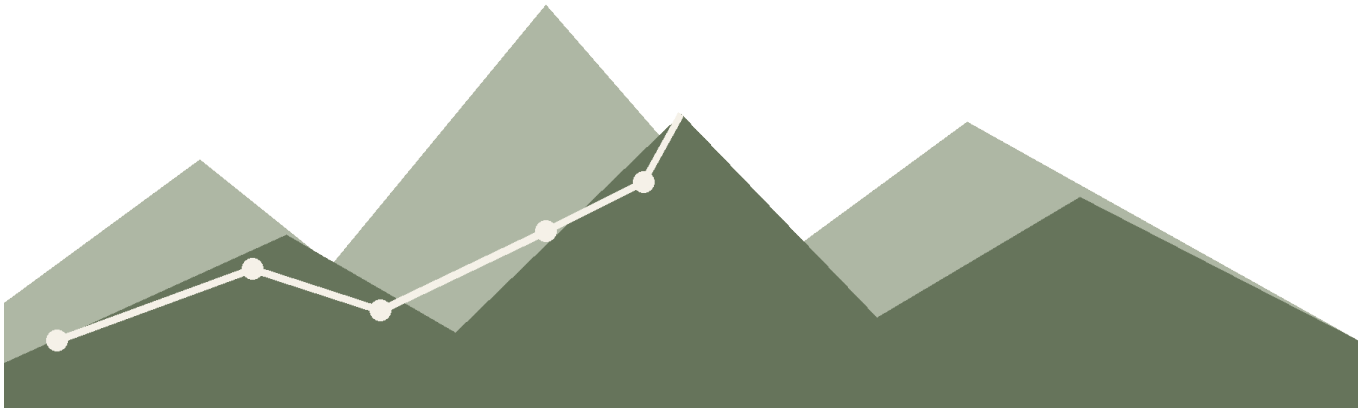
A ROADMAP TO

# THE EDITING PROCESS

## FROM FIRST TO FINAL DRAFT

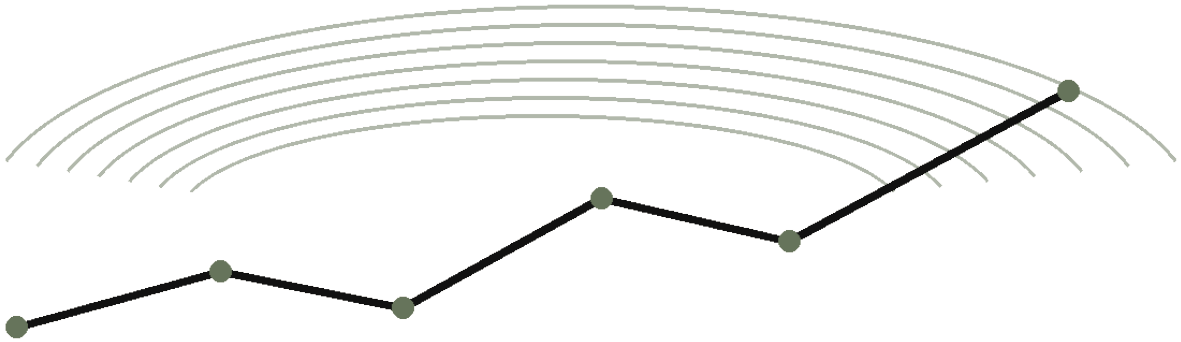
A practical route through revision, editing, and reader feedback



# CONGRATULATIONS, YOU HAVE A FIRST DRAFT!

You have done what many of us never do: **you have turned your idea into a story**. Now, it's easy to feel a bit lost. Do you start tinkering with those long sentences? Maybe rethink the protagonist's clothes? Maybe you should just rewrite the entire thing from scratch?

I suggest you **take a beat and plot out your course forward**. You just climbed the perilous mountain that is writing a story, and now you want readers to enjoy the view at the peak. **First, you need to look back down the path you came.** Let's be honest, you've been Indiana Jonesing it a bit to get to this point, and there are crevices you've just whipped across by the skin of your teeth. **You can't expect a reader to take that route.** Sure, they want the thrill of reading your story, but that is different from the thrill of *writing* it. **This is where editing comes in**—the delicate art of shaping a path up your mountain of a story, so that your readers, too, can marvel at the view. **This is your roadmap to that process.**



**"Editing is the delicate art of shaping a path for the reader up your mountain of a story."**

# EVERY STEP TOWARDS THE FINAL DRAFT

THE ASCENT / STAGES 01–04

## 01 DEVELOPMENTAL EDIT

An editor diagnoses the whole story: character, structure, setting, theme, prose, and especially the reader's experience.

