

Editing

I just completed writing another novel, the fifth in the Wrong Side series. Completing the first draft of that novel was the easy part of writing. If you have a story in your head, just get it on paper or in the computer – however you write. Don't spent time correcting spelling, grammar, punctuation, confusing wording, and such. Once you have moved it from thought to writing, you can move to the next step – editing.

I like to write on the computer and let the story flow freely. Some writers need to make an outline of their story before starting to write. That is good, because you can write from any point in your outline and build your story in sections. You may be one of those who likes to put pen to paper to create your work, then put in on the computer. Does anyone still use an old-fashioned typewriter? I still have painful memories of composing college papers on one of those. If you use a computer, save your work often and back-up your work on the cloud, a memory stick, or something. I also print my draft pages and keep the pages in a ring binder.

The first step in editing is – let your work set and don't look at it for at least a month. Don't even think about it. Move on to other projects if they are bouncing around in your head.

The second step in editing is to read your draft after the waiting period. You will have fresh eyes that will see things that you simply could not see immediately after finishing your draft. Mistakes will jump out at you – spacing, spelling, punctuation, grammar, incomplete thoughts, and surprises! How did that get in there?

It will probably take several readings, but after you fix everything you can find and you are convinced that your work is finally perfect and mistake-free, then you are ready for the third step.

The third step is to find another writer or a friend with a critical eye for details – maybe a couple of friends – and ask them to read your polished draft. They may want to work off the computer or may want to see your work on paper where they can exercise their red-pen skills. While they may find some grammar or such mistakes, they are really looking at how your story flows and if there are any lack of clarity issues. Sentences and thoughts that seem obvious to you may need further explanation or have a completely different meaning to someone else. Maybe the entire general direction of the story or part of the story may need to change. Consider each and every comment and correction that is made of your work. But remember, they are suggestions. You need to decide if you want to make those changes to your work.

The last part of editing is reviewing the whole work and asking yourself, is this character really needed in this story? Is this section really essential to the overall story? Is this paragraph really needed? Is this sentence really needed? Can I say the same thing with fewer words? Are there better words to say the same thing? You need to keep what is essential to the story and shed those things which do not support and further your story line. This is the most difficult part of editing. Giving up the non-essentials, even though you are in love with them.

If you have scenes that you love but they just aren't supporting your story, save them in a file folder of orphan ideas. They can be dragged out, rewritten, and used in another story. If they are characters, they can be used in other stories. What you remove is not lost.

When you are sure that your story is fully edited and ready, get a couple of other opinions. If they are favorable, then you can think about all the other things you will need to do before publishing your work.

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