# Self Editing For Fiction Writers

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Once you’ve finished your first draft...

What is your end goal?

Self publishing

Hiring an editor before publishing or submitting to a market / editor / agent / press

Do you need to edit if you’re planning to hire an editor? yes!!!

Saves you time and money

Will get more out of the edit (less focus on common errors)

Also need to edit before sending to beta readers or critique groups

Always save each draft as a new document so you can go back if needed. Helps remove anxiety so you can be more brutal with edits.

Where to start:

Read through **first draft**, if you didn’t make an outline before, do that now based on what you’ve written and where the story needs to go from beginning to end.

Make notes of character arc(s)

Plot

Pacing

Subplots

Note what needs to be switched around/ dropped/ changed/ expanded / tightened.

Do all characters serve a purpose?

Are all scenes and chapters meaningful?

Write **second draft** and read it

Double check character details (names, description)

Make sure the tone and voice are consistent

Is the POV consistent?

Are character motivations clear?

Are chapters in the right place and do they end on a note that makes the reader want to turn the page?

On the **third draft** it’s time to get into the smaller details

Check spellings, including world words, places and names

Cut filler words: Just, So, Very, Really, That, And Then, But, Of, Some and Like Seek out adverbs to replace with stronger verbs if possible.

Remove and tighten obvious words and phrases. Got to her feet: She stood. She stood up: She stood. She smiled at me: She smiled.

Do paragraphs start with differing words (ie. four in a row start with same pronoun)

Varied sentence structure

Word choice, tight, strong, clear, convey the correct tone for the scene

Is dialogue natural per character

At this point, have someone or two or three read it: Beta Readers

You can find them on facebook groups, people you know who enjoy the genre you write, exchange with other writers you know.

Beta readers can:

Provide their reactions to scenes – letting you know if they are doing what you intended

Point out plot holes or questionable character motivations/development

Answer any big picture questions you may ask about your story

Give feedback on the pacing, whether the end was satisfying, continuity issues and areas that are unclear to the reader.

You could also turn to a critique group or partner(s)

Usually comprised of other writers, maybe in your genre, varying levels of experience

Feedback is usually more in depth, specific and may be similar to a Developmental edit or Line edit depending on the person critiquing. It is a good idea to be specific about what kind of feedback you’re looking for.

Read feedback and make necessary changes. Keep in mind that this is your book and you don’t have to make every suggested change. Do what feels best for your story. If more than one reader points out the same thing, definitely look into it.

**Draft Four** should be pretty clean by now. Print it. Read it out loud or better yet, have your computer read it and follow along on the printed copy. Listen for:

Wrong words

Stilted sentences

Word echoes

Staccato lines

Unnatural sounding dialogue

Narrative or dialogue that goes on too long and needs to be broken up

Missing words

Note all changes on the hard copy and then apply them.

**Draft five** should be ready for submission or sending off to and editor you’re looking to hire.

Yes, there will still be typos and there will probably still be words or lines you could tweak for weeks/months or years, but the goal is to publish so moving forward...

If your submission is accepted for publication, it will go through a professional editor. At which point, you may get a content/Developmental editor.

Content will focus on the overall content, similar to your first and second edit. The bigger picture things, plot and character.

Next, a line / copy editor will go over what you resubmit: Makes structure more solid, word choice, errors, clichés, logic, continuity, tightens everything, Grammar, style, repetition, word usage

Proofreading comes last, hunting down any last typos

If you’re going to self publish, you can look are hiring or trading with another author for any of those editing stages.