

Get your First 1,000 Readers

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Step 3: Editing Your Reader Magnet

Due to the need for social distancing, we are now meeting virtually from home. That does not mean, however, that we cannot progress with our writing in general and our Reader Magnets specifically.

Remember, the goal is for everyone to end up having a finished product, published on Amazon, with edited content, a high-quality cover, and a growing collection of reviews. Then we will go through the process of putting your reader magnet to work for you as an author!

We've already talked extensively about *what* a Reader Magnet is and why it's a good idea to have one (see the previous handouts for Step 1 and Step 2—they are available on the WoW website Resources page: <https://writersofwsbg.weebly.com/resources.html>).

If you have finished writing your Reader Magnet, great! If not, keep at it until you get it done. Now it's time to consider the possibilities for *editing* your Reader Magnet.

IMPORTANT: *Self-edit your story before you have others edit it.*

Why? Well, consider why we have others edit our work. We need help because there is a limit to what we can do ourselves. We need help with what we *cannot* do ourselves, not with what we *can* do ourselves. If we give an editor a story that has NOT been self-edited to the best of our ability, then that editor will be occupied with the things *we* could have done rather than the things we *cannot* do. In other words, it defeats the purpose of having others edit our work.

TIPS FOR SELF-EDITING

1. Don't be afraid to remove unnecessary characters or scenes

Your Reader Magnet is probably a short story or novella. Often, even *novels* have too many characters. Shorter stories should have a *very* limited number of characters. Not only that, but shorter stories should have only a few scenes. Don't try to pack too much into the story.

2. Get rid of excess words

Every. Word. Should. Count. Especially in short stories and novellas. Pretend like you have to pay 25¢ for every word in your story. This will help you eliminate those that aren't necessary.

3. Focus on Point of View

Authors often have a hard time keeping a consistent point of view (POV). Short stories, in particular, should probably have only one POV anyway, so that makes it easier to edit for consistent POV.

Here's a great article on choosing a POV:

<https://nybookeditors.com/2016/01/all-about-point-of-view-which-one-should-you-use/>

It's worth doing a *complete* run-through of your story in which you look only for errors in POV consistency. Did you show something that your POV character could not have seen or known? Did your story suddenly look at something through a non-POV character's eyes?

4. Look for opportunities to show vs. tell

Yep, it's the old *show versus tell* conundrum. These have a tendency to sneak up on us. It's worth doing a complete run-through of your story just to look for where you could show instead of tell.

Telling: He was angry. *Showing:* He tightened his mouth and took a sharp breath.

5. Read your story aloud

Or have someone else read it aloud as you listen. You'll be surprised at how many errors you'll catch, such as poor word choice, poor flow, awkward phrasing, and much more. Remember, your brain shifts to a different mode when reading aloud compared to silently.

6. Get some help from an editing app or web site

Yep, there's an app for that! In fact, there are many, and they can be extremely helpful. Here are a few examples (I sometimes use the first one):

ProWritingAid - <https://prowritingaid.com>

Grammarly - <https://www.grammarly.com>

Hemingway - <http://www.hemingwayapp.com>

Autocrit - <https://www.autocrit.com>

7. Trust "said"

Yeah, this one may reflect my own style, but dialogue tags should be invisible. They should not draw the reader's attention. Just use the word "said." Avoid the awkwardness of "spat," "coughed," "sneezed," "yawned," "yelped," "caterwauled," "demurred," "shrilled," "twitted," or... "ejaculated!" People do not sneeze or yawn their words (although these actions might *interrupt* their words).

WHAT TO DO ONCE YOU'VE EDITED YOUR STORY TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY

Now it's time to get help. Basically, you have the following choices. These are arranged by level of editing expertise and therefore level of effectiveness.

Level 1: Friends and family who are not writers

Level 2: Other writers who are not professional editors

Level 3: Professional editors

All three of these are important and have their place. You may, in fact, use all three, particularly if you have the financial resources for Level 3. For my Reader Magnet, I am using Level 2 and Level 3. First I edited it to the best of my ability, then I had Trish help editing (she does not claim to be a writer, but her editing experience is extensive, so I consider her to be Level 2), then I paid a professional editor to provide a line edit of the story (not terribly expensive with a 15,000-word story).

THREE TYPES OF EDITS

- 1. Developmental Editing** (sometimes called Substantive Editing) Overall structure and content, chapter by chapter. Story arc, plot, pacing, etc.
- 2. Line Editing** (sometimes called Copy Editing)
- 3. Proof Reading** (sometimes called Copy Editing) Grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typos.

WHICH TYPE DO YOU NEED?

This depends. If you are sure (and others have confirmed it) your overall story is engaging and well-paced, you may not need *developmental editing*. But I think every story that is intended to be published needs thorough *line editing* and then *proofreading*.

WE'D LIKE TO HELP

As promised, if you are participating in the Reader Magnet Challenge, Trish and I are both offering to provide a *LINE EDIT* of your Reader Magnet. After you have edited your story to the best of your ability, please email your story (preferably as a Word document) to: stan@stancsmith.com