

# YOUR BOOK'S BEST FRIEND

Self-Editing Guide &  
Workbook





You've done it! You finished the first (or maybe 87th) draft of your book. Now what? Well, first, celebrate. Finishing even a single draft of a book is a huge accomplishment. But now you must commit to seeing your manuscript through multiple revisions and drafts. Publishing your book, whether you take the traditional or indie route, is a big commitment. It's time to buy the rings, say the "I dos," and get ready to start a long-term relationship.

Writing is a unique art form that allows you to interact with the public in an intimate and singular way. No one writes the perfect book in one shot. You must open yourself up to making changes, listening to feedback, and understanding critiques if you want to reach readers in a meaningful way.

This workbook can help push you and your writing to the next level. It is packed with tips and tricks to help you prepare your manuscript for what is ahead. These steps apply whether you are self-publishing or taking the traditional route.



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Aka: The Manuscript Revision Process

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# TAKE A BREAK

Taking a break is one of the most important steps when it comes to writing a book. It can be a struggle to step away from your book after the first, second, or even third draft, but it is imperative that you do. As hard as it can be to step away, the benefits are completely worth it.

First of all, let's discuss what we mean by taking a break. We don't mean taking a break to cook dinner for all your little minions or watching an episode of the trashiest reality TV show you can think of. What we mean is stepping away from your manuscript . . . for a long time. Close the document. Close all your tabs of research. And do not return for at least two weeks. You might even find that you need to leave your manuscript for a year. Don't limit your break; only come back to your book when you find that you are excited again, and when you feel that enough time has passed that you can look at it anew.

When writing, you become extremely invested in your work, and you're so immersed in that world that it can be hard to notice blatant problems. Fresh eyes are a huge benefit of stepping away. You can come back to your manuscript as if you were a stranger reading it for the first time. You'll be able to see many of those pesky plot holes that were invisible to you before.

The most important reason to take a break is to regain the enthusiasm you once had for your book. It's possible you've been living in your book's world for so long that it's become a slog. You might think writing it was all a waste of time because you hate every word, or that you've poured your blood, sweat, and tears into the book and don't want to see it ever again. But coming back to it after a break can bring a renewed sense of pride. You might read a passage and think, "Did I actually write that? I love that!", and your vigor will be renewed.

Whether this is your first draft; the draft you've sent to critique partners (CPs), or your (lovely) editor; or your final draft before self-publication or querying, remember that taking a break is a thoughtful action.



# SELF-EDITING

To get the most out of working with a CP, beta reader, or other editors, you'll want to first correct all the problems in your manuscript that you know about on your own. Otherwise, the next reviewers who look at it may only tell you what you already know, rather than pushing your book further and showing you new ideas.

These next steps and workbook pages will help take you as far as possible with self-editing. That way, when you reach out to others for reviews, your manuscript will be in the best shape possible.

## **Read on a Separate Device**

My big tip for beginning edits is to read your work on a separate device. Print it out, read it on your e-reader, or use programs that limit the changes you can make. This will trick you into reading your own words as a first-time reader would. Your work will feel new, which will allow you to see problems that you normally would brush past.



# SELF-EDITING

## Reverse Outline

Next, create a reverse outline. This is a great tool to help guide your edits going forward. As you read each scene, list out your character's goals, the conflict they come up against, the internal stakes, and how those stakes further the main plot.

As you go, you may find chunks of text that aren't really scenes at all. They don't further your plot or contain conflict and growth. Instead, they're exposition or info dumps. Figure out what you are trying to get across in these passages and come up with a plan to apply those ideas and details elsewhere into other scenes that forward the plot.

Click here to create your own [reverse outline](#).



# SELF-EDITING

## Big-Picture Edits

Big-picture edits encompass many different topics. They range from story arc and pacing all the way to character building and deep point of view (POV). In this section, we will break down three of the edits that you should start with. There are always more edits to make, and this list is by no means comprehensive, but hopefully it will get you headed in the right direction.





# SELF-EDITING

## **Big-Picture Edits: Goal, Motivation, Conflict (GMC)**

What are your main character's goals, motivations, and conflicts? Each character (particularly the main characters, but don't forget about the antagonists and important side characters) need to have all three of these.

