

*Authors* Publish

**How to**

**Revise for**

**Publication**

**Get Your**

**Creative Writing**

**Ready to be Published**

**Aliya Bree Hall**

# **How to Revise for Publication**

**Aliya Bree Hall**

Authors Publish

Copyright 2023 Aliya Bree Hall. All rights reserved. Do not distribute without permission.

Questions, feedback, corrections? Email  
[support@authorspublish.com](mailto:support@authorspublish.com)

## **More Books from Authors Publish**

[The 2023 Guide to Manuscript Publishers](#)

[Submit, Publish, Repeat:](#)

[How to Publish Your Creative Writing in Literary Journals](#)

[The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submissions](#)

## **Free Lectures from The Writers Workshop at Authors Publish**

[How to Hook Readers and Publishers With Your Opening Pages](#)

[Writing to Save the World](#)

[The Art of Poetic Efficiency with Michael Kleber-Diggs](#)

[View More Lectures.](#)

## Contents

Foreword: Now That You Finished Your First Draft .....	6
Chapter One: Preparing to Self-edit.....	8
Choosing a Publishing Route.....	8
Setting Realistic Goals .....	11
The Benefits of Multiple Projects .....	14
Chapter Two: Revision Checklist .....	17
Reread Before Revising .....	17
Filling the Plot Holes .....	18
Fleshing Out Characters & Relationship Dynamics .....	21
Following Genre Guidelines .....	26
Chapter Three: Peer Edits .....	30
Choosing Who to Get Feedback From.....	30
Finding Beta Readers .....	32
Authenticity Readers.....	35
Chapter Four: Implementing Feedback .....	39
Determining What's Useful Feedback .....	39
How to Know if You Should Shelf Your Project (For Now).....	42
Determining When You're 'Done' .....	46

## Foreword: Now That You Finished Your First Draft

There are a lot of emotions at play when you finally type the words “the end” after completing your first draft. Excitement, relief, and pride take the forefront, but once those feelings start to settle, it’s easy to push that all aside and immediately look ahead to what happens *next*.

Although it may be tempting to go back to the start of your manuscript or article and immediately start the self-editing process, I strongly urge you to instead close down the processor and celebrate the accomplishment.

The first draft is the crucial, initial step down the long winding road of publishing. It’s also creatively draining and requires adequate rest before continuing your trek. In other words, you made it to the top of the mountain, take the time to soak in the views and revel in the work you’ve done that got yourself to this point. Eventually you’ll have to climb back down, which will bring its own set of challenges, so don’t embark before you take the necessary time to replenish your mind.

Now, once you’ve given your mind some time away from your first draft, we can finally start to tackle step two of the publishing process: Revising with publishing in mind.

The best place to start, before you even begin to self-edit is to reflect. Similar to how brainstorming and plotting helps lead into the first draft, taking some time before revisions to set up realistic goals and choose a publishing route to aim for will keep you from feeling aimless. Even if you have an idea of the direction that you want to go, such as self-publishing, that goal setting and process is going to look different than if you were to traditionally publish. Knowing what the path ahead looks like can help keep you aligned with your timelines for revisions.

Once you have that figured out then you can start to actually self-edit. I use a revision checklist where I go through different elements of my story and focus on filling plot holes, fleshing out my characters and double checking that the piece I wrote fits in with the expectations of the genre that I'm looking to publish in. I do the best I can to ensure that I've reviewed the draft to the best of my ability and then I send it to be peer reviewed.

There's a lot that goes into this step, from finding people to review your work and determining the best way to implement the feedback you've been given. It can be easy to get overwhelmed at this stage, after all it's the first time since the inception of the piece that anyone has read the draft outside of you. While peer edits are a crucial part of the publishing process, I know many (including myself) find it the most daunting.

