

PRE-EDIT CHECKLIST

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1. RUN A SPELL-CHECK

Seems simple, right? It's such an easy thing to do, and yet quite often people don't think of completing this task. No, not everything that comes up in a Microsoft Word 'Spelling & Grammar' run will be correct – but it's a great place to start and to pick up on those pesky errors you'll cringe when you see corrected later.

The thing is this: we're all human. We're all going to make mistakes (but I bet you already know that). Make as little as you can by doing this one quick and easy task.

Yes, you're hiring an editor, and they are correcting errors for you, but why not eliminate all the easy-to-fix problems yourself, leaving them more focused on catching the harder-to-find problems, ones that won't show up in a spell check? Remember, **you are the best person to improve your manuscript** until you no longer can. Then it's time for an editor.

2. SEARCH FOR REPETITION

Do you have any obvious repeated words or phrases in your manuscript? Look for these close together (e.g. the use of the word "sandwich" twice in three sentences) and then take it one step further. Do you have multiple sentences in a row starting with the same word? Ending with the same word? Multiple paragraphs? Analyse your writing and get it in top shape before it heads to the editor.

3. STICK TO THE NEED-TO-KNOW

Read through your manuscript and write a list of each scene in the book. Does each scene move the story forward? If you were to eliminate a certain scene, would the story still make sense?

Make sure you're only presenting your reader with what they need to know. By eliminating extraneous material, you'll help keep them turning the pages at a steady pace.

4. CHECK FOR LOOSE ENDS

Read through your manuscript one more time and check for any loose ends. Do you mention an event coming up but not show it in the book? Does your hero leave a jacket at the heroine's house, but it's never spoken of again? Check that every action in your book has a corresponding reaction. This will result in a sound work of fiction.

5. HUNT FOR EXCLAMATION MARKS

And kill them. Murder them and be absolutely ruthless when it comes to their demise. Exclamation marks are very easy to over-use. Most of the time, these can be replaced with a full stop for a better reading experience. This way, we save our exclamation marks for when things are really exclamation-worthy (e.g. Help! He's got a gun!) as opposed to things that sure, may be exciting, but aren't on quite the same level (e.g. I spilt some milk!).

6. READ YOUR WORK ALOUD

Reading your book aloud can help alert you to subtle errors that your eyes will naturally skip over. Hate the sound of your reading voice? Have someone read it for you, whether it's a supportive friend or family member, or even your computer using

one of the many apps out there such as Voice-to-Text on iOS and Android. This is a great tool and can also help alert you to any slow spots in your manuscript – if you find yourself getting bored, chances are the reader will be, too.

7. CHECK YO' CHAPTERS

You better check yo' chapters before you wreck yo' chapters. Cheesy rap music aside, it is important to give your book the once-over, and do it thoroughly.

Check everything about your chapters. Check that they're numbered correctly. Check that each chapter has a page break before it, ensuring the separation in text is clear. Check that they occur in places that make you want to keep reading, not just at logical locations (e.g. a scene's conclusion). Make "just one more chapter" readers suffer by leaving them on cliffhangers, or teasing them with a question that they're hanging to get answered.

8. MAKE IT UNIFORM

Make your manuscript uniform. Select one font, and a standard font size (size 12 and a simple font such as Times New Roman is recommended for editing). Check your paragraph and line spacing are consistent (I recommend at least 1.5). Ensure you have indents at the start of each paragraph, and close the indents when starting a new chapter or after a scene break. Also, make sure you only have one space in between sentences. Once upon a time, we used to have two. These days, we do not.

9. CHECK YOUR QUOTATION MARKS

One of the most common errors in consistency I come across in books is differing quotation marks. There are straight quotes and smart quotes, and sometimes, we can end up using both in our manuscript. Make sure yours are all the same to avoid a less professional-looking product.

If you're wondering what these look like, here's an example: "Hi, Jenny." "Hi, Jenny." The first uses smart quotes; the second uses straight ones.

10. RENAME YOUR WORK

Before sending your manuscript to the editor, I recommend renaming it. Sounds very simple, right? But this can save you a lot of time. I recommend naming pre-edit versions Manuscript title_Pre-Edit. Then, when you get your manuscript back from the editor, save the new document as Manuscript title_Edited. This way, you have your original document handy for reference and your current WIP document, and you don't stand any chance of confusing the two. Of course, once you have a final document, I recommend renaming your document one final time to Manuscript title_Final.

This is a very simple thing you can do, but it can save you hours in wasted time spent on the wrong documents, or in opening and closing documents as you try and find the correct one.

Should you keep your earlier drafts? It's up to you. Some people like to, and if so, I recommend starting a file in your computer specifically dedicated to drafts. If you're not the sentimental type, delete, delete, delete – just remember to back-up, back-up, back-up to avoid accidentally deleting files you mean to keep.

11. READ IT ONE MORE TIME

Go on. Just once more. Yes, you've read it so often now that it hurts. Yes, you know this thing like the back of your hand. But reading it just one more time can leave you amazed at the things you missed on your last read. Go on, writer! You've got this.

PRE-EDIT CHECKLIST

I have ...

Performed a spell-check

Searched for repetition

Checked each scene moves the story forward

Checked that there are no loose ends

Hunted down and killed any rogue exclamation marks

Read my work aloud

Checked my chapters are numbered correctly, and that each starts on a new page with a page break separating it from the chapter prior

Made text size, spacing and font consistent, including around scene breaks

Renamed my work

Read it one more time