Your character's goal is what they want in life, their motivations are what happened in their past that's left them with a lack of something, and the conflicts are what gets in their way.

For example, if your character's goal is to be in a band, maybe their motivation is to craft a family that they've been missing since their parents died. And maybe the conflicts they've faced in the past are people telling them that they're not good enough or don't deserve a family.

Each main character should have both internal and external goals, motivations, and conflicts (GMCs). And each scene should be threaded with their main GMCs as well as their temporary, scene-specific ones. Once you know your characters' GMCs, you'll be able to figure out exactly how they will react in a scene.

If the band-wannabe character is confronted by a band with members who love each other like a family, will that make them feel hopeful or despondent? Maybe both!

As you work on your reverse outline, make note of how your characters' GMCs come into play and how they further the story. If a character responds according to their GMCs, their actions will never feel out of the blue.





# SELF-EDITING

## Big-Picture Edits: Character Building

Creating believable characters that readers connect with is imperative to a successful book. But how do you create those characters?

First, you'll need each character to have their own goals, motivations, and conflicts (GMCs). Find the details of [GMC](#) here . Next, they will need to grow over the course of the book. Stagnant characters aren't believable. People grow and change throughout their lives. How does your plot and conflict change your characters? What are their personal journeys and arcs? How are they different at the end of the book versus the beginning?

Creating relatable characters can seem complicated, but what it really comes down to is flaws. What are your characters' flaws, and how do those flaws come into play? Avoid common "adorable" traits that masquerade as flaws, such as a clumsy heroine. True flaws will have a negative impact on a character's likability, no matter how small. Nothing turns a reader off more than a perfect character who always makes the right choices. Make your characters deeply flawed, but with enough redeeming qualities to balance those flaws out.

And finally, what is your character's voice? The term voice is one of those ineffable things that trips writers up, but it all boils down to personality. How does your character think and speak based on their personality and traits? For example, do they swear a lot because they anger easily, or because they like creative expression?

Use the character sheets to help you flesh out your characters. And don't forget to give your antagonists and side characters the same treatment. The key to a believable antagonist is a relatable one who has redeeming qualities as well as flaws.

Click here to [build your characters](#).



# SELF-EDITING

## Big-Picture Edits: Worldbuilding

Worldbuilding is an important part of every book, even if it is based on the real world. How the world and your characters interact with each other is integral to creating a place that your readers want to be in. Worldbuilding affects your characters' belief systems and their understanding of that world; it shapes their choices, their circumstances, and their goals. The worldbuilding worksheets will help you create a believable world for your characters to interact in.

Click here to complete the [worldbuilding exercise](#).





# SELF-EDITING

## Nitty-Gritty Edits

After working through all your big-picture edits, it's time to get into the small changes. This stage is when you can allow yourself to tweak that one sentence that has been bothering you for weeks. Now is when you can play with dialogue and change all instances of "purple parrot" to "aubergine parrot."

To get you started, here is a list of **filler/filter words** that can slow down your pacing and create distance between your characters and your readers.

Note that you should not fully extinguish these words from your manuscript. They are important and have their place. However, taking a long look at your writing and limiting their usage will improve your work's readability.

Just	Really
Like	So
Feel	Actually
Wonder	Even
Very	Kind of
Sort of	Some
That	Basically
Definitely	Things
Stuff	



# CRITIQUE PARTNERS (CPS) AND BETA READERS

Authors are often confused about the difference between critique partners and beta readers. Let's break it down here.

Critique partners (CPs) are fellow writers who exchange manuscripts and provide feedback for one another. The feedback you receive from your CPs will help you grow as a writer, and you'll also grow your skills in providing feedback to others. Find CPs who share your genre and who you get along with.

Beta readers do exactly what you might expect. They are readers who read from the perspective of your audience. They are not writers, and they don't have the toolset to tell you how to improve, but they will hold your manuscript up to readers' expectations. They are great for making sure you are fulfilling those needs, and they will point out what they loved or disliked.

Both CPs and beta readers will help you grow as a writer!





# DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

Developmental editors focus on content. They focus on the big picture and can help you mold the malleable bits of your novel into a story with solid structure. They will look at plot holes, inconsistencies, flow, character development, plot development, hooks, pacing, structure, voice, dialogue . . . and the list goes on! If you are worried that your characters are flat and predictable, developmental editors will help you bring them to life. If you can't seem to come up with a satisfying conclusion, they will tie up all your loose ends and quench your readers' thirst. A developmental editor will bring your story to light, making sure that certain items aren't stuck in your head instead of on the page.

Your manuscript can go through a single or multiple rounds of developmental editing depending on what will help you the most.

## Note:

This step means you may work with a freelance developmental editor before self-publishing or pursuing traditional publication. This step is always optional, as it costs money. Do not take this step if you can't afford to. However, an editor is the greatest tool to help you become a better author and create a better book. Editors understand the inner workings of a book, and they are great teachers. Not every writer is a good teacher, but every editor is.

If you are pursuing **self-publication**, working with an editor is an important step to produce a quality book that readers will recommend to others and return to read more of. Both developmental editing and copyediting are necessary to make a polished book.

If you are going the **traditional publishing** route, you don't have to hire an editor. However, many authors find that working with an editor gives them the tools they need to write even better. But please note that hiring an editor doesn't guarantee you'll be able to find an agent. Too many factors go into an agent's acquisitions, from marketability to plain-old personal connection.



# DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

## **Build Your Team:**

### Finding the Right Editor for You

1. Look for someone credible. Yes, it is obvious, but it still needs to be said. Check credible organizations in your area; many of them have lists of freelance editors. Make sure to look at resumes and recommendations. You don't want a beta reader masquerading as an editor.

2. Look for someone with experience in your genre. Every editor has inclinations to a certain type of genre. You want to make sure that the editor has experience with your specific type of writing. On a basic level, if you write romance, you'll want your editor to enjoy that type of book. But there is more to it than that. Every genre has different tropes and expectations. You want to make sure the editor knows what the reader expects and knows when you are subverting expectations or feeding into them.

3. Look for someone you respect. Your editor is about to break your heart. When you get your manuscript back and it is full of red marks, you may want to cry, scream, or hug the computer (depending on how you feel about the edits). If you don't respect your editor, you'll be tempted to throw their edits in the trash (or hit delete). You are paying them for their advice, so make sure you will trust it.





# DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING

## Finding the Right Editor for You (Continued)

4. Look for someone you like. This seems obvious, too, right? But it is not. Yes, you want someone professional—someone with opinions you respect—but you also want someone you can talk to. Your editor is part of your team. You want to make sure you feel comfortable talking with them and asking them follow-up questions. There needs to be a good rapport.

5. One final tip: Don't be afraid to ask questions and speak up! If you are on a deadline, ask about your editor's availability. If you are unsure of them, ask for a sample edit of a few pages or a chapter of your book. Many editors will do this. Do you want them to pay special attention to a certain section? If so, tell them.





# APPLY THE EDITOR'S FEEDBACK

## How to Process Feedback

Now that you have your feedback from your editor, CPs, or betas, what do you do? It can become a little overwhelming to try to apply advice to your manuscript when you've got pages of notes and comments.

First of all, approach both praise and constructive criticism with curiosity. Open yourself up to the advice and feedback the editors give. Remember, no manuscript is perfect, and no advice is perfect; it is all about how you question both and find a way to meld them together. Approach the feedback with the intent to understand it, not to agree or disagree.

Next, ask questions! If you need clarification, there is no harm in asking for it. Your editor won't mind. Understanding the intent behind feedback is key. If you don't think an edit works for a piece, ask yourself why that is, and then ask the editor why they gave you that advice. The intent and reasoning are just as important as the advice itself. Often times, understanding why they made that suggestion will help the both of you brainstorm a solution.

Be prepared to have an emotional reaction to the feedback you receive, and have a plan for how to deal with it. Your writing is your baby, your darling. Whenever anyone gives constructive criticism, it can feel like just plain old criticism. But remember the benefits of constructive feedback. No author is an island. Every good book you have ever read has had multiple eyes on it, and those eyes helped the author tweak their work to make it even better.





# APPLY THE EDITOR'S FEEDBACK

## **How to Process Feedback (Continued)**

Next, take some time and mull over the feedback. Don't dive right in and start deleting huge swaths of writing just because an editor says to get to the inciting incident quickly. Instead, take time to figure out how to best apply the feedback and what it really means for your piece. Come up with a plan of action. Outline what changes you will make and how you will make them.

