

The

ULTIMATE

SELF-EDITING

CHECKLIST



A FORMULA FOR LEAN WRITING
THAT IMPACTS YOUR READER

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Print this page and use it to grade your manuscript, checking as many of the boxes as you can.

I HAVE:

- Deleted throat-clearing, freeing my opening of unnecessary scene setting, backstory, background information, or anything else that keeps me from getting on with my story.
- Chosen the simple word over the complicated one. Anywhere I could have simplified, I have.
- Omitted needless words.
- Deleted even subtle redundancies, such as “he clapped ~~his hands~~” or “he shrugged ~~his shoulders~~.”
- Deleted *up* and *down*, except where necessary.
- Deleted *that*, except when necessary for clarity.
- Not over-explained. (Instead of “He walked through the open door and sat down in a chair,” you would write, “He walked in and sat in a chair.”)
- Avoided quotation marks around words used in another context, as if the reader wouldn’t otherwise “get it.”
- Avoided telling what’s *not* happening, such as, “He didn’t respond,” or, “The room never quieted.”
- Used strong nouns and verbs instead of overusing adjectives and adverbs.
- Avoided hedging verbs, such as smiled *slightly*, *almost* laughed, etc.
- Deleted the term *literally* when I actually mean *figuratively*.
- Deleted unnecessary stage direction, telling my reader only what he or she needs to know in each scene—nothing more.

ESPECIALLY FOR FICTION

I HAVE:

- Maintained a single Point of View per scene.
- Avoided clichés—not just words and phrases, but also situations.
- Resisted the urge to explain, showing rather than telling. For example, not, “It’s cold,” which is merely flat, telling narrative, but rather, “She shivered,” which is descriptive language, showing a character in action, letting the reader experience the story and deduce what is going on without being told.
- Primarily used *said* to attribute dialogue, rather than any other option.
- Included specifics to add the ring of truth.
- Avoided similar character names or even the same first initials to keep characters distinct.
- Avoided specialized punctuation, timesteps, font sizes, ALL CAPS, *italics*, **bold facing**, etc.