What we'll cover today

- What editing is
- How technology can assist the editing process
- How to use technology for story, scene and page level edits

Understanding editing

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What is editing?

Editing is the process of revising your manuscript to improve upon it. Editing includes everything from:

- Moving entire scenes
- Deleting or adding text
- Changing how sentences are written

What is editing? continued

Editing may also include starting from scratch on:

- A scene
- A chapter
- Several scenes
- Your entire novel

The editing mindset

The editing process is all about the *reader*.

You need to separate yourself from the manuscript to understand how your audience will enjoy and understand your book.

The editing process is just that... a *process*.

In many instances, editing lasts longer than drafting.

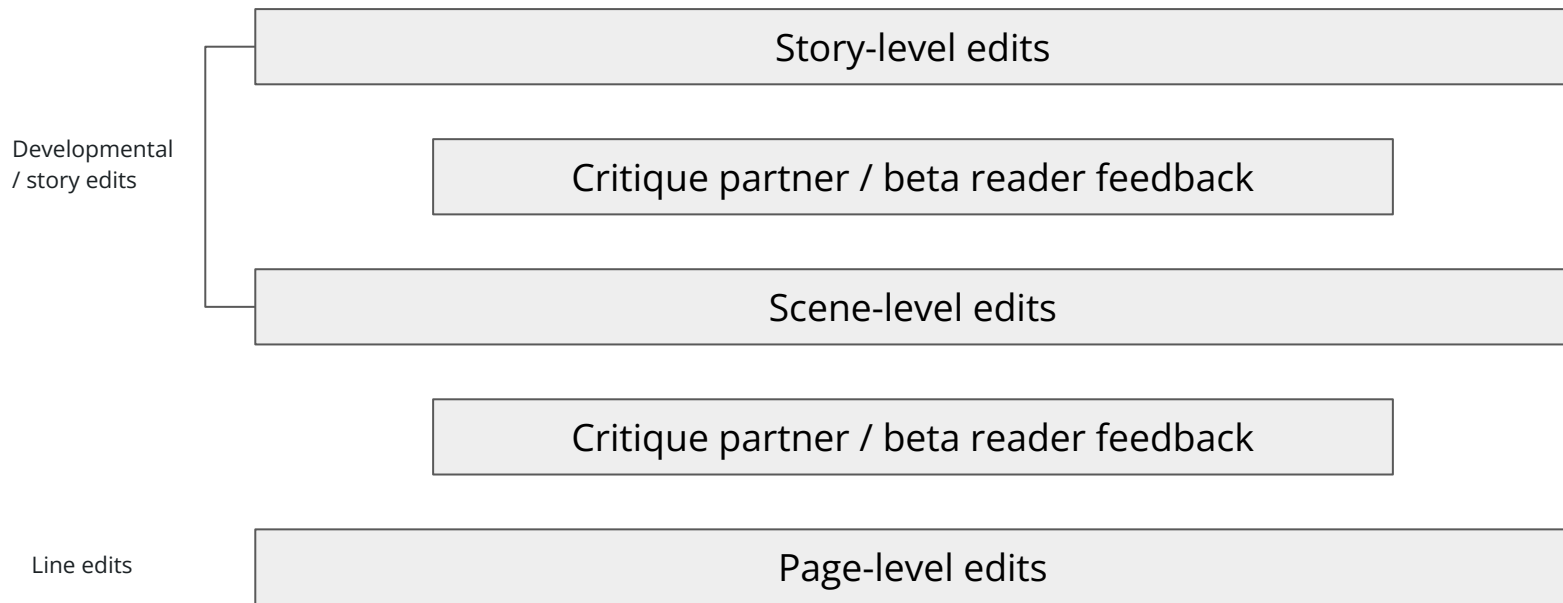ProWritingAid

Maintaining momentum through editing

To effectively edit, you need to put aside your inner perfectionist.

Every novel can still be edited, even once published.

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but only finding the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping.

I prop myself up on one elbow. There's enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned in my mother's body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me.

Setting expectations for the editing process

Developmental / story edits

Story-level edits

Critique partner / beta reader feedback

Scene-level edits

Critique partner / beta reader feedback

Line edits

Page-level edits

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How technology can assist with editing

Why use technology for editing

Editing is a complicated and long process. Often, it can be difficult to get distance from your story to objectively evaluate it. Technology can help:

- Speed up the process
- Identify errors humans can't spot
- Give inexhaustible feedback

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Using technology is a spectrum

No generative AI   All generative AI

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Completing story-level edits

What are story-level edits?