It's my hope that this book will help make all aspects of the editing process a little easier and empower you to take more creative ownership of revising your draft, so you can take it all the way to publication — whether you're looking to self-publish, traditionally publish, or submit to literary or academic magazines

# **Chapter One: Preparing to Self-edit**

## **Choosing a Publishing Route**

As you begin the editing process and honing in on the theme of your piece, it's important to consider what publishing avenue you want to pursue for this media. Are you looking to publish a novel traditionally with a large or small publisher, or would you rather self-publish?

Fortunately, there's no "wrong way" to publish. The reason there's multiple paths to publication is that writers have success with many different forms of publishing. A lot of writers will also use a mix of publishing routes throughout their career depending on what their needs are at any given time.

The best way to determine what route of publishing is the right fit for you is to take a look at what your goals are, what's important to you when it comes to the process and who your ideal audience is.

### **What are your writing and publishing goals?**

In the last section, we've talked about setting realistic goals that are measurable and actionable, but now I want to take a second to sit with our ambitious, dreamy goals. Before we go about trying to achieve these, it's important to be honest with ourselves about what it is we want. Not all writers have the same exact aims in regards to publishing. Some folks may just be



looking to write freelance articles on the side, while others are making it their career. Some writers want the first book they publish to be the start of a career, while others just want to get their story out into the world. Plus, not everyone wants to be a full-time author.

When we start to approach publishing, it's important to make sure that you're choosing a route that best aligns with your writing goals. If you're looking to be a full-time author, it may make more sense to pursue traditional publishing, where there is a higher chance of that becoming a reality. If you're happy with your work situation but want to make the "book of your heart" available to read in paperback, perhaps indie publishing is better suited to you.

Once you know what it is that you actually want to achieve, it makes the path forward a little clearer on how to get there.

### **How involved do you want to be in the process?**

Whether you're publishing a manuscript or an article, there is always some level of involvement on behalf of the writer — although the amount of involvement differs depending on what route you take.

If you're someone who loves to be involved in all aspects of publishing or have the final decision on all creative decisions, self-publishing will be the best route for you. You will have complete freedom over the cover art, formatting, and marketing of your book. For writers who would like some say but don't have the resources (time and money) to self-publish, publishing with a mid-size to small indie press will give you more of an opportunity to be involved in what the publishing process entails.

However, if you're someone who would prefer a more hands-off approach, publishing traditionally may work better for you instead. If you want to keep your focus strictly on the

writing and marketing of your book, while a creative team designs your cover and brings your concept to life, this is the best avenue for that.

For articles, the editing process looks a little different depending on where you're publishing. I've worked with some editors where the process was fairly collaborative, and I got to see the final version of the article before it headed to print. Other editors would make the necessary changes themselves, while not always looping me into the process, and I wouldn't see the article until publication. None of these are bad options, but as writers, we often have a preference on a type of work style.

Knowing what level of involvement you want to have is another step towards choosing the right route for you.

### **Who is your intended readership?**

I'm not just talking about genre or age here. Publishers, and certainly publications, have a distinct readership. Even though there will be some overlap — particularly among Big 5 Publishers — having an idea on who is most likely to consume your book will make it easier to place your piece. While your agent will be in charge of selling your story to publishers, you still have to find an agent that aligns with your vision and can connect your work with the right readers.

For writers querying small to mid-size publishers, or for those pitching articles, this process is crucial to finding the right home for your piece. Sometimes this is easier than others. For the more niche a publishing house or publication is, the easier it is to determine if your story will be the right fit. For example, Quill & Crow Publishing House and Tiny Ghost Press are both small, indie presses that acquire horror novels, but with different audiences and angles. Quill &

Crow Publishing House focus on gothic and macabre horror, which include fiction, poetry and short stories. Tiny Ghost Press on the other hand, acquires exclusively young adult, LGBTQ+ horror fiction. Same genres — different audience.

Articles can be the same way. You can try and pitch for publications that cater to a more general-audience or are extremely popular, such as *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic*, or you can find a home with a publication that may have less universal appeal, but is the magazine that will make your content shine. There are many magazines and digital outlets that have a niche demographic, which is helpful if you're trying to get your work in front of readers and editors that specialize in that genre or content.

