

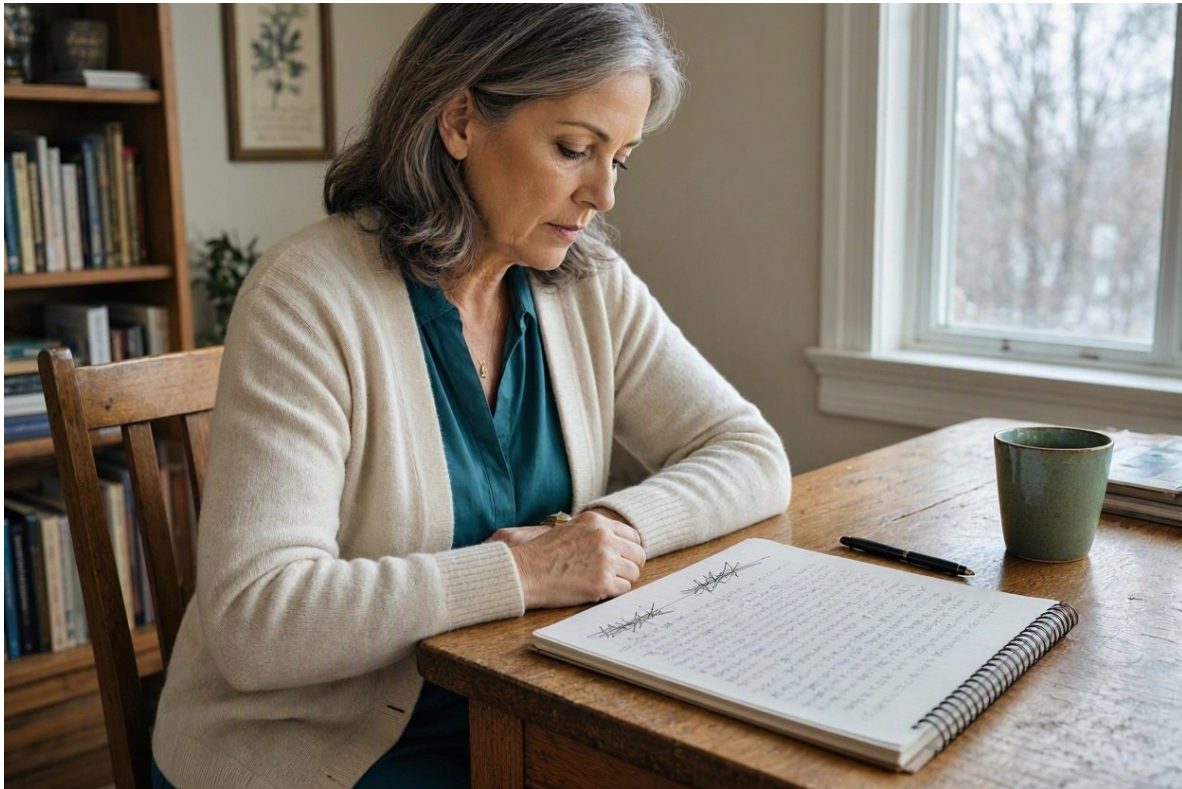


WHEN TO STOP EDITING

Recognizing readiness and preparing the book readers will receive

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Tuesday's revision changed "She shut the door" to "She closed the door."

Wednesday's changed it back.

By Thursday, the door had received more attention than the character standing behind it.

Some revisions solve problems. Others exchange one acceptable choice for another. Learning the difference helps you finish a manuscript without pretending that publication requires perfection, or using exhaustion as proof that the book is ready.

DEFINE READINESS BEFORE CHASING IT

Decide what the book needs to achieve for its intended readers. For a novel, that includes a coherent central story, believable character motivations, an intentional reading experience and an ending supported by what precedes it. The prose should be clear enough for its purpose and consistent in its chosen voice.

A practical nonfiction manuscript needs a sound organization, usable explanations and properly checked claims. Different books have different requirements; a confusing instruction has consequences beyond a slow paragraph.

