

THE REWRITING PROCESS

Fine-Tuning the Details

by

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Did everybody hear me shouting for joy this morning?? I managed to cut over 7,000 words from my manuscript and I turned it in first thing this morning! YEEEHAAWWW! :) (I imagine a few more words will get cut in the line edit, but already I'm amazed at how much better the cuts made the book.)

So now, for the next and final course topic:

The Rewriting Process--Fine-tuning the Details

I think the most helpful and important thing I can say about this phase of the rewrite is: if at all possible, let some time pass before you do this final read-through for details. After you've done all the other read-throughs, you will be so incredible close to your work that you will not be able to be objective. Even one week of not so much as glancing at your manuscript, will help you regain some objectivity when you begin this final pass.

When I do this last "technical" fine-tuning read, I print out the manuscript a final time. It is just too easy to miss the kind of things I'm looking for in this pass, if I read from the screen.

I try to go away from home somewhere I won't be interrupted by the phone, doorbell, or the laundry and other distractions of my house. Even just going to my porch so I can't HEAR the phone or SEE the dust is helpful. ;)

I try to read the entire manuscript over the course of 1-2 days. Preferably in only 2 or 3 sittings. This really makes a difference in helping you recognize inconsistencies, repeats, timeline problems, etc.

I do read with a red pen ready, but I try very hard not to allow myself to start "editing" again. When I see a problem area that will definitely need reworking, I simply flag it with a Post-it note, or draw a big red circle around the section and go on. This time my goal is to be reading the book as an ordinary reader would.

Here are the things I'm looking for:

*Simple typographical or spelling errors. This is a good place to catch places where you used "their" but meant "there," etc.

*Overused words or phrases. As a general rule, if you use an unusual or memorable adjective or adverb once, you should not use it again in the same book; and you shouldn't use the same ordinary word more than once or twice in close proximity. This is as much a

visually detected thing as an "audio" thing. If you look at the page and the word "man" or "she" jumps out at you again and again close together, you need to go in and rearrange the sentence to eliminate some of them, or think of more creative ways to express the thought. (However, as I said earlier, don't stop and make the change immediately, just flag it as needing attention, and go on with your reading.)

*Overwriting. Have you beat an idea to death, trying to be sure your reader understands what you're trying to get across? One of my favorite editors is constantly telling me: TRUST YOUR READER TO GET IT THE FIRST TIME. This is a good place to get rid of anything that suddenly strikes you as preachy, or as author intrusion.

*Pet words or phrases. Often these are character actions in tags. (Angie Hunt says she usually discovers she has a different pet phrase in every book. I noticed in my wip, I must have said "his heart lurched" and "he cleared his throat" half a dozen times each. I deleted all but one or two.)

*Timeline problems I didn't catch before. (It's amazing how many of these glitches show up in the last read-through--places where you changed the main timeline and forgot to adjust a little reference to "two weeks later", etc. in another scene. Here's where it really helps to read the whole thing in just one or two sittings.)

*Character movements that don't make sense: a character who stands twice without ever sitting, one who carries a coffee mug somewhere and "forgets" to set it down before hugging someone, or throwing his hands up in despair, etc.

*Anyplace that makes you do a double take or ask yourself "What in the world did I mean by that?" If YOU, the author had to read it twice to get it, think about the poor editor or reader! :)

*Visual issues: By this, I mean the way the manuscript appears graphically. For instance, a line break or scene break that comes at the end or beginning of a page and might confuse the editor, misplaced hyphens, italics in inappropriate places, widow or orphan lines (I usually turn on the "control widow and orphan" option in Word formatting, because these are very visually distracting to me, however, if your publisher uses a 25 lines per page word count, you'll need to consider that.)

*Anything else that jumps out at you, as it might in a book you were reading for pleasure.

What have I missed? What are some of the nit-picky details you find when you are reading other authors' work, or perhaps your critique partners' work, that would fall in this "technical" category of things to look for in fine-tuning?

Class is open for discussion. I'll make a few closing comments later this week, but October is quickly winding down and this class has just about come to an end!

