

## **HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MANUSCRIPT BY EDITING BACKWARDS**

If you are an Indie author, and don't have the benefit of a publisher then you have to appreciate that, love it or hate it, editing is a very important part of the publishing process and is up there at the top of the list along with cover design. Usually, most of us will probably out-source this job, as there is no doubt, that a professional eye can see flaws in a manuscript that we the author can so easily miss. Especially when you've been reading and re-reading your story for some months. And also, because the brain has this funny knack of flitting over words without us noticing. Including the missing ones.

### ***There is an Importance in Self-Editing***

Unfortunately, though, good professional editing isn't cheap. It is therefore always worth doing what you can yourself before looking for outside help. The less time the professional has to spend tidying up a manuscript, the less cost it will be to you, the author-publisher.

And if you have an Achilles heel, such as punctuation, well that's when you need special attention. Many new and developing writers have a tendency to sprinkle commas around like salt. As a reviewer and editor of manuscripts I've seen lots of comma's in my time which needed removing.

New authors usually fall to temptation and leave all the punctuation stuff to the professional. Being new to the craft some believe the actual writing is a more important way to use their time. Personally, I don't mind because when I review/edit I still look at the punctuation as well as the other aspects of the manuscript. It's a personal choice for the writer. So, enter editing backwards.

### ***First, Edit Forwards***

Sounds daft to say that but of course you should edit forwards first. You should plot the story arc on a graph, indicating the points of tension and crisis. Doing so ensures that momentum is building; and that the 'lulls' give space for the reader to breath. Check for consistency – both within the book itself and, if writing a series, across all the books. One thing I do advice most strongly is that you read the entire manuscript out loud in as short a time as possible; say over the space of a couple of days. Doing this will highlight anything which doesn't sound right. It also shows you if the story is flowing or not. Privacy and a sound-proof room are quite important. Try using the bedroom or the bathroom.

And now is when the backwards edit comes into play; after all that fairly standard stuff.

### ***So How does Editing Backwards Work***

What you do is start at the very end of the manuscript, and read the pages in reverse order, working from top to bottom of each page... I hear a big gasp and the question Why?

By taking each page out of context it allows you to focus tightly on the individual words and phrases which are often masked by the flow of the story.

So, as a professional reviewer and editor, aside from punctuation, what else do you think I am looking for?

□ Overuse. We all have ‘pet’ words or phrases which are repeated in our writing without our even noticing. Over the years I have compiled quite a list. However, with the advent of Word’s ‘find and replace’ feature, replacing them has made the job much easier. When mentoring new and developing writers I advise them to try to not to use any word or phrase (e.g. other, than, and, but, a, the, etc) more than 10 times in an entire book of say 100k. Also, be aware of obscure and/or flowery alternatives!

□ ‘Non’ words. These are words which can be removed without their loss affecting the sense of the sentence, but which, if left in, will lessen the impact and probably slow the pace down. ‘Just’ is one of the usual suspects. It is surprising how many ‘non’ words can be ‘culled’ from a manuscript to good effect – I once took approximately 5,000 out of 107 k words in one pass.

I hope this short Blog about editing helps you.

In the meantime; Backwards editing may sound weird and a little uncomfortable, but once you get into the swing of it, you will be surprised what an invaluable tool, and how surprisingly easy it is, for both cleaning and tightening up a manuscript. Go on, try it and see.

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