

# Editing Workshop

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**Developmental edit:** the overall story—character, setting, and plot.

**Line edit:** page, paragraph, and sentence level

**Copy edit:** consistency, correctness

**Proof read/pass pages:** final pass

## Developmental Mindset: Trust

Set expectations:

Write a love letter to your manuscript.

What is the MOOD for your book?

What draft are you on? (A second draft will look different than a fifth draft)

What plot structure are you using?

What feedback are you consistently getting from beta readers? OR What issues keep tickling at the back of your mind? (aka reader instincts)

Does your manuscript match your pitch, query, and synopsis?

## Character: What sets your story apart

Maggie Steifvater's Three Truths about Character:

- 1. Character is subtractive.** Characters should be realistic, but conveyed in an intentional way.
- 2. Character is subservient.** They are constrained by the mood of the scene, and the overall story.
- 3. Character is complex.** Don't default to easy or familiar. As you build characters, knowing the why of their details brings them from trope to individual. "Reality is shocking and dissonant in surprising and cool ways." (MS) Don't just borrow details from life, but the feeling and why behind the details.

**Exercise:** chose one trait of one character (maybe someone you want to dive deeper into) and write about it. Why do they have that trait or habit? Why is it important to them?

## Character Tropes

All characters start as stereotypes/tropey, and then you build them up to nuanced and complex. As you do this, note the spaces between characters. Ex: Sitcoms—Seinfeld, Friends, Scrubs, Chuck, New Girl, etc. There's one type of friend per group, and those types interacting brings tension that's familiar and satisfying. (smart one, funny one, lazy one, responsible one, etc. ).

If you have a cast of characters—big or small—list out the characters and which one they are in the group. If you have more than one type, consider consolidating or adjusting.

## Character Check:

Is your main character interesting?

Does the character feel real? (flaws, depth, consistency, distinctness, motivation)

Will readers like, relate to, or bond with the main character?

Does the character change by the end of the story?

Is the antagonist fully fleshed out? Is their motivation compelling and even relatable?

Are the supporting cast full characters, or placeholders?

Are there any inadvertent issues with diversity, offensive or harmful language or tropes, etc., or something that you're worried about?

Resources:

<https://writingwithcolor.tumblr.com/>

<https://www.saltandsagebooks.com/>

## Ways to Strengthen Character

Make sure you have enough physical description to ground the reader.

Choosing which parts of the character to describe can also show character, depending on who the narrator is. Why do you share the details you share?

Use the setting around character to show who they are.

Use what the character doesn't do or say to reveal something about them.

Ask why?, and why now? for character actions and introspection to ensure character actions/thoughts have good motivation.

Ask your character questions.

**Brainstorming:** Choose a character: main, side, antagonist. Answer these questions from the character's POV:

I was happiest when \_\_\_\_\_

I fear: \_\_\_\_\_

When I'm alone, I: \_\_\_\_\_

If there was an explosion outside, what's the first thing your character would do? (pray, check for weapons, run outside, hide, gather a group together, etc.)

If your character appeared right next to you, what would that character notice *first* in the room, and why?

## Setting

You can use setting to control the pacing (ex: include a longer description after a quick scene). And to reveal character (ex: setting can show something about the people in it). Everything, including setting, should be connected to your POV character's lens (or narrator's).

## Setting Check

Is there a consistent culture? Does it draw on its own history, whether it's invented or takes its framework from the real world?

Do your characters interact with the setting?

Is setting incorporated into every scene, esp through characters' senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell)

Do you only reveal relevant details?

Do you wait to share relevant details, rather than interrupting action?

Do your characters have legitimate reasons for sharing information about the setting?

Is your setting description consistent with the voice/history of the POV character/narrator?

Does (almost) every mention of setting do more than one job? (show character, control pacing or tension, advance plot)

### **Ways to Strengthen Setting**

What is the why of your setting?

What is the truth of your setting? (social, emotional truth)

Ask yourself WHY you (or your character) are sharing the description, and why now?

Use the setting to show character.