Once you know what your goals, personal involvement and ideal readers are, you'll have a better idea of what publishing route will make the most sense for you at this time. Your publishing needs may vary depending on the project you're working on or where you're at in your career, but fortunately there's a lot of fluidity with how you can publish your work as long as you know what it is you're looking for.

## **Setting Realistic Goals**

When starting a manuscript, most writers are already thinking ahead to the finish line — being published. Although publishing is an excellent overarching goal to strive for, it shouldn't be the *only* goal that you have as a writer. At the start of your novel, publishing feels like such a distant accomplishment that it makes the writing journey seem almost impossible.

This is why it's important to reframe your goal setting as a writer to help you create multiple goals that are measurable, realistic, and further your revision progress. Having goals for

each step of the journey helps with fulfillment and keeping you on track so you can eventually hit that dream goal of publishing.

These are some tips to help you set shorter-term goals and reach them.

### **Break goals into achievable pieces**

By breaking a large goal into smaller, more attainable goals, you have more opportunities to hit those objectives and set yourself up for success.

Setting goals for each step of the writing journey will continually push you to the next major milestone without getting lost in the vastness of your goal. For example, focusing on finishing your first draft or first round of self-edits are still hefty goals, but give you a sense of completion that you can reward yourself with.

If that goal is still too large for you, break it down further. Is the idea of revising your first draft too daunting? Try to set a goal for when you'd like to finish edits on Act 1 instead or even setting a deadline for finishing certain plot points or character arcs. Or perhaps, set a goal of reworking a chapter a week. Smaller goals keep you from getting overwhelmed by the scope of your project, and are satisfying to cross off your to-do list.

### **Set SMART Goals**

Even in smaller pieces, the more tangible the goal is, the higher likelihood you have of actually reaching it. The SMART goals framework helps you structure your goals so you have a firm grasp on what you're trying to accomplish and when.

The SMART acronym breaks down to: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based. The benefit of this goal framework is that it makes your goals more accessible and

helps you determine what you actually want. An example of a SMART goal for edits on your first draft could look like: I want to have the first round of self-edits on my YA pirate fantasy completed by the end of 2023 in order to get it out to beta readers on January 2, 2024.

The SMART framework also lends itself to specificity and a group of smaller goals that build off one another instead of one large overarching goal.

### **Work with your strengths**

Another challenge writers face with goal setting is crafting goals that are achievable for the type of writer they are. Setting goals that play into your strengths will keep you from feeling discouraged because you didn't meet the ambitious goal you set for yourself.

For example, maybe you know that you have a lot of revisions on your piece to do, and setting deadlines around beats or acts in your story may not work as well as taking edits by layer, such as worldbuilding, A-plot, B-plot, or romance arc. These are more tangible goals that you can start working towards that will make it easier for you to reach.

### **Planning around other people**

As we get further into this book, we'll talk more about what revisions look like once you start including feedback from other people, but it's important to schedule out how long you want to have your story with beta readers so you can keep on your self-revision deadlines.

This time allotment will depend heavily on how tight your schedule is. Some writers are comfortable leaving the story with readers for a longer time, while some want to get feedback implemented right away. It's a careful balance though — you don't want to rush the beta reader and not give them enough time to sit with your story, but you also don't want them to sit on your

story for six months either. Flexibility is also important at this stage too, because your story is not going to be the most important thing happening in your beta reader's life and sometimes unforeseen events do happen. This also depends on if you're paying beta readers or not. Contracts typically take care of these types of issues, and better set out the ground rules everyone will be working under. That said, usually between one to three months is the length of time I've seen offered for beta reading.

## **The Benefits of Multiple Projects**

As writers, we're constantly bombarded with new and enticing ideas. Although it can be tempting to drop any other project we've already begun working on to focus on a new project — that can lead to a routine of abandoning your current work in progress in favor of whatever idea is freshest in your mind.

