

Nifty Manuscript Revision and Proofreading Tips for Novels

by Joyce Shafer



The first thing you need to know is that there are no real shortcuts when it comes to the revision process. And, it's going to take multiple passes through the manuscript in order to make sure it's the best story and cleanest copy it can be. Why more than once?

For one thing, you absolutely will not be able to see everything in just one reading. It's also very likely that if you're truly tuned in to your novel, ideas and even questions will continue to come to you for a while. Be sure to write them down!

If you know that your skills regarding technical and or creative matters aren't what they should or could be, at some point you'll need to get an editor on board to assist you. There's no shame in this!

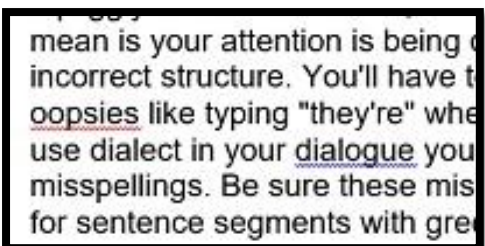
But for your purposes, here are some (just some) of the things you are obligated to address as an author.

- Does the story work? Is the plot engaging from start to finish, and are your characters developed well enough?
- Have all the questions posed in the story been answered?
- Look for inconsistencies. Is your protagonist completely bald in chapter one but you have him comb his hair in chapter five? Does your story start on Monday and two days later it's Friday?
- Watch for repetitive word usage and even incorrect word usage (both are all too easy to do).
- Check your verbs: Are they strong action verbs or weak, passive ones?
- Is your dialogue strong and natural sounding for each character, or is it stilted, or boring? Do all of your characters sound alike?
- What's the pace like? Is it faster in action scenes and slower in narrative passages?
- Is there any place where it drags?



- Are you telling when you should be showing?
- Is your protagonist making a decision--any kind of decision--in each scene? She or he should be if you want to keep the story moving forward and the pace from lagging.
- Is each scene written from one, and only one, point of view?
- Is tense correct and consistent throughout the story?
- Make sure you have only one space between sentences and no spaces between your indented paragraphs.
- Do not overuse exclamation points, ellipses, em-dashes, and italics.

Here's something else: many new writers completely ignore the red and green



mean is your attention is being drawn to either a misspelled word or a grammatically incorrect structure. You'll have to carefully read what you've written so you catch oopsies like typing "they're" when you should have typed "their" (or "there"). If you use dialect in your dialogue you'll see lots of words with red squiggly lines indicating misspellings. Be sure these misspellings are deliberate on your part. The same goes for sentence segments with green squiggly lines under them: If the way you wrote them was deliberate, and not because you didn't know better, you don't want to change them in a way that alters the voice of a character or the storyteller.

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Something I cannot stress enough: At some point, print your manuscript. Sit somewhere with extra paper, and a pen, where you can read your novel draft out loud. This is an invaluable tip that allows you to hear how it reads for readers and to see and catch things you won't if you read it silently.

Wayne Dyer said, "If you want the things you look at to change, you must change the way you look at things." This is also true for writers! In fact, after you've looked at your manuscript a number of times both on the computer screen and in print, it can become less easy to see the details any longer. So, switch the view--literally. If you work in Word, click on View then on Reading Layout (or Read Mode). It's amazing what you see when your manuscript looks more like a real book. Set your own manuscript up this way then read it aloud, and don't speed through this. Also, when you save and close the document and then open it again, it likely will have reverted back to the original paper size version. So, if you have to stop reading this altered format, be sure to make note of which page you stopped on. When you return to the document, just choose Reading Layout again and you can easily return to your place.

Granted, there is a lot to know about the writing craft and always more to learn. But anything that assists you to create a novel that will entertain readers in the way your story is meant to--and that they expect--is something you should be committed to doing for your sake and for the sake of your book and its readers. What an adventure, yes? Yes.



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Joyce L. Shafer provides services for writers, with a focus on assisting new and indie authors. Services include Manuscript Evaluation, Substantive Editing, and Silent (Ghost) Rewriting/Editing, which includes converting plays and screenplays into novels. Her clients say she's part editor, part teacher, part coach. Details available at editmybookandmore.weebly.com/.

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