



Edit Like a PRO in 7 Easy Steps

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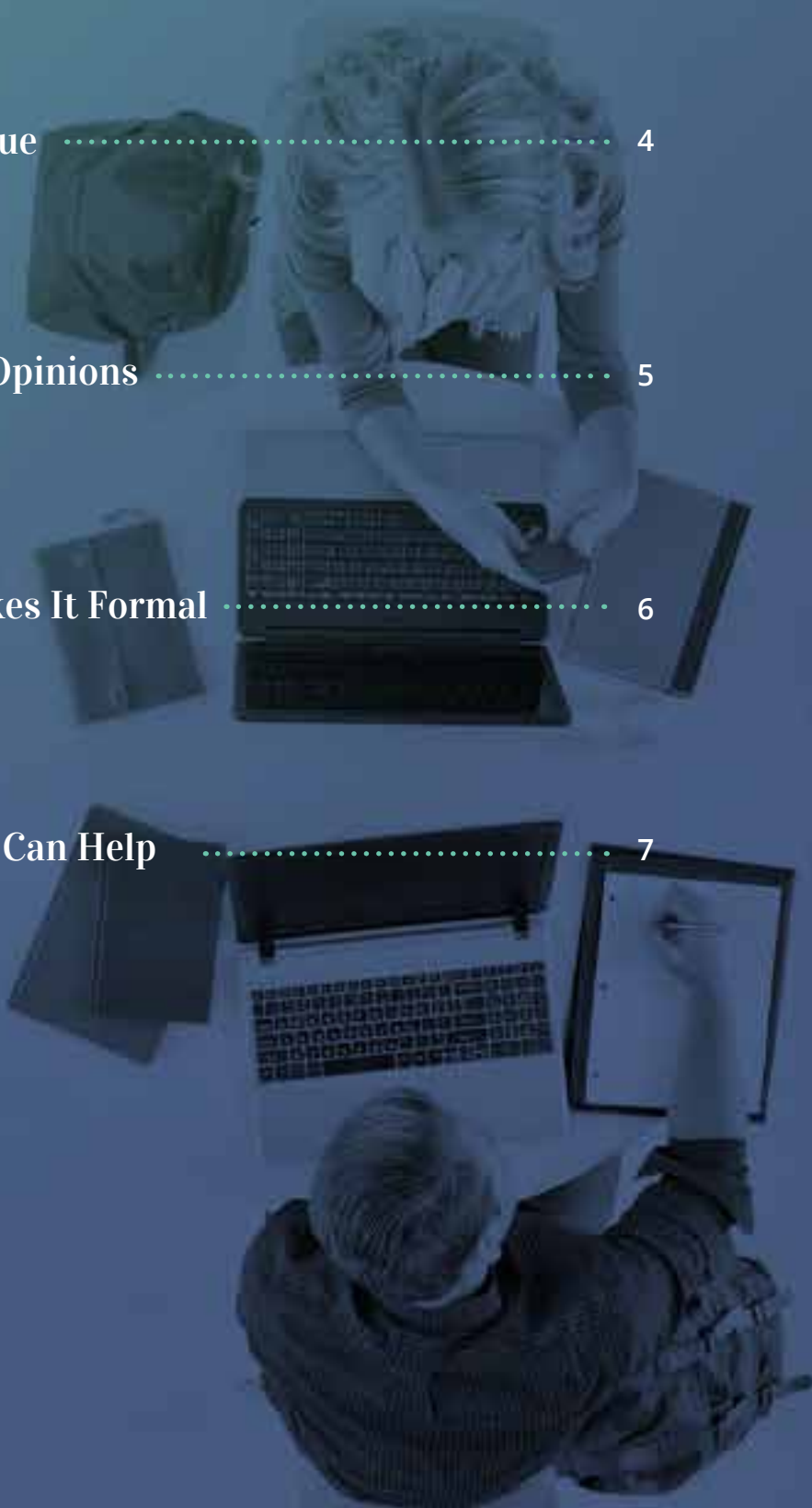
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Editing your work should always begin with you, the writer. While this may seem like a daunting task, there are ways to make it easier and more manageable. We've outlined seven easy steps that you can follow to ensure that your work is as error-free as possible.