That doesn't necessarily mean working on multiple projects is a bad thing. There are a lot of benefits to having these different creative outlets; however, it's important to understand *how* it's helpful and what pitfalls to avoid when you're considering developing not just a second but a third or fourth story concept.

### **Benefits**

One of the best aspects of managing multiple writing projects at the same time is that it keeps your creative juices flowing. Whether it's novels, short stories, flash fiction or a combination of mediums, if you get stuck you have a back up project to work on. For novel

writers, especially, having a side project can be therapeutic when you've hit writer's block. It helps you maintain your writing routine because you're still showing up, and your brain can work through a different set of challenges. That space away from your main project will hopefully help you cultivate answers or motivation that you can bring back to that story.

This strategy works best though when you're in different writing stages. If you're starting both ideas from scratch, it can be trickier to switch between projects because you're pulling from the same creative well. But if you're halfway through a draft of a novel and want to start plotting a new idea, or if you're knee deep in edits and missing drafting something new, keeping that as a side project will help you from getting frustrated with the phase you're at with your main project.

A lot of writers find success with this particularly when there's a degree of separation between the projects. Outside of being at a different phase, if the projects are in unrelated mediums or genres, that can help provide a further level of distinction. Especially if you're a mood or vibe writer, having projects that evoke alternative writing styles can help you maintain your focus on whatever story you're currently working on.

What it really comes down to is giving your muse permission to create. If you set too rigid restrictions around what you're writing and how, it can be trickier to work through any challenges because you don't have anything to distract you or expand your imagination.

### **Pitfalls and how to avoid them**

There are still things to consider when it comes to working on multiple projects, however. At a certain point, working on too many stories will keep you from making adequate progress on *any* draft. Setting a limit to the number of side projects you're working on at once is one way to ensure you're not drowning in works of progress. Balancing two projects at once is the most

sustainable, although some authors will juggle up to three. While I wouldn't necessarily recommend writing more than that at one time, if you're also not trying to write three novels all at once — that's an easier workload to swing.

Another problem writers encounter with multiple projects is a lack of prioritization. If all of your projects are on equal footing, it can be hard to establish attainable goals around one project. At a certain point, it's going to make your life easier if you can choose one story to give the bulk of your energy to finishing and keeping the other idea simmering on the back burner. You can always return and give it a good stir, but this way you're not getting burnt out on multiple stories at once.

Too often when writers are working on multiple projects at the same time that are both long-form or similar genres, the writer will get bored or stuck and look to develop another side project to help distract them from whatever is currently on their plate. If you're constantly jumping ship for the next shiny idea, you're using side projects as a way of procrastination, and avoiding your unfinished projects won't help you actually finish anything.

This is why it's important to be selective in choosing what your side project is. If you're working on one fantasy novel and you have an idea for a YA fantasy story as well as a contemporary story, it might make more sense for you to shelve the second fantasy idea and develop the contemporary idea.

Of course, if you're a writer who prefers to focus on one project at a time, you know what's best for your writing routine. But if you've been toying with a certain idea and have been worried about how it'll impact the progress you're making on your primary project — consider the side story as a way to supplement your writing energy and a further investment in your craft



## Chapter Two: Revision Checklist

### Reread Before Revising

Now that you have a strategic framework in place to tackle self-edits, it's time to bring out your first draft and actually dive into the revision process.

Revisions can feel really intimidating at first. You just created a whole manuscript, story or article and now you have to be ready to kill your darlings? What if you're not sure where to start? Or you know you have *a lot* of changes you want to make but it seems daunting to get in there and start rearranging or deleting.

This is why I recommend going through a revision checklist. For this self-edit we'll be coming at things from a developmental editing perspective, meaning we'll be focusing on each moving part that makes up your story. From characters with their arcs and relationship dynamics, to filling the plot holes, and building tension. While it's always helpful to get insight from a professionally trained editor, there's still plenty of developmental work that can be done while self-editing.