Write a short readiness list for this manuscript. Make each item something you can assess: unresolved plot problems addressed, major reader confusions examined, language and consistency passes completed, factual questions resolved where needed, and publication files checked.

This list gives revision a destination. "Make it better" offers an unlimited walking holiday.

SEPARATE REMAINING PROBLEMS FROM OPTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Keep a final issues list with three groups:

- Problems that prevent understanding, undermine the book's central purpose or leave important accuracy questions unresolved.
- Meaningful improvements with a clear benefit for the intended reader.
- Preferences between acceptable alternatives.

A character knowing a secret she has never learned belongs in the first group. A slow exchange that weakens an important confrontation may belong in the second. Choosing between two equally suitable verbs may belong in the third.

Work through the first group and judge the second in context. Give the third a limited final pass rather than allowing it to reopen the whole book.

An apparently tiny change can still matter. Correcting a missing "not" is not optional polishing. Assess effect rather than size.

LOOK FOR DIMINISHING RETURNS

Revision has diminishing returns when additional effort produces less useful improvement.

You may notice that recent sessions mostly reverse earlier choices, adjust isolated preferences or create new problems while solving none you can explain.

Ask of a proposed change: what reader problem does it solve? Can I identify the effect in context? Does the revised version actually deliver that effect?

You do not need a formal experiment for every adjective. The questions help when tinkering has become a way to delay letting the book go.

If you cannot judge because you are too familiar or tired, stop revising temporarily and seek distance or outside attention. Uncertainty is a reason to assess, not automatically a reason to publish.

USE OUTSIDE HELP FOR A DEFINED PURPOSE

A beta reader can tell you where they felt lost or disengaged. A developmental editor can assess structure; a line editor can work on expression; a copyeditor can address correctness and consistency. Proofreading belongs near publication, on the prepared files. Services overlap, so clarify responsibilities.

No editor can promise a flawless book or guarantee sales. Nor does readiness depend on buying every possible service. Match available funds to the manuscript's actual weaknesses and be honest about what has and has not been checked.

With a small budget, careful self-editing, reciprocal critique and a targeted paid service may be the practical combination. A limited assessment still has limits. If an unresolved problem is central to the book, postponing publication may be wiser than hoping a launch date will fix it.

FREEZE THE TEXT, THEN CHECK THE PRODUCT

Once substantive revisions and text editing are complete, establish a clear master manuscript. Resolve outstanding queries, remove drafting notes, and deliberately accept or reject tracked changes before preparing the publication files. Keep a recoverable copy of the edited text.

Then inspect what readers will receive. For print, examine the laid-out pages and, where available, a physical proof. Check headings, chapter openings, page numbers, running heads, blank pages and front and back matter as well as the text.

For ebooks, review the converted file in suitable reading software. Check navigation, the table of contents, scene breaks, links and text behaviour at different font sizes. An attractive word-processing document does not prove that conversion worked.

If you are producing several formats, check each. A correction made in one file may not automatically reach the others.

CONTROL THE LAST CHANGES

Keep a short correction log during proof review. Apply each change to the appropriate master and output files, regenerate as necessary, and verify the result. A layout correction can move text elsewhere, so check the affected pages too.

Avoid casually rewriting passages during this stage. If you discover a genuine structural problem, address it and plan another appropriate round of checks. Calling a late rewrite a "tiny fix" does not make its consequences smaller.

When the readiness list is satisfied and remaining changes are mainly preferences, choose the release version and preserve it clearly. You can still record future corrections without reopening every settled choice today.

Finishing means you have done the necessary work, assessed the remaining concerns and prepared a book you can stand behind. Eventually, the door must stay either shut or closed long enough for someone to read what happens next.

SOURCE NOTE The placement of proofreading after editing and layout was checked against the Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading, "About proofreading and editing": <https://www.ciep.uk/resource/about-proofreading-and-editing.html> . Readiness questions and workflow suggestions here are practical guidance, not a formal certification standard or platform-specific upload instructions.

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