**SELF-EDITING**

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There's no real replacement for having a pro like me critique your beloved manuscript (bit of shameless self-promotion there, LOL), but if you insist, this document will give you a series of questions to ask yourself about your manuscript. But before we get to that, let's talk about a) how you can gain objectivity over your own work and b) how to actually attack revisions...

***HOW TO GAIN OBJECTIVITY OVER YOUR OWN WORK:***

So the goal of self-editing is to be able to objectively assess your manuscript. But how can one possibly be objective about one's own work? Here are some tips for gaining some objectivity:

1) Take time away from your manuscript. (You'll come back to it with fresh eyes.)

2) Read the manuscript aloud. (You'll catch things you didn't catch while reading silently.)

3) Read your draft from a printed out copy. (You'll see things differently than you did onscreen.)

***HOW TO ATTACK THE REVISION PROCESS:***

Once you have your list of revisions after you've done one or more of the above and also asked yourself the questions posed below, I suggest you revise in multiple rounds. I always tell my clients to take care of the picky problems first and then to devote a manuscript pass to each of the general issues.

Okay, now for the meaty stuff: questions to ask yourself about your manuscript...

***PLOT/STORY:***

Have you started with a premise and expanded upon that premise (the snowflake method)?

Are you using the three act structure or a beat system or the hero's journey to guide you?

Is your plot unusual and relevant to today's readers? (This is vital!)

Is the book exciting? Are there several twists and surprises throughout?

Do the subplots reflect or comment on the main plot so the book is a unified whole?

Are the plot lines believable?

Are all plot issues resolved?

Does every scene/chapter actively forward the plot?

There's plot/story, and there's how you tell it (structure). Does your story start in the right place, and is your opening strong? You want to tell your story in an interesting way, e.g. start at the climax, then go back; or tell the story through letters or texts, etc.

***THEME:***

Does this book have something to say?

Do all the plot lines somehow reflect or comment on this message (for a sense of unity)?

***CHARACTERIZATION:***

Are all characters interesting?

Are all characters realistic/three-dimensional?

Are your main characters admirable yet flawed/relatable?

Are there too many characters? Is each character vital to the plot? (Do two of your characters serve the same dramatic purpose? If so, combine into one.) Is each character distinct in personality?

Does the reader have enough or too much access to your MC’s thoughts/feelings? You want interiority (to add depth, complexity) but not so much that it overwhelms scenes of action and dialogue...

Do your main characters have strong arcs/journeys? Wants and roadblacks? Internal conflict(s) on top of your plot's external conflict(s)?

***DIALOGUE:***

Does the dialogue fit your characters?

Do the conversations in your book forward the plot/theme?

Do you overuse dialogue tags? Use odd ones?

Does your manuscript have the right dialogue to exposition ratio?

***POINT OF VIEW:***

Whose story is this? Are there too many POV characters?

Have you avoided ‘head-hopping’? (Can be done, but hard to do well.)

***VOICE:***

Does this manuscript sound unique? Is your writing style identifiable?

***SETTING:***

Does it fit the story?

Do you have your characters actions and moods reacting to environment/setting?

Is there a clear sense of time and place? (Setting can almost be a character, even have an arc...)

Is there too much description? Not enough?

***RANDOM OTHER STUFF!***

Is there a lot of redundancy or repetition?

Have you avoided long passages of exposition? (Show, don’t tell!)

Have you kept your paragraphs short?

Are you consistent with tense?

Have you overused 'very' or 'just' or 'really'? Have you eliminated most adjectives and adverbs?

Have you used overly fancy words?

Is there too much unnecessary research-related detail?

Does the writing flow well? Are there good transitions between paragraphs? Is the passage of time clear?

Have you avoided stage directions? ('Sarah put her hand on the doorknob, twisted it and went into the hall' can be, simply, 'Sarah went into the hall'.)

Do you tend to start paragraphs the same way? (This is a big problem with manuscripts told in first-person, with many paragraphs and sentences starting with 'I'.)

Does every scene/chapter end on a hook?

I hope these suggestions prove useful!