The first thing on the list, before you even pick up that red pen (physical or metaphorical), is to give your draft a full read through. Don't stop to edit as you go, but make notes to yourself in the documents or in the margins of things to come back to later. By reading through your piece after taking some distance, you're bound to notice things that you hadn't before — plot lines you may have dropped at the beginning of the story, or catching points of

character development you can add in now that you know your characters better — and you can add these notes to your running checklist of things to rework.

Beyond reacquainting yourself with your story, you've eased yourself into an editing mindset. You're seeing all the layers in the story and bracing yourself for creative problem solving. Now you can dive into revisions with more certainty and a better idea of what you're trying to accomplish.

## **Filling the Plot Holes**

One of the first things likely to jump out at you during the read through of your finished draft is how the plot unfolds. Are there any awkward sticking points? Lulls throughout the middle? Rapid build ups that rush the climax and aftermath?

Through your notes, you probably already have an idea of what aspects of your plot need some TLC, but knowing that something reads a little off and knowing how to fix it are two completely different things, so here are a few tips that I've put together to help you work through common plotting problems that come up while you're self-editing.

## **Reviving Dropped Plot Lines**

Have you ever started out a story being positive that a certain character, theme, or item is crucial to the plot, only to finish the piece and realize that you never mentioned that element again? It happens to the best of us. There's so much to juggle when we're writing it can be easy to forget certain plot points or ideas that we had built up in the beginning of our work that we lost track of.

Fortunately, this is a pretty easy fix. Depending on what was dropped, if it was a character trait that you've been wanting to flesh out or an important item that seemingly disappeared, you can simply go back through the piece and pepper back in those details where they make sense. It doesn't have to be in every single scene or chapter, but adding in enough references that a reader will know what you're referencing instead of responding with, "When did this happen?"

In some cases, you might even find that the dropped plot line might actually be for the benefit of the story. If you've been able to go through the rest of the piece without mentioning this character or plot point that you thought was *so* important — maybe it's not as integral to the piece as you thought it was. It could be worth cutting those sections out. If you're determined to keep them in, there are ways to re-incorporate those plot lines, but you may have more reworking to do to ensure that these pieces fit in naturally. It can be easy for writers to get distracted by plot bunnies, which is why you have to take a critical eye to count the number of subplots you have, and if you really need all of them. (Hot tip: you probably don't!)

## **Unearthing Plot Holes**

Plot holes can happen no matter what type of story you're writing, but the longer and more complex a story is, the more likely you'll see these issues come into play. There's a few different kinds of plot holes that you could be dealing with depending on the genre, and not all of them require you going back to the drawing board.

One of the best ways to solve or find work-arounds for plot holes is more research. Oftentimes a plot hole comes into place because the author has created an impossible event or wrote themselves into a jam they can't figure a way out of. For stories that have a tie to the real

world or delve into science-fiction, the best answer is usually spending more time to research the “hole” you’ve created because the more you know about the topic, the more chance you have to find a work around for it.

If you’re writing a fantasy and you’ve uncovered an issue in your magic system that is contradictory or has made the obstacle too challenging, there might be some tweaking you need to do — but, fortunately, it’s your world to bend at will! That doesn’t necessarily mean it’s easier, but it does give you more freedom to explore possible solutions and rework the plot or world to allow for those fixes. If you do have a magic system or strict rules in your world, I recommend keeping some sort of list with a breakdown of these guidelines you created to make it easier to reference when you’re editing.

Outside of research, writers can also solve plot problems by going back and providing adequate set-up to help foreshadow events (or possible solutions) that occur later in the story so it doesn’t feel like the hero accomplished something out of nowhere.

## **Perfecting Plot Pacing**

Pacing is another fickle beast that ties into how we look at plotting when we’re self-editing. While outside perspectives are usually the best way to get an idea on how a story is being paced, there are a few things you can do as well to see if you’re on the right track.

Following story beats is a major one. You can use the craft book, *Save the Cat! Writes a Novel*, or you can follow beat sheets for other novels in your genre or in a comparative title. While the points may not line up *exactly*, it can be a really useful tool to make sure that you’re not ending at the midpoint of the book or that you’re not rushing the end of the story by adding a fuller wrap-up and diving into the aftermath of the climax.