(how the character thinks, feels, sees the world, OR in juxtaposition of the characters' feelings—bright sunlight exaggerating deep sorrow inside).

Use different senses in scenes, don't rely only on easy ones.

Break up the setting descriptions so the reader is absorbing it all along with character/plot.

Use similes and metaphors to describe setting that creates emotions, but also shows what's important to the character.

Make your setting a logical choice, but also surprising in some way.

(ex: have a mundane moment happen in a cool place, or put a big moment in a mundane place)

If you repeat a location, change something about it.

(time of day, different smells in the kitchen, etc.)

What can you remove from the setting details so the focus is where you want it?

Use negative space to show a lack of something that should be there but isn't (no sound in a forest), or to compare two places (home vs. wilderness).

### **More questions for invented worlds:**

How do characters boil water in your world?

What belief systems do your characters have? Why?

How did language(s) develop the way they did?

What is the political/geographical history and how does it shape the present?

What folklore does the culture have?

Money systems, social hierarchies, power differences, agricultural techniques, etc.

## **Magic Systems:**

See Brandon Sanderson's Three Laws (<https://www.brandonsanderson.com/sandersons-first-law/>)

What are the costs of using magic? What are the limitations of the magic?

Why this magic system? What would happen if there wasn't magic anymore?

## **Practice:**

Take the most important scene in your pages. What is the big emotion in this scene?

Brainstorm: Where else could this scene take place to reflect that emotion?

What other time of day?

What senses could show this emotion?

What can you remove so the focus is where you want it?

What surprising thing could you add to the setting to show character?

Where can you include setting details for the biggest emotional impact?

## **Plot**

Plot is the sequence of events of the narrative. It's a character's goal meeting a problem. It's what happens to make the internal and external arc of your characters come together in a meaningful way. There are a lot of different plot structures and ways of telling a story, and the structure you use depends on what kind of story you're telling.

Basic Three Act: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-act\\_structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three-act_structure)

Act 1: Introduction of setting and characters

Inciting Incident: what happens to send them on their journey

Act 2: Rising action (introduction of subplots, increasing tension and conflict)

Midpoint: false high or false low where the main character starts on the true path to the climax

Act 2.2: Rising action (bad guys closing in, dark night of the soul, solution found)

Act 3: Break into three by putting the solution into play, climax/finale, resolution (new normal)

## **Plot Check**

Is the story being told by the right person, in the right POV tense (first, third, omniscient)?

Do your characters have a clear goal? (Internal is abt character arc/external goal is abt plot)

What is keeping your character from reaching their goal?

What are the stakes if the character doesn't reach their (internal/external) goal?

If there are multiple POVs, are they all necessary?

Are you showing the right things, and telling the right things?

Is the pacing intentional?

Are you hitting the beats of your plot structure when you're supposed to hit them?

Are the overall conflict, tension, and stakes rising all the way to the story's climax?

Are all the subplots supporting the main plot? Are there any unnecessary or unfinished subplots?

Are the funny parts still funny? (Don't edit the fun out.)

Are there any harmful tropes? Do you use tropes in a new, interesting way, or do they feel like clichés? How can you twist the trope a little more?

Does the end of the story fulfill the promises made at the beginning? Did you earn your ending?

### **Ways to Strengthen Plot**

How could things be worse for the main character? How could the conflict be deeper and more layered?

How does your character's internal arc lead to the ability to win the external arc?

Does the scene or story need an unexpected twist?

Can you twist a trope, and twist it again, to make it new and interesting?

In trouble spots, ask: Why is this happening? Why is it happening now? What more could happen?

Soggy middle: divide the middle into three sections so it has its own beginning, middle, and end, and re-plot the action within that framework.

Pacing too slow: how could you amp up tension?

Pacing too fast: how could you slow things down or show tension in another way?

### **Brainstorming Activity**

Use this story spine structure to tell what happens in your story.

1. Once upon a time:

2. Every day:

3. Until one day:

4. Because of that:

5: Because of that:

6: Because of that:

7: Until finally:

8: And ever since then:

The moral of the story is: