used to indicate what happens next in a sequence of events. While it's sometimes necessary for clarity, its overuse can lead to a list-like narration of actions, which can be less engaging for the reader. For example, consider the difference between these two descriptions:

- **With "then":** "He opened the door, then stepped inside. Then he turned on the light and then saw the note on the table."
- **Without "then":** "He opened the door and stepped inside. Turning on the light, he noticed a note on the table."

The second version invites readers into the scene, allowing them to visualize the actions without the story being explicitly dictated to them. It's a more subtle and refined way of guiding the reader through the narrative, embodying the "show, don't tell" principle.

2. Improves Sentence Variety and Rhythm

Variety in sentence structure is crucial for keeping readers engaged. Overusing "then" can make your writing feel monotonous and predictable. It locks you into a specific, often simplistic, sentence construction that can rob your prose of its rhythm and dynamism.

By reducing reliance on "then," you force yourself to explore different ways of linking actions and events. This exploration can lead to more varied and interesting sentence structures that better capture your narrative's ebb and flow, enhancing the overall reading experience.

3. Strengthens Cause and Effect Relationships

"Then" suggests a chronological sequence but doesn't inherently imply causation. Sometimes, what's more, important than the order of events is how those events are related. By choosing constructions that emphasize cause and effect, you can make your narrative more compelling and insightful.

For instance, instead of saying "He shouted at the dog, then it ran away," you could say "The dog ran away because he shouted at it." This not only eliminates the "then" but also clarifies the relationship between the actions, making the sequence more meaningful.

4. Promotes Tighter, More Efficient Writing

Every word in your prose should serve a purpose. "Then" is often superfluous, as the order of sentences can already imply sequence. By eliminating unnecessary instances of "then," you can make your writing tighter and more efficient, which is especially important in maintaining pace and tension in your narrative.

Use of Adverbs

The use of adverbs in writing is a topic of considerable debate among authors and editors. While not inherently problematic, the overuse or misuse of adverbs can inadvertently weaken prose, dilute impact, and impede the reader's engagement with the text. Let's explore why judicious use of adverbs is recommended and how this approach can elevate your writing.

1. Adverbs Can Undermine "Show, Don't Tell"

Adverbs often serve to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, typically expressing manner, degree, frequency, or intensity. For instance, an adverb might tell us that a character speaks

"loudly" or acts "quickly." However, this directness can be a double-edged sword. Reliance on adverbs can lead writers to tell readers how a character feels or acts, rather than showing it through actions or dialogue. Consider the difference between "She angrily slammed the door" and "She slammed the door with enough force to rattle the frame." The latter paints a more vivid picture, allowing readers to infer the character's anger through her actions.

2. Adverbs Can Weaken Verbs

Strong writing often relies on precise, vivid verbs to convey action. When adverbs modify verbs, they can dilute the verb's impact, making the action feel less immediate or significant. For example, "ran quickly" could be replaced with "sprinted," a choice that offers more specificity and power. By selecting more precise verbs, writers can reduce their reliance on adverbs, streamlining their prose and enhancing its clarity and effectiveness.

3. Adverbs Can Signal Weak Adjectives or Verbs

The frequent use of adverbs might indicate that the chosen adjectives or verbs are not strong enough to stand on their own. If you find yourself using adverbs to bolster a verb or adjective, it may be worth considering whether a more precise or impactful word choice could eliminate the need for modification. For instance, instead of saying "very big," one might say "enormous" or "colossal," which conveys the intended scale more directly and powerfully.

4. Adverbs and Redundancy

Sometimes adverbs are used redundantly, adding nothing to the sentence's meaning. Phrases like "whispered softly" or "screamed loudly" can be trimmed to "whispered" or "screamed" without losing any of their effectiveness. In these cases, the adverb only serves to clutter the text, slowing the narrative pace and distracting the reader.

Write Dialogue out in full

In crafting a compelling narrative, the distinction between when to incorporate dialogue in full and when to summarize it within the narrative plays a crucial role in pacing, character development, and reader engagement. Full dialogue and narrative summary each have their places within a story, serving different purposes and contributing to the overall texture of your writing. Let's delve into where and why you should opt for writing dialogue in full rather than relegating it to narrative summary.