If you disagree with the feedback, try to figure out why. You might not like the suggestion, but is there a kernel of truth within it that will improve your manuscript? There may be something about it that hits home, even if the details of the suggestion don't work for you.

Above all, remember that editors want to help you create the best book possible. They are invested in fostering authors and their manuscripts. They do not want to change your vision; they want to bring your vision to readers. The job of an editor is to give you the tools to create your vision, help you shape your book, and give you the support to publish it. Try to keep all that in mind if the feedback gets difficult and feels impossible. Using this feedback will help you both improve your manuscript and become a stronger writer overall.



# COPYEDITING

**By Laura Dennison**

If you're looking to hire a copyeditor, wait until you're completely confident with the content of your draft, since any major rewrites would require another round of copyediting. That's because copyeditors scour manuscripts for any issues related to spelling, grammar, usage, style, and consistency. These changes, which are mostly objective in nature, are standard to any copyedit and are sometimes referred to as a light copyedit. A heavy copyedit, on the other hand, wades into more subjective waters, and includes a check on any awkward sentences, repetitive phrasing, or wordy paragraphs.

Yes, computers can point out errors our humanoid eyes tend to easily gloss over, but they're prone to their own careless mistakes. Did Jen definitely stare into the solar eclipse, or did she defiantly stare into it? Is Leo studying public healthcare at college in the fall, or something a little more . . . specific? Simply running the spelling and grammar check on your Word processor is just a start.



# COPYEDITING

## **(Continued)**

Copyediting also requires a human touch when it comes to maintaining consistency, and when a novel spans hundreds of pages, that's no small tasks. Consistency applies to both details about your characters and their world and the rules of grammar and style.

The truth is, whether Clyde gets an X-ray or an x-ray of his broken wrist is less important than whether the X remains capitalized for the length of the novel. At best, these types of inconsistencies annoy the reader. At worst, they can make your writing seem sloppy or unprofessional. Keep in mind that, especially with creative writing, these guidelines are just that—guidelines. They're not meant to be a set of rigid rules replacing common sense. After all, that's what computerized grammar checkers are for!

Beyond the universal, it's important to keep track of all things unique to your novel. To stay organized, copyeditors use a style sheet. This document should include information such as the names and correct spellings of your characters, any unique locations, and any other relevant details that the editor should be on the lookout for, such as notes on characters' physical appearances.



# RESOURCES

## Structure, Plot, and Pacing

### ***Structuring Your Novel* by K.M. Weiland**

Three act structure, scene structure, and scenes and sequels

- Other choices: *Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks; *Save the Cat Writes a Novel* by Jessica Brody

### ***Romancing the Beat* by Gwen Hayes**

Short book specifically on pacing in a romance--can be used for main plot or romantic subplots

### ***Story Genius* by Lisa Cron**

For how to make plot and character work together. The Scene Card exercise is especially helpful. This one is more helpful to writers who already have a decent understanding of plot and character arcs

## Style, Flow, and General Writing Tips

### ***The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White**

For line-level issues of flow and style, as well as some light copyediting

### ***Understanding Show Don't Tell* by Janice Hardy**

Helps writers understand when to show, when to tell, and how to distinguish between them



# RESOURCES

## Characters and Voice

***The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression (Second Edition)* by Becca Puglisi and Angela Ackerman**

Great resource for expressing emotions in various manners. Helps with voice and deep POV. Less of a guide and more of a reference material.

***Creating Character Arcs* by K.M. Weiland**

Different kinds of character arcs with tons of examples

***Voice* by James Scott Bell**

Short book that helps writers understand and hone their narrative and character voices



# RESOURCES

## POV (Deep POV in particular)

***The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression (Second Edition)* by Becca Puglisi and Angela Ackerman**

Great resource for expressing emotions in various manners. Helps with voice and deep POV. Less of a guide and more of a reference material.

**[Point of View: First, Second, and Third Person POV](#) by Reedsy**

Article with basic explanations of the different types of POV as well as ample examples.