But remember: You might not be able to catch every single mistake in your work, and that's fine too. At the very least, these seven steps will help ensure that the changes required for your book will just be minimal if you decide to hand your book over to us for professional editing.

Now here's a quick tip for you before we get started:

Creativity First, Editing Later

Try and finish your book first before you even try to edit it. We find that most AuthorHouse-published authors find it more effective to let their creativity flow and complete their story before anything else.

You shouldn't let the idea of editing prevent you from completing your manuscript because you keep trying to perfect one chapter before moving on to the next.

With that said, let's get right to it.



Step 1: The Editor's Mind-Set

Here's what you need to do first: you need to step out of your writer's shoes and start to approach your work with the analytical eye of an editor.

But we know making that transition is easier said than done. Here are a few tips we've found useful:

Take a Break

You've just finished writing your draft—give yourself a break and take some time off. Rest easy in the knowledge that you are one giant step closer to achieving your publishing dreams.

How long should this celebratory break last? That's up to you, really. Taking some time away from your work is good for you—so don't be in a rush to go back to it. This will allow you to return to your work with fresh eyes. You want to forget enough of what you've written so you can read the words on the page without being influenced by the message you intended to convey through them.

Most editors suggest at least a couple of weeks' break, but the general rule is, the longer you've worked on the manuscript, the longer your break should be.

Be Your Own Toughest Critic

Your editing has two main goals. First is to correct errors, and second is to create a shorter, more concise manuscript. Check that every statement, point, question, phrase, and word adds value. And if it doesn't, cut it.

Know Yourself as a Writer

By now you should be familiar with your own nuances and writing quirks. Perhaps you repeat the same word or tend to use clichés a lot? Make sure to watch out for those.

Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance

Here are a few things to consider:

- Just as you set a daily writing time, you should also have a fixed editing schedule. Find the time of day when you can best focus.
- Proofreading can become very monotonous as it entails intensive periods of focus and concentration. Listen to music, play with stress balls—anything to relieve your mind without distorting your focus.
- Avoid fluorescent lighting. It has a slower flicker rate than standard lighting, making it more difficult for your eyes to pick up inconsistencies.



Step 2: Editing Method and Technique

Method

As you might imagine, an effective edit requires a structured, methodical approach. There are three main areas on which you should focus on:

1. STRUCTURE. You can start small—transferring a sentence or perhaps a paragraph you think would be more effective in a different place within your story. This might seem daunting at first, but do not be afraid to reconstruct your manuscript if needed.

If you're a fiction writer

Think about it: can your story be improved by adding an adventure, subtracting a subplot, or altering the sequence of plot elements? Who knows, your story might become more compelling by simply changing the order in which events occur.

If you're a nonfiction writer

Maybe your readers could benefit from more detailed instructions in a manual or you could add one more reference to establish authenticity. Rereading your work might also help you realize that, at one point during your narrative, you have digressed too far from your subject.

A very good example highlighting this would be somebody writing his or her memoir. Writing a chronological list of events is not a memoir. Don't start at the beginning; instead, choose a theme and link the events of your life to that theme. This will make for a much more compelling read.

2. CONTENT. In the end, you want your message conveyed clearly in your story. To ensure this, make sure that the words you chose and the writing style you used makes sense.

3. PROOFREADING. Check your spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Read [Step 3: The Point of Proofreading](#) of this editing guide for specific examples.