## 02 DRAFT 2

Use the developmental feedback to revise the manuscript with clearer intention to guide the reader all the way through.

## 03 COPY AND LINE EDITING

Once the story structure is stable, a copy and line editor can address flow, clarity, consistency, rhythm, and voice, to make sure it doesn't distract the reader.

## 04 BETA READER FEEDBACK

Test the manuscript with several real readers and compare what they understood, felt, and expected. Did your story come alive in their imaginations the way you intended?

# FROM REVISION TO A CLEAN MANUSCRIPT

THE APPROACH / STAGES 05–08

### 05 DRAFT 3

Try to solve any technical problems the readers may have faced while reading your story. Even if the story may be jagged, you want the read to be smooth!

### 06 PROOFREADING AND TOUCHUPS

Once all large revisions are complete, it's time to remove any remaining grammatical errors, formatting problems, and editing artifacts.

### 07 FINAL DRAFT

Review the last corrections, make the final creative decisions, and prepare a clean manuscript. You have a final draft!

### 08 OPTIONAL SECOND BETA ROUND

If you think your book is ready for market, test it on the actual market! Send your latest polished draft out to a new set of beta readers.

## The exact route may change.

Some manuscripts need another revision between stages; others need less.

The sequence here matters more than the number of drafts.

# THE PROCESS IN PRACTICE

01

## DEVELOPMENTAL EDIT

This is where the manuscript is examined as a complete reading experience. A developmental editor gives clear, actionable guidance on characterization and arcs; plot, tempo and structure; setting and description; theme and motif; and recurring prose issues. The goal is to move from text on a page to a story that can come alive in every aspect of the reader's imagination.

02

## DRAFT 2

At this stage, the craft of revision takes over. Use the developmental feedback to rebuild, deepen, and reconnect the manuscript. The aim is not to obey every suggestion from your editor, but to understand any underlying problems well enough to make your own deliberate creative decisions.

03

## COPY AND LINE EDITING

With the story now solid, it's time to focus on words, sentences, and paragraphs. Copy and line editing refine clarity, flow, rhythm, consistency, and tempo while removing anything that could interrupt the reader's immersion. If you're watching a movie, you don't want to be distracted by an actor who keeps messing up their lines. Writing is very similar.

04

## BETA READER FEEDBACK

Send the revised manuscript to several beta readers. Look for patterns rather than treating every opinion as an instruction. Do readers connect with the characters? Is anything repeatedly confusing? Do the emotional beats land as intended? In short: are the words doing what they need to do inside the reader's mind?

***Pro tip: hire beta readers. Professional feedback is more valuable than your dear mother's "I loved it!"***

# THE PROCESS IN PRACTICE

05

## DRAFT 3

Use the patterns in the beta feedback to streamline the reader experience. Clarify anything that may have caused confusion, strengthen emotional or structural beats that did not land, and bring the story—not the explanation around it—to the foreground.

***Don't answer the beta reader's annoying questions in an irate email—make sure the story doesn't produce those questions in the first place!***

06

## PROOFREADING AND TOUCHUPS

Once the larger revisions are done, proofread the third draft for grammatical errors, inconsistencies, and editing artifacts: unfinished sentences, misplaced line breaks, duplicated words, forgotten author notes, and anything else left behind during revision. Remember that it's easy to become a bit blind to your own text, so use a third party when you can.

07

## FINAL DRAFT

Review the final corrections and make the last creative decisions. This is the clean draft you prepare for querying, submission, or publication—depending on the path you're planning on taking to get your story out there. Until you're actually holding a printed book in your hand, this is as finished as the story is going to get.

08

## OPTIONAL SECOND BETA ROUND

Before querying agents or publishers, though, it might be good to test your final draft on the actual market. The goal is not for everyone to love it. The goal is to make sure that you have a manuscript that the reader can become immersed in, that doesn't distract them with rickety structure, bad grammar, or confusing plot points.

***You want the story that has lived in your head for so long to finally come alive in the mind of someone else. Go see if it does!***

# THE READER'S IMAGINATION IS THE MEDIUM

**THE PAGE IS ONLY HALF OF THE STORY.**

Many writers come to me believing the page is their canvas and the words their paint.

**That is only half the story.**

I argue that your words are the brush, painting with the reader's imagination. Words are the code we use to build *immersive experiences* in our minds: image, movement, emotion, expectation, and meaning. Editing is the process of refining that experience—and helping the reader live your story as clearly as you live it in your own mind.

## NOT SURE WHAT YOUR MANUSCRIPT NEEDS NEXT?

I offer developmental editing, beta reading, and one-to-one writer coaching.

START AT JROBERTSSON.COM →