The first step in revising your work is to complete a story-level edit. At the story level, you're focusing only on the *story*, which includes:

- Plot
- Structure
- Character development
- World-building

Story-level edits are the highest level of the process, where you're discussing the biggest pieces of your work.

An example of story-level edits for crime

Initial Plot Summary:

Detective Sarah Blake is called to investigate the murder of a wealthy businessman, James Caldwell. The investigation leads her through a series of twists and turns, uncovering Caldwell's shady business dealings and a long list of enemies. The prime suspect is his business partner, Mark Evans, who had a public falling out with Caldwell days before his death. As Sarah digs deeper, she discovers that Caldwell was involved in a secret affair with his secretary, Laura, who also becomes a suspect. In the end, it's revealed that Mark Evans committed the murder out of greed and jealousy.

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An example of story-level edits for crime

Edited Plot Summary:

Detective Sarah Blake is called to investigate the murder of a wealthy businessman, James Caldwell. The initial evidence points to a straightforward case with Caldwell's business partner, Mark Evans, as the prime suspect due to their recent public altercation. However, as Sarah delves deeper, she discovers Caldwell's complex web of deceit.

An example of story-level edits for crime

Expanding motives: Add layers to Caldwell's character, revealing that he was blackmailing several influential people in the city.

Introducing subplots: Sarah learns about Caldwell's estranged daughter, Emily, who had recently reconnected with him. Emily's troubled past and her need for money make her a suspect, adding emotional depth to the story.

Adding red herrings: Caldwell's secretary, Laura, is found to be secretly investigating Caldwell's illegal activities for a journalist. This subplot creates tension and suspicion around Laura until she is eventually cleared.

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Story-level edits:

- A character that needs to be cut from the story.
- A missing plot point or beat.
- An ineffective climax.

***Not* story-level edits:**

- A description of a new setting in a scene.
- An overly wordy sentence.
- Dialogue that feels boring.

How to complete story-level edits

Story-level edits require you to approach your manuscript like a reader (and a new one at that). What is working about the story and what isn't?

➜ Set your story aside
➜ Read your story like a reader (aka, no edits)
➜ Capture ideas in a notebook
➜ Utilize technology to support your process

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Completing scene-level edits

What are scene-level edits?

Scene-level edits come after you are happy with your story-level edits. During this part of the process, we zoom in and look at each scene for:

- Key scene beats
- Pacing
- Engagement opportunities

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Scene-level edits:

- Whether dialogue is exciting.
- How action within the scene is progressing.
- Whether your descriptions make sense.

Not scene-level edits:

- If your sentences are overly wordy.
- If a character is not effective for the plot.
- If you're missing a story beat.

Scene-level edits vs chapter-level edits

I recommend completing edits at the scene-level rather than the chapter-level. This is because:

- Scenes are the true building blocks of story, which contain individual beats.
- Some chapters contain multiple scenes or only part of a scene.

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Original dialogue:

Sarah said, "Mr. Evans, we have evidence that you were at the scene of the crime on the night James Caldwell was murdered. Can you explain why you were there?"

"I told you," Mark replied frustratedly. "I had a meeting with him that night. We were discussing many types of business matters. I left shortly after our meeting ended."

"But witnesses saw you arguing with Mr. Caldwell earlier that day. What was the argument about?" Sarah asked again.
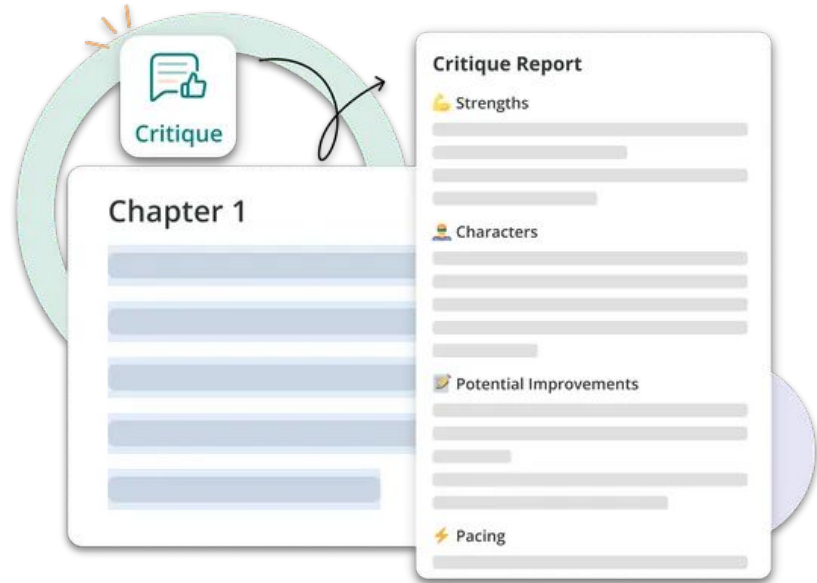
New dialogue:

