

MICRO-EDIT  
DIAGNOSTIC CHECKLIST

1. **Language:** Language determines that transcendent aspect of a writer's work: her unique style, her voice. Edit out favorite familiar riffs: Kill your shtick.
  - a. *Keep language fresh.* Ask: Is this language my own or borrowed? Am I writing new words to fit this moment and this story?
  - b. *Keep language precise and concise.* Ask: Is this word or phrase necessary?
    - i. Avoid rhetoric that sounds lofty and says little.
    - ii. Eliminate verbal filler.
    - iii. Avoid adverbs and adjectives. As you edit, ask yourself how this or that sentence reads without them.
    - iv. Eliminate tiny words that bog down sentences unless you are using them for a specific purpose (in dialogue, or to achieve a certain rhythm).
  - c. *Keep language active.* Make your sentences active and upright. Ask: Have I overused the present participle ("ing" words), especially to modify the verb "to be"? Have I slowed down my prose by using the "standstill" construction, and created monotony by repeating it too many times?
  - d. *Keep language real.* Avoid pretentious overwriting. Lyricism can be real, highfalutin rhetoric cannot.
2. **Repetition:** Have you repeated words and expressions? Repetition is only acceptable if there is a reason for it—such as creating a rhythmic pattern, emphasis, or leitmotiv.
3. **Redundancy:** Have you rehashed an idea? If so, keep the more affective expression of it.
4. **Clarity:** Is an idea muddy? A paragraph vague? Have you put three ideas into one sentence, where they are competing with each other and none are clear? Tease them out, and keep them separate in new, simpler sentences. Or structure one complex sentence more carefully.

5. **Authenticity (Image, Dialogue):** When you edit, make your images ring true. Ask yourself: Does each object mentioned make sense? Make sure your dialogue rings true to your characters and the world you've created. Ask yourself: Do people really say that?
6. **Continuity (Visuals, Character):** Make sure every aspect of a character is convincing. The tiniest alterations count. Also, keep the visual details straight: A cherry table on page 2 cannot be maple on page 7. In the movie industry, people are hired just to keep visual continuity. Hire yourself to do the same for your text.
7. **Show and Tell:** If you have a traditional plot, did you summarize it, fearful that your reader may not have "gotten it"? Cut out summary. Show what's happening along the way so there is no need for explanation at the end. The point should reveal itself in the action and dialogue.
8. **Beginnings, Endings, Transitions:** All three frequently need to be finessed when we edit. See if the beginning and ending of your sentences, paragraphs, and sections, and of course book, have grace, tension, and purpose.

As you read, ask yourself if in places you feel abandoned by the author. This may mean that you didn't achieve a smooth or sensible transition; and instead have created a lapse that jolts a reader outside the story.