

Editing 101: Common Editing Mistakes

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Before the Professional Edit

- Before you pay someone to edit your manuscript – and I encourage you to hire a professional editor! – give your book to at least 3 or 4 other readers to read (beta readers).
- Pick people who read – preferably someone who reads A LOT!
 - And even better are people who read in the genre you’re writing.
- Tell your reader what age group and/or demographic your looking to reach with your book.
- Give your readers some idea of what you’re looking for related to feedback – and you may ask different people to look at different things.
- Always thank your readers in some way – a copy of the book, a nice dinner, a 6 pack of beer... ☺

Types of Editing

- Developmental/Substantive editing

- Not always required but would be done before copy or line-editing
- Looking at the bigger picture

Can address – plot, story arch, character development, consistency with the character, style, voice, word usage and tone of the manuscript. May also look at some grammar and punctuation, but these things are not the main focus.

- Copyediting/line editing:

- Done after developmental editing
- Sentence level editing
- Clarity is paramount

Can address— grammar, punctuation, wordiness, redundancy, accuracy, consistency, transitions, overall flow, word choice, style, voice, tone... may also include comments on some aspects of the story as a whole

- Proofing:

- Usually is done on a paper document supplied by the printer
- Always done on the manuscript just before publication
- Is not copyediting/line-editing

Addresses: spelling, punctuation, layout – including hyphenations, widows, orphans, headers, footers, chapter head and copyright pages, TOC accuracy, layout of images, index, footnotes...

What's Important When Working With an Editor?

- As with most things – that you both understand each other.
 - Understand their definition of the type of edit they are providing.
 - Ask for a test edit (it should be free)
 - You or your editor may or may not need/want a contract
 - If there is a particular style you write in (i.e., italicized foreign words, your main protagonist has a certain/odd style of speaking...) and you don't want that changed, let the editor know ahead of time.
 - You understand their payment system – when payments are due, how to pay and how much, what happens if it takes the editor more time...
 - Time line

Keep in mind – Editing is not an exact science. It is more of an Art!

- There are some rules that are hard and fast:
 - Commas and periods always go inside quotes, colons and semicolons do not.
 - If you use a semicolon, the text after the semicolon has to be a complete sentence (or clause).
- Unfortunately, there are many things that are up for debate:
 - When you use a semicolon
 - Comma usage (that discussion could go on all day!)
- Some decisions can be made by the style guide used, which depends on the genre or where the text will be seen (web, newsprint, book...).

Common Errors

- Overuse of adverbs
 - patiently, warily, suspiciously
- Overuse of prepositional phrases
 - As he handed the check to me, he looked the other way.
 - As he handed me the check, he looked the other way.
 - (other examples on writetightsite.com)
- Overuse of flowery dialogue attributions, AKA dialogue tags
 - He cajoled, she declared

Overuse of the Passive Voice

- The best way to find the passive voice in your writing:
 - Look for the form of “**to be**” + **past participle** (sometimes but not always ends in – ed) = passive voice
(forms of “to be”: is, are, am, was, were, has been, have been, had been, will be, will have been, being)
 - Ask yourself: Is a person or thing doing the action?
- *The house **has been scorched by** the dragon.*
 - *The dragon scorched the house.*
- *When her house **was invaded**, Mary had to leave.*
 - *When the bees invaded her house, Mary had to leave.*
- *A new system of control **was set up**.*
 - *Melvin set up a new system of control.*

Lie vs Lay

• Tense	<u>Present</u>	<u>Past</u>	<u>Participle</u>
• To recline	lie, lying	lay	has/have/had lain
• To put or place		laid	has/have/had laid
• To tell a fib	lie, lying	lied	has/have/had lied

Effect or Affect?

- **Effect** – most often used as a noun
 - means to show result/cause/bring-brought about
 - always has *a, an, the, no, any, take* in front of it

She had the effect she was looking for.

Rarely used as a verb – to cause

He effected (caused) the change in personnel.

- **Affect** – most often used as a verb
 - to show influence
 - use when effect doesn't work

How does that affect you?

Rarely used as a noun – *His affect was diminished*

Essential vs Non-essential words or clauses

- If you can take it out and the sentence still makes sense, then it is nonessential and should be surrounded by commas if it is in the middle of a sentence.
- *My husband, Bill, took the car to the wash.* (I only have one husband)
- *My friend Sally took the car to the wash.* (I have more than one friend - believe it or not - so it is essential to the sentence to know who I am referring to.)
- *He called me a liar, which isn't very nice.*
 - (Note the use of *which* and the comma before it. If a sentence uses *that*, it does not use a comma because what comes after is essential.)
 - *I don't want something that isn't on my list.*

Who or Whom?

- If you're not sure which to use, substitute he (who) or him (whom) in the sentence.
 - *Bill only invited guys (who or whom) he thought liked the game.*
- If you're not sure, Who (always a subject) is doing what to whom (always an object)
 - *Bill invited guys / (He/him) liked the game*

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- *I now report to (he/him)*
- *He's the person to whom I now report.*

Miscellaneous

- Alright is always “All right”
- Use “between” for 2 objects or people and “among” for 3 or more
- Use “less” when referring to an uncountable number
 - *There were less fish in the lake than they thought.*
- Use “few” when referring to a number you can count
 - *She took a few bags with her.*
- Avoid weak, vague or overused words: *that, had, very, just, quite, stuff, things, got, really, perhaps, maybe*
- Don’t use a colon after a verb.
 - *Their choices included gray, blue, purple and black.*
- Should you use a serial (AKA an Oxford) comma?
 - It depends on what style guide you are using.

And when all else fails – laugh!



References

- **Online:**
 - grammargirl.com
 - owl.english.purdue.edu
 - grammar.ccc.commnet.edu
- **Books:**
 - Woe Is I by Patricia T. O'Conner
 - The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation by Jane Straus
 - Eats, Shoots and Leaves by Lynne Truss
 - Self Editing for Fiction Writers by Renni Browne
 - Grammar Snobs Are Great Big Meanies by June Casagrande

Questions?

- Feel free to contact me with any editing or publishing questions: christinekeleny@yahoo.com