"Mr. Evans, we know you were at Mr. Caldwell's the night he was murdered. Why you were there?"

"It was a business meeting. We talked, I left," Mark said.

"Witnesses saw you arguing with Mr. Caldwell earlier that day. What was that about?"

How technology can assist with story-level edits

➜ Critique report
➜ Dialogue report
➜ Pacing report
➜ Sensory report

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Completing page-level edits

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What are page-level edits?

Page-level edits are the final step in your editing process. This is where you zoom into the page and look at each sentence to see if it's effectively telling your story.

Page-level edits include:

- Am I showing, not telling?
- Am I overusing adverbs?
- Have I overused passive voice?
- Do I have repetitive sentence structure?

A word of advice for page-level edits

It's possible to tinker with sentences forever. Any sentence can be changed or improved in some way.

Remember, you're aiming for *your* best effort.

Old sentence:

The detective walked over into the back of the hospital looking for a piece of evidence that he could use in order to prove that a hypothesis was correct.

New sentence:

The detective searched the rear of the hospital for evidence to support his hypothesis.

How technology can assist with page-level edits

➔ Realtime report

➔ Overused words report

➔ Sticky sentences report

➔ Cliches report

➔ Consistency report

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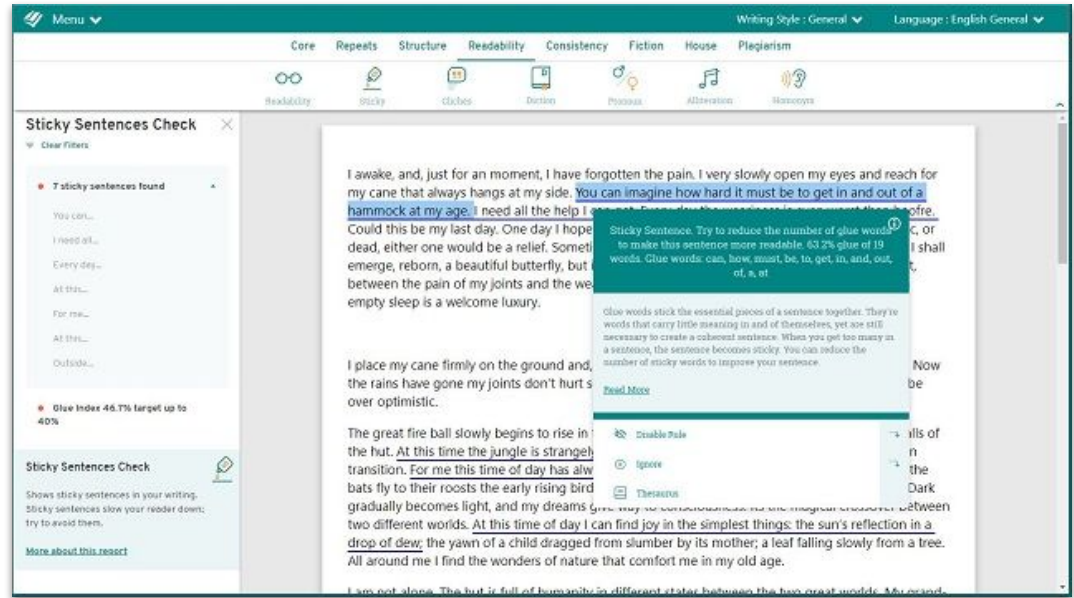
Recap

What to keep in mind when editing

Editing is a process.

Technology can assist with making editing faster and easier.

Using technology is a spectrum.

Questions?