1. Key Character Interactions

Crucial moments of interaction between characters, where their personalities, relationships, or pivotal plot points are revealed, should almost always be presented in full dialogue. These exchanges offer a direct insight into characters' thoughts, emotions, and motivations. For

instance, a confrontation that leads to a major plot twist or a heartfelt confession that deepens a relationship should be fully depicted to allow the reader to experience the moment's intensity and significance firsthand.

2. Revealing Character

Dialogue is a powerful tool for character development. The way a character speaks—word choice, tone, dialectIn crafting a compelling narrative, the distinction between when to incorporate dialogue in full and when to summarize it within the narrative plays a crucial role in pacing, character development, and reader engagement. Full dialogue and narrative summary each have their places within a story, serving different purposes and contributing to the overall texture of your writing. Let's delve into where and why you should opt for writing dialogue in full rather than relegating it to narrative summary.

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2. Revealing Character
   Dialogue is a powerful tool for character development. The way a character speaks—word choice, tone, dialect, and even what they choose to omit—can reveal more about them than pages of descriptive narrative. Important moments that showcase a character's growth, internal conflict, or unique personality should be detailed through dialogue, as this direct expression provides a vivid and immediate sense of who they are.

3. Enhancing the Story's Pace
   Full dialogue can significantly affect a story's pace, adding dynamism and tension to scenes that might otherwise lag. Fast-paced exchanges, with short, sharp lines of dialogue, can create a sense of urgency and momentum, propelling the story forward. In contrast, narrative summary can slow down the pace, offering readers a breather in between intense scenes. Use full dialogue to inject energy and maintain reader engagement during crucial moments.

4. Building Atmosphere and Setting
   Dialogue can also be instrumental in building atmosphere and conveying the setting. The way characters interact with each other and their environment, the slang they use, and the subjects they discuss can immerse readers in the world you've created. Significant scenes where the setting plays a pivotal role in the characters' experiences or the story's mood should feature dialogue that brings the scene to life, allowing the reader to "hear" and "see" the world through the characters' eyes and ears.

5. Conveying Subtext
    Moments filled with subtext, where what's unsaid is as important as the spoken words, demand full dialogue. These instances, where characters might be speaking about one thing but meaning another, rely on the nuanced interplay of words, pauses, and implied meanings that summary cannot capture. Full dialogue allows for the subtle cues and silences between lines to speak volumes, enriching the narrative with layers of meaning., and even what they choose to omit—can reveal more about them than pages of descriptive narrative. Important moments that showcase a character's growth, internal conflict, or unique personality should be detailed through dialogue, as this direct expression provides a vivid and immediate sense of who they are.

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Chapter Feedback

This section contains specific feedback about your chapters. This feedback is in addition to the Specific Feedback.

Chapter 7

Lapdog in hotel. Receptionist. Godfrey. Seated at table. Gangsters turn up. Lackey stabbed.

- This is a good chapter. I would urge you to try and use the word 'then' less often. I have included an explanation above that explains why this is the best way to move forward.
- I noticed that you have a tendency to revert to adverbs when describing characters. While this is not 'wrong' it should be avoided where possible. I have added an extended explanation above.
- I love the slow and deliberate pace of this chapter, it is led by the dialogue and allows the reader to fully engage as it unfolds.

Chapter 8

Billy-Billy and Tony in apartment.

- This is a good chapter, there are a few sentence level issues, but nothing significant. I have corrected these. There's also a section at the end where you have moved the conversation into the narrative summary, you need to write this out in full.

Chapter 9

Freddy in car. VIP room. Stranger turns up. Donnie. Fight. Man at door.

- There are occasions when you have the dialogue in the narrative summary. Where possible, you need to write this out in full. This way the reader will be more engaged.
- You need to make sure that you have layered in a more detailed description of the store. This will allow the reader to picture the scene more clearly in their mind's eye.
- I am not sure the last half of this chapter works. You have the fight and then switch to Freddy in the store. Its ok but a little confusing. I have added a break to help indicate to the reader that they are moving scene. Another alternative would be to have the whole scene written from the same viewpoint. This would be more consistent. I don't think there's a 'correct' way from these two choices, but I think you need to pick one of them.