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, typestyles, font sizes, ALL CAPS, *italics*, **bold facing**, etc.

For more information on Jerry's self-editing rules, visit this article:

Self-Editing Your Book: The Ultimate 21-Part Checklist