Beyond story beats, I recommend trusting your gut. Are there points in the story that you find to be boring or a slog to get through? If you're struggling to get through those sections, odds are your reader will be too. Are the establishing scenes taking too long to get into the meat of the story? If you're genuinely not sure how the pacing reads, but these questions are tickling at the back of your brain, all you have to do is make a note as to what feels off for you and wait to see what beta readers think or ask your future editor.

## **Fleshing Out Characters & Relationship Dynamics**

As a character-motivated writer myself, my favorite part of the revision process is fleshing out my characters, their arcs, and their relationship dynamics. When we first start our draft, we have an idea of who our characters are, but for many of us it isn't until we actually get mid-way or even to the end of the story that the characters really start to come into their own. Often, we've given them more depth and nuance as we've spent more time with them, and that attention can be lacking in our first acts.

When we go back to revise, strengthening our characters and their relationship dynamics will help further their development and make them more well rounded. The secret is, most of the answers to fleshing out these characters is by giving them more backstory or purpose within the larger story. It might be your protagonist's story, but they don't live in a vacuum, and you want to make their interactions and relationships feel as realistic as possible.

## **Leaving a mark with your main character**

There's a lot of writing advice out there on how to write a memorable main character, which is understandable — the main character is important! We're following them through the majority, if not all, of the story. We spend enough time with them, through their highs and lows, that it's important for us to craft a character that readers *want* to read.

Notice that I didn't say likable. Main characters of the story don't have to be "likable," and in many cases that's a loaded term anyway. What you want is a character that's *compelling*. Even if we don't necessarily like the character or approve of every action they're doing, we still want to know what's going to happen next to them. There's usually some sort of redeeming quality or character trait that is so entertaining that we choose to stick with them. Maybe, it's relatability, a sense of humor, or they're such a mess you can't help but keep reading.

One of the ways to ensure that your main character is a stand out is by really asking why this character is the protagonist of the story. Why is their perspective so important? What are they offering to the narrative that makes the story interesting? Leaning into what your main character brings to the story and grounding yourself in their perspective will help your protagonist stand out.

### **Solidifying side characters**

When done right, side characters can be just as important and beloved to the story as our main characters. There's a reason so many books and shows have spinoffs — readers fall in love with a side character who they didn't get enough of. For many readers, side characters are the ones that steal the show, so it's important to let your secondary characters also have a chance to shine.

One of the go-to ways authors create lovable side characters is by making them just as interesting and well-rounded as their protagonist. By developing your secondary characters, you're making your world feel more lived in and your story more realistic. These characters should have their own histories, lived experiences and unique worldview.

It's not just enough to be entertaining, though. Your side characters should also have a reason for being included in the book. To help flesh out your secondary characters, build off of their relationship to the main character. Ask yourself why your main character is drawn to them, what purpose do they serve within the story? Your secondary characters should be helping to push or support the main character forward in the narrative, but they should also have their own goals and dreams. Your side-characters don't stop existing when your main character leaves the room, and by building more of a storyline into your secondary characters, you can make every interaction between them feel intentional and more impactful.

### **Livening up our love interests**

Even if you're not writing a romance, many stories still feature an element of romance in a subplot. While this may not be your main focus in the piece, you still have to give this plot point enough attention or else the romance is not going to feel believable and it will hinder rather than help your overall piece.

Outside of just being a well-rounded character, the relationship your main character has with the love interest has to hinge on more than just the love interest being *there*. You should have a list of reasons why your protagonist is invested in this character — outside of the fact that they're attractive. Especially if you're writing a female love interest, you don't want to fall into

the trap of making your female love interest one-note and boring, or it's going to take away from the romance.

