

Fiction Fix-It Shop

Substantive Editing Checklist

When a client purchases a substantive edit from FFS, they have a right to expect the following services, qualities, and end product:

Qualities of Editor and Feedback

- Published novelist
- Thorough
- Honest
- Encouraging
- Helpful
- Understandable
- Professional yet personable
- Reflective of current fiction publishing standards
- Respectful of writer's own voice and talent
- On Time

Qualities of ShopTalk Session

- Prompt start and finish
- Professional
- Helpful
- Client driven agenda
- Client-focused and client manuscript-focused
- Conversational, not lecture or "therapy session"
- Editor is prepared for session in advance
- Encouraging and friendly
- Positive and solutions-based

The FFS policy on endorsements and using FFS or the editor's name in queries is this:

Mentioning in a book proposal that the manuscript has been professionally edited will not affect the publisher's interest in the book. A publisher wants to see if the story works and is a compelling read. If it is, it's not that important how it got that way. Mentioning the professional edit in the proposal could be seen by some in-house editors as an amateur statement because experienced writers know that in a proposal the manuscript must stand on its own merits. It is acceptable to mention the FFS edit in the proposal, but we do not recommend it.

Having a book edited by FFS does not imply an endorsement of that manuscript by the FFS editor. Quotes from the editor's feedback may NOT be used in a book proposal, query, or pitch. Editors, being also published novelists, have the right to offer an endorsement of a manuscript

once it is contracted by a publisher if they choose. However, there is no obligation for them to do so, and the client should not make that request.

End Product

- Complete read-through of manuscript
- Moderate line editing using Track Changes, Comments, and analysis inserted into manuscript text
- Substantive edits and analysis at conclusion of manuscript, typically 10-20 pages single-spaced narrative
- Four recorded ShopTalk sessions of 30 minutes each

Editing Services

During the substantive edit, your editor will be considering the following aspects of novel writing to comment on as needed:

Line Editing:

- Analysis of scene structure** for as many scenes as time allows: Scene Goal, Motivation and Conflict, Climax, Resolution, Tension, Motivation-Reaction Units, and relevance to story arc.
- POV:** problems, errors, or opportunities to deepen POV
- Show-Don't-Tell:** your editor will flag enough examples of different types of telling so that you can identify remaining examples during your own revisions of the manuscript
- Dialogue:** flagging awkward, contrived, or unwieldy dialogue
- Wordiness or Slow Pacing:** with possibly some suggestions on how to improve pacing or increase tension
- Unclear Passages:** flagging sentences or sections that are confusing or unclear
- Writing "tics":** flagging several examples of repetitive words, phrases, or other writing patterns that do not contribute positively to manuscript. You as the writer are expected to find further examples during your own revision of manuscript.
- Character development:** flagging inconsistent behavior, unsympathetic or unbelievable behavior, stereotypes, unclear motivation, 2-dimensional character development, and other problems as noted by editor
- Back story and Explaining:** flagging unnecessary back story, research, and other types of explaining
- Clichés and Overwriting:** helping writer avoid "purple" writing, while still respecting writer's voice, genre of story, and mood or tone being set.
- Other problems or areas of improvement:** as deemed important by the editor

Line edits are not expected to correct problems, rewrite, or always make suggestions. They are not required to address continuity issues, grammar, formatting, spelling, punctuation, factual accuracy, flow of sentences, or clarity.

Line edits will be heavier during the first half of the manuscript and taper off during the second half as the editor is only required to point out enough examples of each issue for you to understand the problem and find additional examples during your own revision.

Substantive Editing: At the end of the manuscript, you can expect a narrative analysis with suggestions and explanations of usually about 10-20 single-spaced pages on the following areas:

Characterization

- ❑ **Protagonist: *May include:*** strengths, weaknesses, character arc, GMC (goal, motivation, conflict), portrayal of appropriate and authentic emotions, turning points, raising personal stakes, handling back story, character voice, plausibility, and other suggestions as the editor sees fit.
- ❑ **Antagonist: *Same as above, but additionally:*** special focus on creating a believable, three-dimensional character with clear and understandable motivations and desires
- ❑ **Main Supporting Characters: *Same as above for protagonist:*** for whichever supporting characters the editor deems significant enough for analysis. This will be a briefer analysis since supporting characters are not as deeply developed in most novels.
- ❑ **Overview/Summary of characters as a whole:** including general strengths, weaknesses, suggestions for improvement, and additional resources to help with character development as editor deems necessary.

Plot

- ❑ **Story Structure: *May include:*** Inciting incident, turning points (disasters, three-act structure), building the story tension, dark moment, climax, resolution, Story GMC (goal, motivation, conflict)
- ❑ **Pacing: *May include:*** balance between action sequences and reflective scenes, tension, use of back story, eliminating preachiness, SHIR (See-How-I-Researched), explaining, unnecessary scenes, extraneous sub-plots or meandering story threads, excessive narrative summary or irrelevant dialogue passages
- ❑ **Central Conflict: *May include:*** discussion on ways to deepen conflict, make it matter more in the story, raise public and personal stakes, heighten tension, layer conflicts through sub-plots, complicate the conflict, strengthen or create turning points, and connect external conflict to character's inner conflicts.
- ❑ **Plausibility and Originality: *May include:*** suggestions for avoiding clichéd or stereotyped plots, encouragement to create new plot twists, making the plot more believable
- ❑ **Other aspects of plot as editor deems necessary**
- ❑ **Overview and summary of plot:** strengths, weaknesses, ways to improve, and additional resources such as books, articles, websites, or groups that editor feels would be helpful

Writing Technique—overview and general suggestions for improving the following areas as necessary, basically a recap of the line edits

- Dialogue**
- POV:** deepening, limiting, strengthening
- Voice:** writer's own writing voice
- Showing, not telling**
- Narration**
- Dialogue attributions, beats, and internalizations (thoughts)**
- Increasing tension on every page**
- Maturing overall style**
- Summary and additional resources as needed**

Summary and Further Recommendations

- Advice regarding how to approach revisions**
- Suggested next steps beyond revision**
- Encouragement regarding overall story potential**
- Reminder to schedule ShopTalk sessions to discuss further questions**
- Additional resources not already listed**

ShopTalk Sessions

ShopTalk Sessions are designed to give you an additional opportunity to ask questions and discuss your edits further with your editor. Four 30-minute sessions are scheduled for a substantive edit and should be spread out over several weeks after the your edits are complete. They will be conducted in a similar manner to a paid critique you could receive at a writer's conference.

- 30-min. time limits**
- What questions do you have about your edits?**
- Focus on 1-3 items per session**
- Brainstorming is acceptable, as long as it remains client driven and not editor driven**
- If client runs out of questions, editor will have a few items from edit ready to discuss**
- Editor is acting as a sounding board, may explain concepts and offer suggestions and advice, but not issuing orders**
- Positive, craft-focused discussion. Not judging whether manuscript is publishable or marketable.**
- May discuss next steps such as seeking an agent or querying editors, but may not involve recommending specific houses or agents. If client asks for information on an agent or house that the editor is familiar with, sharing non-confidential information is acceptable.**