

Title: Editing and ReWriting

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Summary: Being an author is a bit like entering a beauty pageant - you don't think you're more beautiful than the majority of other women, and you don't do it unless you think your story is good enough to be on the shelves next to the authors you know and love. Deny it all you want, I peeked into the deepest darkest corners of your soul and you think you've got what it takes. You think you're good. You think your story is good.

Your story sucks.

You've finished that draft of your novel. You're feeling great, and you should be proud of that accomplishment! So now that it's done, you can move on to finding an agent, getting a print, making tons of cash and living the author life, right? Stop lying, I know your mouth and your eyes are "I just want to get published," but let's be honest here -- you've got talent. You think you've got that special something that will put you in the same category as the greats (or at least the mid-listers, right?).

Being an author is a bit like entering a beauty pageant - you don't enter unless you think you're more beautiful than the majority of other women, and you don't do it unless you think your story is good enough to be on the shelves next to the authors you know and love. Deny it all you want, I peeked into the deepest darkest corners of your soul and you think you've got what it takes. You think you're good. You think your story is good.

Your story sucks.

Not my story, you're thinking, everyone else's story. No, your story. It's your story, the bearer of bad news, but that other part of your brain, the one that tells you you can't do it, can never do it and it's all a stupid pipe dream and why didn't you actually listen to the mom you wanted, that part is right.

Okay, put down the knife. You finished the first draft, thought it was good, but now it sucks. You want to kill yourself, your self confidence is shattered ... but there's a solution.

That solution is called "Editing and ReWriting."

Again I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but finishing the first draft is just the beginning of the real game. The sweat and torture of the first draft is just the price of entry, now you're in, so let's get to work.

Here's my advice. You finished the first draft. Now put it away and do not let anyone read it. It's not ready, not even for a cursory read. Remember, it's not your Aunt Enda's review. Yeah, it sucks so bad it's not even ready for your Aunt Enda's review.

Put the damn thing away and start the next book. What? You're not going to write a second book and you have to go through that process again? Um, yeah, that's how it goes. First thing you'll find is your skill level has gone way up. It will be like writing the first one. Things are easier now, things flow better, your brain fills in most of the pieces in the bigger gestalt of the story. Less wasted writing (and less of all wasted writing).

But wait, you say, this is work. Work. You're writing, maybe, so you don't have to. You can thank Hollywood for painting that picture. Maybe your day job is a writer. Life is usually more like 10-12 for most pros. You're either writing, editing, or teaching. Being a writer is owning your own small business, and you make so much money you can't afford a staff of one - you. If you thought you this wasn't going to feel like playing the Lotto. Better chances of winning.

So you're writing the next book, and six months has passed. Why did I do this? Now you pull out that first book and you sit down and read. Six months is long enough to forget what you think you're saying, and see what's actually on the page. It will warn you, this will be the single most brutal experience of your writing career. You'll think, "Scott was right, I do suck, now where is that knife?" All the cool things you'll see you have confusing sentences, plot holes, threads that don't go anywhere, and act out of character -- this happens because you had the story in your head but not in the blanks for what was missing on the page. After six months, you've read your own work and you see what the reader would see.

Pain breeds skill. As you read your first draft, you will learn more about your writing than you will ever teach you. You'll see all your major weaknesses, and start working on them. You'll discover your own voice, and how to cut out unnecessary information (and how to find yourself breezing over your own writing, that's a chunk you need to work on doing the same). More often than not, you'll find that plain language often comes out of you're thesaurus-laden exposition.

So you suck, welcome to the club. Write that second draft, then re-write it. A re-write should you start getting other opinions.

Good luck. At best, you can hope each book sucks a little less than the one before. If you accomplish that, you're on your way.