Focusing on the relationship between the two is one of the ways you can better flesh out who your love interest is. What is their relationship dynamic? How does it change over the course of the story? What does their relationship say about the love interest? How does your main character grow because of this romance? While you're answering these questions, make sure you're giving your love interest a more nuanced personality than what traditional relationship tropes offer. Sure, the grump and sunshine pairing works — but how can you push that further so your love interest encapsulates more than that one singular trait?

### **Amping up our antagonists**

When it comes to writing our villains and antagonists, it's important to remember that they aren't going to view themselves as the “bad guy.” Antagonists are able to justify their outwardly horrible actions because they believe to their core they're doing the right thing, or what has to be done, in order to make the world a better place.

It's easy to want to create an antagonist who is pure evil for no reason — but that isn't realistic. If you want to strengthen your villain, you have to dive deeper into their psyche. Why are they doing this? What is their mission? What has led them up to this point? Not every antagonist needs to have a sob story to justify their actions, but they need to have a *reason* for what they're doing, even if it's misguided or selfish.

Like every character, your antagonists also deserve to be fully well-rounded, and doing so will better your overall story. When you lean into the fact that your villain has their own set of morals and world-view, you can add more dimension to the dynamic between your antagonist



and protagonist and also help further develop your main character. Why is it so crucial for your main character to thwart your villain? When we give our antagonists more to work with, we can create a character that our readers either love to hate or drives them to finish the book just to see how they lose.

### **Cutting out Caricatures**

In the same way that people aren't all a monolith, neither should your supporting cast. Relying on stereotypes may be helpful in helping you figure out the point of why a side character is there when you're drafting, but you're going to want to elevate that in your edits to keep your characters from feeling flat or stale.

Easy ways to balance that is by putting a spin on well known tropes or stereotypes — a jock who also does interpretive dance or the femme popular girl who wants to be valedictorian, or the comic relief character having more going on beneath the surface. By adding nuance to traditional stereotypes and breaking down those boxes, you're creating characters that feel more believable and unique.

This is also particularly worth considering if you have any historically underrepresented secondary characters. Make sure that you're not falling into the tropes of "sassy gay friend" or "therapist Black friend" that turn their identity into a one-note caricature. As you give your characters more attention and develop their backstory and personalities, it will be easier for you to leave the caricatures behind.

## Following Genre Guidelines

When we start writing, we have a general idea what genre(s) we're wanting the story to fit into. Once we get into the meat of the piece, however, those lines can sometimes blur as the narrative changes and evolves as we refine what we're trying to say. During the drafting process, that's okay — you're leaning into your creativity and letting the words take you wherever you need to be and you don't have to be as focused on sticking within rigid genre lines. This changes once we move deeper into revisions.

As you start the developmental edits to evaluate your plot and characters, you should also make sure that the genre you're placing the story in *actually* encompasses the story you're trying to tell. Genres exist for a reason — to help categorize books to make it easy for readers to understand what type of story they're getting into. All genres have certain guidelines that writers are expected to follow, because it's what readers expect when they pick up a story. While there's always room to surprise the reader or create something unexpected within a genre, your story still has to make sense within those confines.

While this is always important, it's especially pertinent if you're looking to submit to a particular literary magazine or publishing house. Editors who specialize in specific genres are doing it for a reason, and you're not going to gain any favor by submitting a piece that doesn't follow genre guidelines.

That said, this can be a challenge if you're still trying to figure out what story your genre falls into, which is why it's important to come back to the purpose of genres and what signs you should be looking for.

## **Fulfilling Expectations**

One of the easiest metrics to ensure that you're following the genre guidelines for the story you're writing is by meeting the expectations of the genre. While this criteria is going to hinge on the genre you're working in, every category has some things readers have come to expect.

For instance, in romance novels a "happily ever after" is basically implied. Readers flock to romance books for a love story that conquers all obstacles, which is an important thing to remember if you're trying to query or submit a story for the genre. A story can contain romantic elements or have a romance that's integral to the story, but if it doesn't fulfill those certain expectations — you're not writing for the romance genre and perhaps your story would be better considered for literary fiction, romantic fiction or women's fiction.