Technique

You will end up proofreading your story numerous times. Even professional editors make up to ten passes over a single manuscript to ensure they have sifted through every aspect. The key is to read it with a different focus every time. Here are a few of the techniques you can employ with each readthrough:

- **First Reading**
This one is a freebie. Your computer's spelling and grammar checks do all the work for you.
- **Second Reading**
Correct and record your most common errors for future reference.
- **Third Reading**
Read your entire manuscript through the eyes of one of your readers. Don't make a single change, but make brief notes about major structural flaws or other obvious errors that require attention.
- **Fourth Reading**
Read every word slowly and silently and then again out loud. Point to each word with your finger as you read. Use a piece of paper to block the words you have not read so your eyes cannot run ahead and be distracted. Reading your story aloud will help you find any tricky sentence structures or unclear thought processes.
- **Fifth Reading**
This is a dialogue-specific edit. See [Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue](#) for a complete explanation.
- **Sixth Reading**
Read your manuscript backward to focus on the spelling of words and upside down to focus on typology.
- **Seventh Reading**
Mix up the order of your chapters and edit a randomly selected chapter at a time. They will become independent of one another, allowing you to edit more subjectively.

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Step 3: The Point of Proofreading

Proofreading entails sifting through your manuscript with a fine-tooth comb, searching for errors. As we identified in [Step 2: Editing Method and Technique](#), your story will need several flybys, each with a separate focus. Here in Step 3, we identify exactly what you should be looking for.

Remember that you, the author, knows best. It's not enough to simply run your manuscript through the spell checker and expect it to spit a ready-to-publish manuscript out the other end. Engage your gray matter because your computer will never appreciate the nuances of your story.

Here's what you might want to look for:

Your Written VOICE

You can start small—transferring a sentence or perhaps a paragraph you think would be more effective in a different place within your story. This might seem daunting at first, but do not be afraid to reconstruct your manuscript if needed.

Look out for:

- **Your Tone**
What sort of personality should your writing have? Is it conversational but authoritative if you are writing a how-to guide? Are you in character but still understandable to your contemporary audience if you are writing a historical romance novel? Knowing yourself as a writer will help you as you can eliminate repetition or outdated cliches.
- **The Passive Voice**
Stories written in an active voice are more thrilling than a story being written in a passive voice. Here's the key:
Active Voice: the subject is doing the action.
Passive Voice: the target of the action gets promoted to the subject position.

For example: *Katie is divorcing Tom or Tom is being divorced by Katie.*
- **The Rhythm**
Read your book aloud. Your words should flow smoothly as you read them.
- **Tense Consistency**
Choose a tense and stick to it. Write either in the past or present. Intentionally switching tenses for something like a flashback can be effective. Randomly chopping and changing between tenses will disrupt your voice, rhythm, and every other aspect of your writing that contributes to your skill as a storyteller.

Pay attention to particularly confusing dialogue. Refer to [Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue](#) of this editing guide for more details.
- **The Impact of Emphasis**
“Scare quotes” frighten nobody. Italics can quickly become an eyesore and even lose its impact. And too many exclamation points can draw attention away from the actual message.
- **Keywords**
Does your hero's name really suit him and his persona? Does your antagonist sound villainous enough? Do place names evoke the expected imagery? Do titles and subheads help your story line move forward?
- **Big Words**
Write to express, not to impress. Keep away from any kind of jargon as they might end up intimidating your readers. And while you're at it, make sure that you know the precise meaning of the words you use. Deliver your message in a clear and simple manner.
- **Paragraph Breaks**
Here's the bottom line: you need paragraphs. They don't just break up dialogue, they break up individual topics too. This is something you will definitely learn to appreciate as you start to edit your own work.
- **Subject - Verb Agreement**
Subjects and verbs have a number: singular or plural. When they don't agree, the sentence doesn't work. For example: Johnny and Vanessa are married, not Johnny and Vanessa is married.

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- **Clichés**

Okay, there may be the odd occasion where a cliché might be perfect for describing a situation in your story, but writing is a creative process. As such, do try to relate your story in your own words.

- **Adjectives and Adverbs**

Look for alternative ways to enhance your language and avoid unnecessary padding.

For example: Instead of saying “he ran quickly,” eliminate the word quickly as running already infers rapidity of movement.



Common Writing Mistakes

Whether you're a novice novelist or an experienced literati, make sure to watch out for these:

- **Homonyms**

Select the appropriate word for each occasion. Prime examples are heterographs, such as to/too/two and there/their/they're.

Can you make sense of these examples?

Example 1: The to sailors went too the tavern for some grub and get drunk two.

Example 2: Look at those two sailors, their going to there favorite tavern to get drunk they're.

- **Possessives**

The misuse of possessives is another common mistake. Think of the apostrophe as your friend. Here are a few of the common mistakes considered to be the most cardinal of literary sins.

Your vs. You're

Your: possessive, singular or plural

Bob, don't forget your keys.

Gentlemen, please order your last drinks now.

You're: contraction for “you are,” singular or plural

You're the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

You're the best actors ever to have graced the stage.

Their vs. There vs. They're

Their: possessive, plural, third person

Shirley and Tim were so happy that their daughter was finally married.

There: indicates location or place

Hawaii is beautiful in the pictures, but I have never been there.

There is a great program on TV.

They're: a contraction meaning “they are”

Both teams have played so well this season that they're both deserving of being in the final.

Putting it all together:

They're planning to check into their hotel as soon as they get there.

It's vs. Its

Its: Don't let the absence of an apostrophe fool you; its is the possessive form of the genderless pronoun

The tree shed all of its leaves the other day.

It's: a contraction for “it is”

Please call me when it's time to eat.



Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue

Some of the most common editing questions we hear at AuthorHouse are about dialogue. Well, the golden rule is to show rather than tell. In order to improve our dialogue, it's essential we keep its functions in mind when we read through and edit our manuscript.

The Six Functions of Dialogue

The dialogue in your story should:

1. Reveal character (in what is and isn't said)
2. Provide pertinent information
3. Drive the plot by building tension and drama
4. Reveal the chemistry and relationships between characters
5. Provide an emotional outlet for the story's characters
6. Create white space on the page to avoid blocking and break the story up for the reader

We suggested you conduct a dialogue-specific edit as your fifth read-through. Here are your five focal areas to concentrate on:

1. APPROPRIATE VOCABULARY. There are two groups of people to consider when selecting the style of language your characters will use. The first is your readers, and the second is the characters themselves. Asking yourself these questions about each group will make sure you are vocab-appropriate.

- **How old are they?**

Characters: A teenager will speak differently from a senior citizen.

Readers: Think about movie ratings in terms of explicit language. Also, gear the level of sophistication of your vocabulary to your audience in terms of using long words and technical jargon.

- **What is their gender?**

Characters: Male and female characters will use different vocabularies.

Readers: Male and female readers will respond differently to the vocabulary you have decided to use.

- **What is their social background?**

Characters: Are your characters poor or are they more well-off than others?

Readers: Different socioeconomic classes will view different subject matters from their own points of view. Think about how they would be affected personally and what their reaction might be if what was happening in your story were really true.

- **What level of education have they attained?**

Characters: How varied or limited will their vocabulary be? Will they use technical jargon and speak knowledgeably about a wide variety of topics?

Readers: How much of your technical jargon will they likely be able to comprehend, and how many topics will they be familiar with?

- **Where do they live, and where are they from?**

Characters: Do their geographical location and background dictate that they use particular slang or catchphrases?

Readers: Will your readers understand the slang and catchphrases your characters use? (We will talk about dialect and slang later in this step.)

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2. CAPTIVATING CONVERSATIONS. Your dialogue doesn't have to be an exact copy of how people really speak, but it should be believable. Consider these elements so that you can keep your dialogue in line with your story.

