



Rough to Revised: Self-editing for Impact

In this introductory lesson, we'll look at how this course is structured and cover the different types of edits or "passes" you'll be doing through this program. We'll also discuss the importance of taking a break from your manuscript before you start to edit your own work.

If you haven't already done so, please complete the [Registration Form linked here](#), so that we can allocate you to a coaching group with one of our editors.

Introduction

"Good stories are not written. They are rewritten."
Phyllis A. Whitney

Many variations of the above quote exist, repeated by authors as diverse as Ernest Hemingway, John Green, Khaled Hosseini, and Truman Capote. It's repeated because it's true – your novel isn't done when you've written your first draft. As big an achievement as writing a first draft is, if you want to be a successful, published author, you need to learn to *rewrite* your novel.

Editing is an essential part of preparing your work to submit to literary agents or potential publishers – and it's even more critical if you plan to self-publish. The editing process is where your novel is really created, where it is honed and polished until it shines.

Throughout this program, we'll be focusing on self-editing. These are the edits you do yourself to prepare your manuscript to send to an editor. But this won't be the last edit you do – there will still be subsequent rounds of edits and proofreads with external editors, which we'll cover in the later lessons.

Over the next eight months, we'll guide you through the following seven steps in the self-editing revision process, starting with macro (big picture) edits and ending with micro edits:

- Reverse outlining (also known as Book Mapping)
- Rewrites and biggest structural edits

- Creating a synopsis overview of the story to ensure that the story is structurally sound
 - Content edits
 - Copy edits
 - How to get feedback on your work (and how to give it)
 - Final polish and fine-tuning
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Remind yourself of your promise to the reader

Before we get started, let's take a moment to review what we want to achieve with our story, and what promise we intend to make to our readers.

Every genre comes with a certain set of reader expectations, and if we don't deliver on these expectations, we risk disappointing our readers. So, it's important that before we start revising our manuscript and shaping it into a novel that readers will love, we identify what our readers will expect and what we want to make them feel.

Will you be promising your reader a heart-thumping thrill ride with twists and turns, a dark, angsty read that will have them reaching for the tissues, or a heart-warming, feel-good escapist read? Identify the type of reader experience you want to deliver, so you can ensure, as you revise your novel, that this remains consistent throughout the story and that the end result delivers on that promise.

Ask yourself:

- Does your first draft deliver on these two reader expectations? If not, what do you need to work on during revisions to ensure your novel meets these expectations?
 - Identify what emotions you want your reader to experience while reading your story. What promise will you be making to your readers?
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The different editing passes

As you revise your novel, you'll do at least four rounds of edits on your manuscript. Each stage of editing focuses on a different aspect.

Content edits: These edits look at big-picture story issues such as character development, story structure, conflict, plot holes, and the overall pacing of the story. Rather than looking at language, you'll be focusing on the broader issues. This is the first phase of editing and is often time-consuming as it may require multiple passes. Content edits are also known as developmental edits, structural edits, or story edits.

Line editing: The line edit ensures that the writing is polished at sentence-level. This is also sometimes known as stylistic editing and is designed to improve the style and quality of the prose. This phase of editing can only be done once content edits are complete, as you'll be wasting your time making the writing beautiful at sentence-level, only to then cut scenes, characters, or even rewrite whole sections of the novel during content editing.

Copy editing: Copy editing often overlaps with line editing, but is more in-depth. In this editing stage, we'll ensure that the writing is correct. We'll look for clichéd writing, incorrect tenses or POV jumps, run-on sentences, grammar, spelling, punctuation, word choices, and also fine-tune the story's tone.

Proofreading: This is the 'final check' of a manuscript before it is either submitted to agents or editors or before it is self-published. It's a final quality control review, correcting missed punctuation, spelling mistakes, and misused words.

You may also choose to do additional passes of the manuscript based on your own unique needs. For example, if you are aware that POV (point of view) is a weakness, you may choose to do one entire round of edits, from beginning to end, focused on ensuring that POVs are consistent or on deepening the POVs (which we will cover in one of our lessons).

There's a logical order to this revision process. It doesn't make sense to work on dialogue or word choices or making your phrasing beautiful if you're going to end up cutting the scene or doing a major rewrite on it, so we focus on structural (content) rewrites first. This is why it's also important to complete your first draft before starting the revision process. In order to view your story as a whole, it needs to be complete.

Throughout this program, we will walk you through each of these steps, starting with the big-picture content edits, then copy and line editing, then proofreading... but that's not where the edit process ends! By the time you've done all these passes, you may well be sick of your story and want to move on to something new, but before the book is ready for publication, you'll need to do each these steps all over again with an external editor!

But first: Take a break!

Once you've completed your first draft, you'll still be closely connected to the work; however, editing requires emotional distance and an analytical – and often ruthless – mindset.

The original drafting process requires creative freedom as you write, and a deep emotional attachment to the story. Many writers prefer to write their first drafts quite fast, letting the inspiration flow rather than blocking that creative current by stopping to analyze and dissect the writing. Often the magic happens when we're not self-censoring or worrying about whether something is phrased just right.

While the editing process is creative in its own way, it requires you to put on a different hat, to be more objective about the words on the page. We call the self-editing phase the revision process. Revision is, literally, re-vision. You need to view your work with fresh eyes, as if seeing it anew and from a different angle. However, it is incredibly difficult to distance yourself from the story sufficiently to be able to cut unnecessary paragraphs or change elements of the story when you're still emotionally attached to it. You, therefore, need a little perspective before you can review your work with any sort of objectivity.

The best way to gain this perspective is to take a break from your manuscript. Time away will give you distance and fresh eyes and enable you to see the story as it is written on the page, rather than the way it is in your head. Without the objectivity we gain from space and time away from the story, we stop seeing what is on the page. Our brains tend to autocorrect, seeing instead what they think should be there!

It's often a good idea to write something new before you come back to edit your manuscript, as this helps to break the emotional ties and enables you to view your first story objectively. If that's not possible, and you're champing at the bit to get this book completed, then a break of at least two weeks will help you to forget just enough of it that you'll be reading your work with fresh eyes.

Ideally, you'll be able to take a break from your manuscript before this program officially starts. Refill your well with other projects. Read, watch movies, or enjoy some time with your loved ones before you start the revision process.

Different Drafts

It's important to remind yourself that each different draft of your manuscript has a specific purpose. It is not necessary to fix every problem in your second draft. In this linked video from Film Courage, script consultant Shannan E. Johnson talks about the purpose of the second draft and how to approach it.

Watch: [3 Biggest Mistakes Writers Make with their second draft](#) – Shannan E. Johnson (11:51)

(Note: the first 5 minutes of this video are especially useful for novelists)

Introductory meet-and-greet with your classmates

We invite you to attend an introductory live Zoom call to meet the Gemini coaches as well as your fellow program participants. Feel free to bring any questions you may have about this program, and be prepared to discuss where you are in your writing journey, what you hope to gain from this

program, and what you feel your biggest challenges are likely to be as you embark on the revision process.

Activity: Create and share a logline (1-2 sentences) that summarizes the central premise of your story. For tips on how to write your logline, check out [this article from TCK Publishing](#).

Date: Sunday, March 2nd 2025

Time: 11am Mountain Time

The link to the event will be sent via email to all participants.

What's next?

For our first step in the revision process, we'll be using a method of Reverse Outlining to create an overview of our manuscripts. This process will help us to identify scenes that may be missing or repetitive, plot holes or weak points in the story, or scenes that are not furthering the story.
