

Write Your Novel

Things to consider in approaching your line edit

Big picture – read through and make notes about your story, any threads you need to tie up but don't correct spelling, spend too long rewriting a description, you can do that next.

Dates, chronology – do all your dates tie up? Think about weather eg unlikely to be snow in May. Is it happening chronologically?

Character development – can you see your character changing if this is a transformative journey?

Tension – have you laid down those breadcrumbs etc?

The questions you're asking – ensure all the questions big and small have been made clear and are answered (or not if ambiguity is your aim)

Is each sub-plot managed? – ensure that each sub-plot you've created is resolved or answered

Style and tone – is your style consistent? Is the tone right for each scene as well as the overall tone of the book?

Genre – does the overall story meet the requirements of the genre you're writing?

General formatting of chapters, consistency – ensure you keep each chapter layout consistent. Ensure that each chapter begins at the same point on the page and is laid out in the same way. Below is an example of one of my chapter beginnings. Note the space from the top of the page to 'Chapter 2'. Each chapter in my manuscript must have that identical spacing.

What is Line Editing?

Line editing is a form of editing that focuses closely on your writing line-by-line. During the editing process, your line editor will look critically at the building blocks of your story—**sentence construction, paragraphs, pages, and scenes**—to ensure these components are working together. The process makes your writing tighter and your manuscript stronger.

Some questions that line editing focuses on are:

- **Does this sentence add to the reader's understanding?**
- **Is this sentence slowing down the pacing of the paragraph?**
- **Would your character use these words?**

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- **Is this paragraph redundant?**
- **How can you shorten this scene to get to the action quicker?**
- **How can this paragraph be rewritten to show the action instead of telling?**

What is the difference between line editing and copy editing?

Copy editing focuses on the technical aspects of writing—grammar issues, tense issues, and word choices.

It will ensure your voice and story flow.

So, when should you start the line edit stage of editing?

Line editing should **occur after your book or story draft is completed and all developmental editing is done.**

Record yourself reading your story out loud

You can do this passage by passage or read your story all at once. Play back your recording a little at a time, stopping to make corrections as you go.

Listening to your story can help you identify inconsistencies, jarring words or sentences, and issues with the story's flow that are missed when reading silently.

Leave your computer behind

Print out a paper copy of your story, grab your favourite pen (it doesn't have to be red), and start marking and making notes.

This more tactile technique can provide just the shake up your mind needs to find those passages that need improvement.

Cut back

Cut unnecessary words, sentences, and paragraphs to improve flow, clarity, and tension.

To find extraneous words, read your sentences out loud, looking for any word or phrase that jars or interrupts the flow of the sentence. If a sentence reads awkwardly, read it multiple times and remove words to see if flow improves.

Restructure sentences and paragraphs

Consider whether the sentence or paragraph moves too slowly or is too choppy. Restructuring may help to improve clarity or flow.

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Eliminate weak verbs

Weak verbs make it difficult for the reader to get into the story and feel the action, tension, and experiences of the main character. To find weak verbs, search for adverbs—often your -ly words. Then play with the sentence. Identify what action you are trying to evoke and grab a thesaurus to replace the weak verb.

Weak: The boy ran quickly down the hallway.

Fix: The boy raced down the hallway.

Remove redundancies

Your readers are smart. They don't need to be given the same information multiple times. Experiment by removing repetitive passages. If you don't miss the information on re-reading, then leave it out.

Ditch cliches

Unless it's a character's quirk, cliches—overused phrases or platitudes—can cause a reader to check out of your story.

Hint: Not sure if a phrase is a cliché? A quick Google search will help.

Check dialogue flow and believability

Do you find yourself skimming the dialogue? Is the dialogue simply rehashing information that the reader already knows? Cut it or rework it to get to the point. Also, check to see if it's something the character would say. Don't have a modern teenager using slang from the 1980s unless being retro is a quirk of the character. As you address these issues, you will notice improvements in the flow, clarity, and tension of your story. Your readers will stay engaged and be eager to see how it all ends!