

Self-Editing Checklist

Edit big to small, and never the other direction — structure first, then scenes, then sentences, then words. Line-editing a chapter you later cut is the classic time-sink.

PASS 0 — CREATE DISTANCE (BEFORE YOU START)

- ☐ Leave the draft at least 24 hours
- ☐ Read it on paper, not on screen
- ☐ Change the font or formatting so it looks unfamiliar
- ☐ Read it aloud, or have text-to-speech read it to you

PASS 1 — MACRO: STRUCTURE & FLOW

- ☐ Is the core idea clear and supported all the way through?
- ☐ Does every scene or section actually move the story?
- ☐ Do transitions connect ideas smoothly, without jumps?
- ☐ Does it progress logically from beginning to end?
- ☐ Cut and reorder here — before you polish a single word.

PASS 2 — MICRO: GRAMMAR, SYNTAX, STYLE

- ☐ Subject-verb agreement and consistent tense
- ☐ Comma splices and misused semicolons
- ☐ Weak or overused verbs
- ☐ Run-on sentences and fragments
- ☐ Vary sentence length; prefer the active voice

PASS 3 — TIGHTEN THE PROSE

- ☐ Cut filler words (“very”, “really”, “just”)
- ☐ Remove redundant phrases (“advance planning”, “free gift”)
- ☐ Replace wordy expressions with concise ones
- ☐ Combine short, related sentences

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- ☐ Replace a verb + adverb with one strong verb

PASS 4 – GET FRESH EYES

- ☐ A writing group or critique partner
- ☐ Beta readers from your target audience
- ☐ A professional editor for the final pass

MY OWN RECURRING FIXES

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