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Discussion:

Note that it pays to put the story on the shelf for days, weeks, or months before editing.

Types of Editing:

Content Editing: story structure, scene or character addition/deletion, different ending, etc.

Line Editing: cut/change sentences, rephrasing, wordchoices, etc.

Copyediting: punctuation, style, etc., conformation to a magazine's "house" rules.

Editing Passes:

Check for each of these in a single pass, combine two or more in a single pass if you think you can safely.

Fluidity: Be sure the writing doesn't break the dream-state of the story. Read through and ruthlessly mark anything that even remotely feels "wrong" or breaks you out of the dream world of the story.

Credibility: Be sure the story conforms to the reality of the story's universe. Have a source (can be your professional training/experience) for every fact that requires science (in the real meaning of the word).

Structure: Be sure the story's structure fits the story and that the structure is well-architected and effective. Be sure the story conforms to and validates against the story's architecture.

Character: Be sure the characters are believable and sufficiently developed. Be sure they're inner psychology is revealed to the reader at important points in the story. Be sure the characters are free agents and not puppets on your plot strings.

Precision: Be sure the story is self-sufficient and contains no superfluous material while fully filling out its architecture. Be sure there are not extraneous characters or scenes and that all the necessary characters and scenes are present.

Eliminate Miracles: Be sure that the only coincidences and unexpected powers, appearances, etc., are intended as part of the story's premise. Best of all, the only miracles should be the ones that the story is really about.

Exposition Cheats: Be sure there is no "exposition masquerading as dialogue". Be sure there is no telling where there can be showing instead.

Brevity: Be sure you don't use words that state the obvious or facts the reader knows in the context of the sentence. Find ways to restructure excessively long sentences or combine very short ones where length does not impact rhythm and meaning.

Appropriate Comedy: Make sure puns and comical moments are appropriate within the context they appear. A good example is, perhaps, Melville in Moby Dick where he says: "Alas, Flask was a butterless man." A pun in drama is right out.

Pace: Be sure poignant moments linger and routine moments move. You can slow pace by adding sensory details that focus and linger on the important thing/feeling. You can speed pace by glossing details or skipping some actions.

Clichés: Be sure you don't use clichés except where the cliché is the effect. Watch for phrases that aren't blatantly cliché but feel like clichés.

Body Awareness: Be sure you only state body language where necessary. Some body language is implied in a feeling, so it doesn't usually have to be stated. Some body language can only be done one way or by one part of the body, so that does not have to be described. Condense long sentences by using body language instead of fuller exposition.

Nuance: Make sure you don't come on too strong or too weak. Don't bludgeon the reader with something too strong, but don't be so subtle that the reader is left lost or confused. Find the elegant medium.

Names: Make sure you aren't overusing names in dialogue and that you are consistent naming characters throughout.

Verbs: Be sure to minimize helping verbs, such as "had" in past-perfect passages. You can switch to simple past tense once you've established the past-perfect. Be sure you use active verbs in place of *be*-verbs (is, are, was, were, being, be, am) whenever you can. If there is no past participle (usually involving a word ending in *-ed*), you can probably rephrase it in the active voice.

Self-editing Checklist

Shelf-time since last look: _____

Each of the following is a pass over the story. Combine passes only where you won't miss something.

- Fluidity:** *Must be first pass after shelf-time.* Simply read and mark reality intrusion.
- Credibility:** Mark passages where the facts don't seem to fit the story's reality.
- Structure:** Extract the story's structure and then verify it against the intended architecture.
- Character:** Mark where characters don't seem like real people or are puppets. Note somewhere characters that seem to simple.
- Precision:** Note where the story hasn't set up properly (events or characters). Mark superfluous material.
- Eliminate Miracles:** Mark any divine or karmic interventions or inexplicable coincidences.
- Exposition Cheats:** Mark any case where exposition is forced or insults the intelligence of characters.
- Brevity:** Mark any sentences that seem wordy or run-on.
- Appropriate Comedy:** Mark any out-of-place comedy such as puns or slapstick.
- Pace:** Mark any passages that feel choppy, take too long, or pass by too quickly.
- Clichés:** Mark anything that is or sounds cliché.
- Body Awareness:** Mark any passages with a lot of body language or where psychological state are not well expressed.
- Nuance:** Mark words or phrases that come on too strong or lead to confusion.
- Names:** Mark anywhere a name might be cut or where identity of a character is confused.
- Verbs:** Mark all passive and *be*-verbs.

Now, go back and fix all that. Then put it back on the shelf. Repeat until changes seem minor or start to oscillate, or you reach a deadline to submit.

NOTE: Always keep your favorite passages in the chum bucket and save your favorite editions of stories as the "author's cut" version.