

Notes on How to Revise a Manuscript ¹

These activities all come AFTER drafting

- Add material to enrich– and to learn more. This should be done early and often
- Ask yourself if you've put in all the things that a reader needs. What is missing will depend on each writer's strength, weaknesses, and methods of drafting, but might include anything from feelings (do the characters show how they are reacting to events?) to essential background facts (will your readers born in 1980 have heard of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Spanish Civil War?).
- Go through your manuscript to see if the essential conflicts have been dramatized. This is an especially good technique for improving dialogue you think is flat– add conflict!
- Cut your material so that only the very best adjectives, images, and lines of dialogue remain.
- Go through and cut again out of respect for the reader's time.
- Make changes to fit your audience, if needed. This can be permanent (if I decide to make my book a young adult novel, I may have to get rid of some of the explicit sex) or temporary (I decide to make a story version of a chapter for a reading when I only have 15 minutes).
- Revise action scenes and other narrative sections for logistics. Is it easy to visualize the physical movement of the men having the fist fight? Is the city street where the fight takes place described in a way that makes it easy to picture? Are the parts of the fight described in the best order.
- Revise for continuity or consistency. Did the character change eye color between page 10 and page 210? Indeed, did the character's motivation change in a way not consistent with the events in the story?
- Revise for style: are your verbs active? Do they carry more weight than your adjectives?
- Do your characters' names fit their ethnic groups? Do they fit your story? Do too many names start with the same sound? Or do you want alliterating character names?
- Polish (correct grammar, typos, and format) to get the most respectful possible response from readers – especially potential agents, editors, and contest judges. If you don't trust your grammar, hire an editor or ask your retired-school-teacher aunt to go over it.
- Read through the entire manuscript in order, as a reader would, rapidly, for story, pacing, rhythm, and general arc of the story.
- Read all or portions of the manuscript aloud.
- Super-suggestion: Put it away and come back later. There is nothing like time passing for getting perspective on your manuscript. Write something else, too, a story, an article. Anything to get some distance on your novel.

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