

# NOW WHAT?! Revision Workshop

Daryll Lynne Evans

Congratulations! You've finished a draft!

## MACRO EDIT

### STEP ONE: Let it rest.

For as long as you're able, put the manuscript aside and focus on other things.

- Stephen King does 6 weeks
- 2 weeks minimum. 2 months or more preferable.

This will allow you to read the story with fresh perspective. More importantly, it will allow you to "forget" the minutia of the story as well as your intentions so you'll be able to see **what's really there**.

**BUT...Don't stop writing!** Work on a short story. Plot the sequel or a new novel. Compose a poem or essay. Keep your writing momentum going!

### WHILE THAT'S RESTING...

Now is an excellent time to reflect on the process of writing this project and your writing practice. Write a few sentences or paragraphs on the following questions:

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about your creativity?
- What did you learn about your story?
- How did the process surprise you?
- How will you carry your writing practise forward into 2026 and beyond?



## QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MANUSCRIPT

Send an instant message to your project. Ask the following questions. Write a few sentences or paragraphs on each.

- What are you here for?
- What is it you need to do?
- Who are you here for?

And send a message to your editing self in the future:

- Why do you love this piece?

Pull this out in dark times in the middle of edit pass 13 when you hate your story and forgot why you love writing and are ready to quit and join the circus.

Things will occur to you about story while it's resting. Ok to take notes and put them with the manuscript so they're there when you're ready to edit.

# MACRO EDIT (Continued)

## STEP TWO: Print and read---just making notes but not editing.

YOU ARE READING TO SEE WHAT'S THERE, NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS / PLANNED TO WRITE.

After you're done, spend some time focused on the following. Write your answers out as a few sentences or paragraphs.

- What does your hero want? What is their irreconcilable self and how does the story stress and strain that?
- What is THIS story about? (not the one you originally planned) What themes have emerged?
- What is the BIG TROUBLE/DRAMATIC QUESTION? Did this change from your outline/plan/intention to the actual writing of the story?
- Ask: Is this the right plot/trouble to cause the hero to change and grow or to answer the dramatic question?

## STEP THREE: Story Outline

If you did not plot out or outline your story before the first draft, now is the PERFECT time to pull out a fresh set of index cards.

This is super helpful to see your story structure, analyse and diagnose problems, and manipulate structure easily.

- Go through manuscript and make 1 card per scene. (There may be several scenes per chapter. If there is a long stretch of exposition that doesn't directly affect or lead into another scene, treat it as a separate scene.)
- Number each card/scene.

On each card write:

- A brief, one sentence description of the scene (*i.e.*-Grace takes Clady to the hairdresser and they bond)
- Where the scene falls along the Hero's Journey (Call to Adventure, Crossing Threshold)
- All other important characters in the scene
- The POV Character
- Location
- Time line
- Scene Goal
- Hero's emotion @beginning and end of scene

If you plotted your story out before writing, consider recarding the whole plot rather than using the original cards. This will help you see what's actually there.

**Tips and tricks:** Get a rainbow pack of highlighters and choose one for each POV character and/or one for each important character. Go through cards and highlight each person to see how the characters flow.

**THE PAYOFF:** Layout cards on a table/bed/large surface or tape them to a wall with painters tape. This will allow you to visualise your whole story.

## Now it's time to make an Editing Plan

Look carefully through your notes from reading your full draft, any notes you took through the process, and your careful analysis of your story based on any holes or missing character arcs, etc.

Make a list of all the issues focused on the big, structural problems and the medium-level problems (sentence level issues will be fixed in a later pass).

There is no point twiddling endlessly with sentences when it may turn out that whole scenes need to go or be rewritten.

This list gives you a plan of attack for your manuscript from largest issues to smallest.

# OKAY, BUT WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY DO?

## Shaping the Clay

- Once you really know what's there and think through what you want the story to be, it's time to get busy on the manuscript.
- If you want to stick to original themes/direction, where does story stray? Note what passages need to be revised/changed.
- If you're changing direction, mark passages that no longer serve the story (but don't delete them entirely!! Put them in a Deleted Scenes file).
- Plot—does it work to stress the character and their desires/irreconcilable self?
- Where does the plot take tangents/side trips? Decide if they stay or go.

THE FIRST SEVERAL PASSES ARE ABOUT BIG PICTURE STUFF—PRETTY SENTENCES AND LANGUAGE AND *FROU FROU* COME LATER.

- DRAMATIC QUESTION/STORY TROUBLE
- MAIN CHARACTER'S EMOTIONAL JOURNEY
- OTHER CHARACTERS' EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS
- DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT CHARACTERS? TOO MANY? COMBINE OR ELIMINATE?
- Consider the character arcs for all major and significant minor players (same—even if they don't have huge change, what is their deep desire/ flaw and how does this story strain it? Especially their interactions with the MC?)

## STRUCTURE/ RHYTHM & TENSION

- DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT SCENES/TROUBLE?
- ARE THEY IN THE RIGHT ORDER? (This is where your cards will help you play with story structure, scene order, and such)
- DO you have several scenes that do the same thing?

## STAKES—

- Look at the beginning and ending of each scene. Is there a sense of stakes at the beginning of each scene? Have the stakes changed and/or escalated at the end of the scene?

Scene goals: MC must win, retrieve, escape, or stop something. This can be subtle—a conversation is hero trying to “win” or “retrieve” a bit of information needed to get to the next thing, or MC is trying to “escape” an uncomfortable conversation.

## THEMES

- What themes have emerged? Do they carry through the story? Are there any place where themes need to be shored up or removed?

## TO NE

- What is the tone of the story? Is it even throughout?

## BEGINNING, ENDINGS

- Beginning should signal the ending and the trouble to come
- Endings often echo back to the beginning or to significant motifs/themes established through story
- Scene and Chapter Transitions—set the pacing and draw reader onward through the book. They should also signal the stakes and help drive tension.
- POV clarity—head hopping, continuity of narrative distance/psychic distance

## STEP FOUR: MICRO EDITS

Finally! The easy and fun stuff! Do several passes through the manuscript for each of these. PLAN TO DO SEVERAL READ THROUGHs.

- Language: Fresh, Precise/Concise
- Clarity
- Vivid, Concrete Images
- Dialogue
- Continuity in scene, visuals, character
- Show and Tell
- VERBAL FILLERS—just, very, really, great, etc
- Repetition—repeated words/expressions—
- Redundancy—do you have several expressions that say same thing?

Read aloud or have your computer read to you. It's way easier to hear clunky language and repetitious words and stuff.

START AT END AND GO THROUGH TO BEGINNING—ENDS AND MIDDLES OFTEN GET NEGLECTED

From Cidney Swanson for a final pass—THROW PAGES IN AIR AND PICK UP IN RANDOM ORDER—LINE EDIT FOR A GEM ON EACH PAGE

When writers say they did 17 drafts, this is what they did. They did multiple passes through their manuscripts looking for these different things, roughly in this order, one at a time instead of trying to do ALL THE THINGS to each chapter.