

The Manuscript Shredder's Novel Revision and Editing Checklist

Stage 1

- **Step 1: Take a break**
- **Step 2: Make a scene list with a 1- or 2-line description. (Skip if you have an outline.)**
- **Step 3: First pass**

Using your outline:

- Identify any scenes that do not move your plot forward and cut them. (These are usually world-building exposition and character-building scenes that don't have lasting consequences for the plot) Make a note of any important information in these scenes and make a plan to add it to another scene.
 - Identify any characters that do not move the plot forward. (These will likely be eliminated in the useless scene purge.) And consider combining secondary characters that serve the same purpose.
 - Identify any subplots that do not impact the main plot, consider cutting these. Again, make sure any important information is inserted into another scene.
 - Identify plot holes
 - Now make a short description of your character arc and check them for logical progression.
 - If you use the XXX trick, (typing XXX when you cannot remember a word or detail.) do a "find/replace" and fill in those missing vocabulary words.
-
- **Step 4: First rewrite: Go back through and fix those issues from the first pass.**
 - **Step 5: Second pass- Scene level edits**
 - Are all the scenes complete?
 - Do scenes end in the right place, or do they stretch on too long?
 - Is the pacing too fast? Too slow?
 - Do your scenes contain useless filler or chit-chat dialogue?
 - Are any scenes missing or out of order?
 - Does characterization follow a logical progression?
 - Are your character reactions consistent with his/her place in the character arc?
 - Make sure your secondary characters make appearances throughout the story.
 - Use spell-check to fix any spelling errors or incorrect words for clarity, otherwise, leave the grammar alone. Do not waste time reworking sentences or paragraphs at this stage, as you have not finalized which scenes will remain in the story.
 - **Step 6: alpha readers**

What's the difference between alpha readers and beta readers?

Alpha readers are the readers who read your book when it is still in its generation stages. These readers will give you feedback on overall structure, characterization, or world-building. Alpha readers focus on big-picture items. (If you're working with a professional editor, this stage is called a developmental edit, substantive edit, or manuscript evaluation.)

- **Step 7: Second rewrite** Using the feedback from your alpha readers, solidify your plot line and character arcs.

Stage 2

Now you are ready to look at the smaller details

- **Step 8: Third Pass Focus on the prose.**
 - Check your MRU's.
 - Eliminate unnecessary exposition
 - Eliminate unnecessary words or phrases. (And make sure you are not using commas to tack things into sentences where they don't belong.)
 - Eliminate unnecessary passive voice
 - Look for stronger verbs, etc. (Again, not all adverbs are bad. Use your best judgment)
 - Double check your sentence constructions. Look out for repetitive sentence starts, participle phrase abuse, or otherwise convoluted sentence structures.
 - Check for POV errors and author intrusion
 - Eliminate unintentional distancing: phrases like I felt, I thought, I saw, etc. (deep POV)
 - Eliminate consistency errors

- **Step 9: Beta Readers**

Don't get caught in an editing loop trying to please everyone. You will never succeed. A beta reader may not like your book. That's ok. If you got good feedback at the alpha stage, then you shouldn't need to make huge changes.

- Make any changes you agree with

You are ready to move to stage three. If you are working with a professional editor at this stage you will be getting a line edit.

Stage Three

Copy edits

- Spelling, punctuation, and grammar. If you are having trouble focusing on these tiny details, do this edit from the back to the front. By reading the novel backward, you are forced to look at each sentence individually, and you won't fall into the trap of just reading the novel.

After this edit is finished, you are ready to query. (Although, if you land an agent, then you will likely do this process over again with her.)

If you are planning to self-publish, you will need to prepare your manuscript for publication. (Which is a whole other checklist.)