- **Location**
The situation in which your characters are speaking will dictate the words they use, the manner in which they communicate, and the flow of their conversation. If they are in the middle of a battle with gunfire and explosions going on around them, their manner of speech should reflect this. They are likely to be shouting over the noise and even be interrupted by nearby explosions. Physical gestures may also be incorporated into the conversation to make it easier to get their message across.
- **Words**
Do not let the words your characters speak repeat what has already been said in your narration. Avoid expositions, especially for things that should be obvious to your readers. Don't forget to use contractions too, as most people usually use these in day-to-day conversations.
- **Dialogue Tags**
Remember the KISS principle—Keep It Short and Simple. Stick with the word said as much as possible: "He said," "she said." Add a sprinkling of "shouted" or "whispered" for variety, but do not get too fancy. Too many tags will start to sound contrived and will draw your reader's attention away from the dialogue.
- **Actions**
Your characters' gestures can be used to emphasize what they are saying or to break up a long passage of speech. The listener might nod or sigh while the speaker continues. Commenting on these will break up conversation a bit.
- **Emotions**
The relationship between two characters will certainly dictate the manner in which they speak to one another and the flow of their conversation. They may use clipped, short sentences if theirs is a tense relationship or long-flowing sentences if they are comfortable with one another. This manner of speech will also help build tension or other emotions. Punctuate the conversation again with some physical gestures to portray fear or to reveal a lie, etc.
- **Verbosity**
Some people talk a lot while others are the strong silent types. Don't allow characters to go on and on. Remember that your reader will be able to glean as much from what has not been said as what is being said.

3. DIALECT AND SLANG. In general, less is more. Scotsmen do not have to talk as though they are reciting a Robbie Burns poem, Frenchmen do not have to sound like Inspector Clouseau, and not every Cockney talks as though they were born hugger mugger to the sound of bow bells.

The point is, you need to modify your characters' speech to give them a suggestion of dialect but still allow your readers to understand what they are saying.

4. PUNCTUATE PROFESSIONALLY. Dialogue must be punctuated correctly. Make sure that:

- It begins on a new line whenever there is a new speaker.
- It has quotation marks around the words. US standard is to have double quotation marks and UK standard is single. Just make sure you are consistent once you have chosen which to use.
- It has punctuation inside the quotation marks.
- It ends with a comma before a dialogue tag or with a full stop before an action.

5. WHAT CAN YOU IMPROVE UPON? Make sure you read your dialogue aloud when you are editing it. If it doesn't flow or sound authentic when you are saying it, it will not come across as such to your readers. Look out for tired clichés, and register the rhythm and pacing of your story. Also ensure that your dialogue is contributing to your

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story by making sure it is performing at least one of the six functions outlined above. Eavesdropping is a fun pastime. Here is a justification for indulging in it without feeling guilty: Visit a local public place such as coffee shop or the local park, and sit unobtrusively near people sitting and talking. Pick up the various idiosyncrasies people have in the words they use and repeat in their speech patterns. Now go back and see if you can add any of these common traits into your story's dialogue and see if it results in any improvement.



Step 5: Other People's Opinions

Find someone whose opinion you trust, someone you are confident will be impartial—your mom or your spouse may not be the most objective judges. Finding someone who will approach your book from the perspective of your readers would be ideal.

Some writers find it helpful if they create a group who act as their selection jury. They let one half of the group edit their manuscripts in a manner detached from emotion. The other half represents their book's potential readership. This helps them get a more balanced sense of the feedback they receive.

Remember: You are the author, and this is your story. It's up to you to work out where the feedback will help your story and where you need to back your own artistic integrity. After all, it is going to be your name on the cover of your book, and it's you the readers will judge.



Step 6: Formatting Makes It Formal

Now that you have read your manuscript untold times, had other people read it, and decided on the feedback you like and that which you don't, it's time to get an idea of what your published book is actually going to look like. Here are two approaches to approving the appearance of your work even before it is published.

The Aloof Approach. Format your book as you would like to see it published. Print out your manuscript in the manner you would like the final copy to look like.

The Spatial Approach. Review the amount of blank page (*known as white space*) compared to the amount of black text on the page. If your pages are too white, there is not enough going on to engage your readers. If your page is too black, your story is text heavy and needs breaking up to stop your readers switching off.



Step 7: Ask Us How We Can Help

When you're ready, contact us for a consultation today. We'll help you get your book published and recommend services that best suits your needs and budget. And if you need help with any or all of the steps outlined above, we also offer professional book editing services, which may even be included in your chosen package.

Our friendly self-publishing professionals are always available to help you reach your goals. For more information about Authorhouse or how we can help you publish your book, call **0800 047 8203 (Domestic)** or **+44 1908 723714 (International)**

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