

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers

There are several phases of editing. Each plays an important role in strengthening and polishing your manuscript after you've completed your first draft.

Before you get started -- important/helpful tips to consider:

- Understand/accept that editing takes time (you'll read and reread your manuscript many, many times; and it will get better at each phase).
- Save and rename your draft document before you begin the next round of edits (this "history" along with your notes will be helpful later).
- Take *separate* notes during every phase of your editing (3-ring binder, yellow pad, spread sheet, 3x5 cards, etc.).

Editing Phases:

1. **Big Picture:** focus on the "big" stuff, e.g. plot points, characterization, overall story arc, does your story have a beginning, middle and end?

Approach: several read-throughs; perhaps even one full read for each big-picture aspect

2. **Fine Tune:** drill down to next layer of your story, e.g. theme/symbolism for literary works, common or overused words and phrases, consistency of POV and tense.

Approach: one read through may be enough for the fine-tune; two might be needed for highly literary novels

3. **Nitty Gritty:** pay attention to detail on this read through; keep eye out for typos, missing words, consistency of character names, etc.

Approach: a final, careful read after big-picture revisions and fine-tune edits is critical; some people like to do a quick read backwards through the manuscript to spot glaring mistakes that are easy to miss.