



How to Revise Your Novel

I suggest that you write a first draft with very little revision. Revising as you go leads to a lack of progress (often stalling somewhere between chapter two and three) and wasting time trying to fix problems that may well be redundant or clarified when you reach your final destination. As they say: don't get it right – get it written! Here are my suggested steps to buff a first draft into a final draft.

1. Print out three copies and give two of them to friends whose opinion you value and trust. Ask if they can take the time to read and jot notes in the margin of any passages that don't work or are confusing and any thoughts/suggestions on structure/plot/characters. Make it clear that you are not expecting them to edit your work or concern themselves with punctuation or spelling. Agree on a time frame that suits both parties.
2. The third copy you should read yourself. Read it aloud and correct as much as you can just by noting the problem on the page, circling punctuation and spelling problems.
3. Retrieve the copies from friends and incorporate their notes with your own.
4. Fire up the computer and complete your first rewrite.
5. Make a diagram of your time period: days, weeks, years – make sure that the story is consistent throughout with events, births, deaths etc and the passage of time is clear.
6. Taking each character in turn, read through the sections that relate to them and make sure that the character and, particularly the character's voice, is consistent throughout the story.
7. Take a big piece of paper and draw a continuum of the spine of the story to make sure the structure is as good as it can be to keep your readers engaged.
8. Read every paragraph then rework for easy readability, eloquence – make it succinct.
9. Ditto every sentence – get to the point.
10. Repeat Step 8. To check for the active voice – hone in on words ending in 'ing'.
11. Repeat Step 9. Make sure your dialogue crackles – distil lengthy speeches.
12. Delete all exclamation marks (unless a character is shouting)
13. Make sure your nouns are accurate. Be circumspect with adverbs and adjectives.
14. Read again for flow – does each paragraph flow naturally to the next?
15. Check punctuation and spelling from start to finish.
16. Is your layout correct? Look in a book for correct layout.
17. Ask the most pedantic person you know to proofread for you.
18. Make all the changes
19. Read one final time.
20. Your work should now be ready to submit – good luck!

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