

PERFECT! Hints for an Error-free Manuscript

Re-writing and self-editing has to be one of the most difficult parts of writing a book. While it's easy to be your own best (or worst) critic, it's harder to objectively read your own work looking for errors. And all kinds of errors occur in writing, from the obvious spelling errors to the missing word that you never notice. After all, you know what you meant to say! What follows are eleven suggestions to make the editing process easier and your book better.

1 - Create a Style Sheet for yourself. As you are writing and editing, make notes about the abbreviations you use, the names you need to double-check the spelling of, or anything else you want to remain consistent throughout the manuscript. Ask yourself how you want dates to be formatted, how you will deal with state names and numbers. Your Style Sheet should be easy for you to use. For some that means creating a form, for others it will be notes in an old notebook.

2 - Another thing to do early on in the writing or revising process is to make an outline of how you want your information or story to progress. Even if you have completed your first draft, it isn't too late to go back and create an outline. You may find that it cements what you've already discovered, or it will bring to light new ideas for your manuscripts.

3 - Make ample use of written resources. When you sit down to edit, keep a dictionary at your side - it's still one of the best books out there! You may also want to invest in a good thesaurus and a style manual like *The Gregg Reference Manual* by William Sabin. There are also numerous Internet sites that can assist you, starting with www.dictionary.com.

4 - The Spell Check and Grammar Check that came along with your computer are great tools, so long as you don't rely on them alone. Spell Check doesn't know all the latest jargon, nor does it know proper names. It also can't tell you if your word choice is correct. Grammar Check can sometimes tell you that you are using the incorrect word, but it also gets very cranky about issues of style. For example, sometimes a sentence fragment is just what you want, but your computer will try to convince you otherwise.

5 - When re-reading your book, pay special attention to homonyms - words that sound alike, but aren't the same. The most common of these are: it's and its; hear and here; and their, they're, and there. The only way to combat them is to read carefully. Whenever you find a word like this, stop and make sure that the word you have chosen is the word that you want to use. If you are unsure, check the dictionary.

6 - In addition to homonyms, be careful of how you use affect and effect. Even the best writers commonly misuse these two words. What do they mean? Check your dictionary! When in doubt, reword the sentence.

7 - Pronouns are great little words. Watch out, though, when overused, they can make a sentence clumsy and confusing. A pronoun always refers to the last noun or name used. Imagine you wrote the following: "Bob and Mary owned a better bed than Fred and Suzy. They paid \$1000 for it at a rummage sale." The pronoun "they" refers to Fred and Suzy, not Bob and Mary.

8 - Jargon can be an important part of how you get your point across, particularly in non-fiction and technical writing. But, is your audience as familiar with the jargon as you are? If they are, lucky you! If they aren't, provide your readers with a way to understand what you are saying. You can include a glossary, footnotes, or define the words within the text. You'll want to pick the method that fits with your writing style and the way you envision your book looking.

9 - Editing can be pretty tedious; there is no doubt about it. One way to really focus in on your writing and make editing more enjoyable is to read your manuscript aloud. Hokey as it may feel at first, you'll find that you can easily isolate sentences and paragraphs that are awkward. Whenever you stumble, mark the

paragraph for another read. If it reads awkwardly again, you may need to rework the section to make it flow more easily.

10 - Read it again (and again). Some people like to do a read through for homonym and word choice errors. Then they do a read through out loud, looking for awkward sections. A third read through is then done for flow and topic progression. Other authors like to do one all intensive read. However you chose to re-read your manuscript, it never hurts to look at it again.

11 - Finally, you'll want to find someone to read through the manuscript for you. Hiring an editor is a very personal choice and you should make sure you find someone you trust. Clearly outline to that person the parameters you wish to set. Do you just want grammar editing? Style editing? Do you want feedback on the progression of the text or no comments at all about the content? When you send the manuscript, keep a copy for yourself, just in case! Once the chosen editor completes their work, read the book again to make sure nothing has changed that you don't agree with. Remember, you name is on the book, not the editor's. They work for you!

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