**[Everything You Need to Know About Writing a 3rd-Person POV](#) by K.M. Weiland**

An article that delves into the different types of 3rd-person POV. It gives examples and uses visuals. It discusses the pros and cons of each type, and warns of common pitfalls.

**[Third-Person Limited: Analyzing Fiction's Most Flexible Point of View](#) by Peter Mountford for Writer's Digest**

An article that discusses the pros and flexibility of using third-person POVs. Ample examples.



# RESOURCES

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

### [Writing the Other](#) -

Website with written posts and webinars, plus they do live classes on a pretty regular basis. Also consider reading their book:

- ***Writing the Other* by Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward**

For understanding the work and research that goes into writing characters with backgrounds different than the writer's.

### [Conscious Style Guide](#) -

Fabulous, albeit large online resource full of tons of articles and posts that break down potentially harmful language and conscious word choices. Great for when writing a marginalization that is not part of your own identity.

- [Conscious Style Guide Newsletter](#) available that is chockfull of resources.

### [Salt & Sage Books](#) -

Blog and books focused on providing guides for different marginalizations, written by sensitivity readers.

### [Writing with Color's guide to skin tones](#) -

Classic post that breaks down how to write about any skin tone without using harmful stereotypes or fetishizing.

### [Disability Language Thesaurus](#) -

Great article/thesaurus for potentially ableist language that can be harmful to the disabled community. Gives alternate word choices that aren't harmful and a great thesaurus for being specific/accurate.

### [Saima Sensitivity Reads: Resources](#) -

Amazing resource that is continually updated to include different ways/places to find sensitivity readers.



# CHARACTER SHEET

Name:

Description



Goals



Motivations



Conflicts



Sketch

Flaws



Personality/Voice Characteristics



Growth Throughout the Story



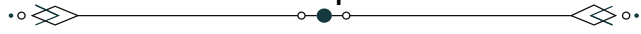




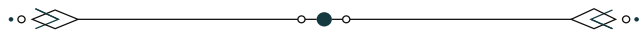
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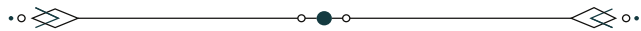
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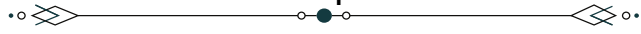




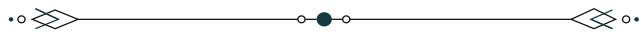
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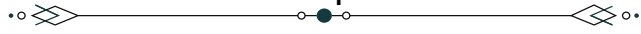




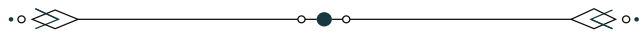
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Growth Throughout the Story





# WORLDBUILDING

**What kind of setting are we in? (For example, a city, small town, or the wilderness?) Create a detailed description here:**

**How does the landscape and geography influence who your character is and the governing systems in place? (That is, does a river bring in a lot of trade and a complex economic system? Are we lost in a desert desperate to go to the big city?):**

**What are the economics of your world, particularly in relation to your various characters? Are some of them tight on money or overtly wealthy?:**



# WORLDBUILDING

**What is the governing system in your world? What is the hierarchy? How does it influence your character's world view? (That is, is it a democracy where your characters have a voice? Is it a dictatorship where they don't? Is it run by elders who are respected or derided?):**

**Is there a religious system in place? What is it and how does it influence your characters' understanding of the world and its belief system?:**



# WORLDBUILDING

**Is there a magic system? What is it and how does it influence your characters' understanding of the world and their belief systems? Do your characters have magic? How does that magic work? Where does the magic come from? Is there a hierarchy to the magic? Are there checks and balances? What are the limitations?:**

**What other systems or details are important in your world? How does interacting with those systems or details shape your characters, their choices, and their circumstances?:**



# REVERSE OUTLINE

**Chapter:**

Word Count:

POV Character:

Summary:

How does the chapter further the main plot?:

What are the goals of the characters in this chapter?:

External Conflict:

Internal Conflict:



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POV Character:

Summary:

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# NOTES

# KEEP IN TOUCH!

I want to hear all about your progress.

IG: [@BookLightEditorial](#)

Bluesky: [@FromCarly](#)



[WWW.BOOKLIGHTEDITORIAL.COM](http://WWW.BOOKLIGHTEDITORIAL.COM)