An indie author and friend of mine learned this the hard way when they published their fantasy with a cover reminiscent of a romance. While there were romantic elements to the story, the cover misrepresented the story and their readers were disappointed by the disconnect. My friend decided to redo the cover with art that better fulfilled the expectations of the fantasy genre. While this has less to do with how the story was written, for authors who are self-publishing and creating their own covers, it's an important thing to keep everything in alignment.

Word count is another thing to keep in mind when you're looking at fulfilling genre expectations. Each genre varies for what is an acceptable word count, specifically when you're looking to traditionally publish, so making sure that you're sticking within those ranges will help you better meet those expectations. For example, some adult fantasy can be upwards of 150,000 words (though the sweet spot is usually closer to 110,000) but that isn't feasible for genres like

romance or young adult that are closer to the 80,000 word count mark. Here is a helpful [guide](#) to consider when looking at word count.

To make sure you're fulfilling expectations, read more books within your intended genre and see if your beats are matching up. What elements in your story lend themselves to certain guidelines and what can you do to better align your work within the genre?

### **Creating Marketability**

Beyond a genre's importance for readers, knowing what your story's genre is will also be crucial to selling your story. Genres are a tool for publishers to help categorize and promote their releases, for agents to know which publishers they should take your manuscript to, and also how authors carve out their niches.

From a marketing perspective, genres can be extremely useful to help establish your writing style if you're looking to make a name for yourself within a specific group. It also helps publishers and readers know what to expect from you as a writer too. Many readers also don't read outside of their preferred genre, which is why doubling down in a genre can be so fruitful. Sure, authors with a loyal fanbase will follow the author across genres or between age groups, for many writers, building a strong reader base within a specific genre works is a strategy that works best for creating a sustainable author brand.

### **Subgenres Exist For a Reason**

For many authors and their books, picking one genre for your story to fit into can be a challenge. Or, alternatively, a story may fit within a certain genre but not necessarily be what is

“expected” from the genre in the traditional sense of the word. This is where the beauty of sub-genres come into play.

For example, horror is an expansive genre that contains a multitude of sub-genres. Terms like supernatural horror, psychological horror, supernatural horror, gothic horror — the list goes on and on. While the broad genre of horror is helpful to initially market your book and connect with readers, you can utilize sub-genres to find the best descriptor for your story.

Together, genres and subgenres are designed to make it easier for you to connect with your intended readership, but you have to make sure you do the work to determine that the genre you choose is the correct fit.

## **Chapter Three: Peer Edits**

### **Choosing Who to Get Feedback From**

After finishing a new project, whether it's for a fiction story or article, it's always important to get another set of eyes on your work. If you happen to have a really strong support network of other writers or colleagues, this is a great resource to tap into; however, sometimes you have such a large pool of prospective critics to choose from, it can be tricky to narrow down your options.

At a certain point, involving too many voices will overwhelm your piece and make it impossible for you to sift through any meaningful feedback. This is why you will need to select a handful of people who will provide the most useful feedback for your work.

#### **Someone familiar with the topic or genre**

The best place to start out with when evaluating your creative network is picking the people who have the most knowledge on whatever it is you're writing about. Not only does it make it easier on you because you don't have to go through the extra length of explaining the background context, but you can ensure that everyone is starting off at the same place. There's already a level of familiarity that your readers will have, which allows for a deeper level of feedback.

Even though you can receive useful insight from writers working outside of your genre, there needs to be an extra level of attention to ensure that they will be a good fit. If you're working on a sci-fi story that has an important romantic subplot, enlisting the help of someone with a background in romance novels may be useful in making that relationship believable. That said, if you were working on a contemporary middle grade story and a potential critique partner solely writes adult horror — there's probably not going to be any useful crossovers.

### **Someone with a unique perspective**

Although these people don't need to have a different worldview from you, having people involved in the process who brings a unique or differing perspective than your own may help you find gaps in your story or research that you hadn't seen yourself. Perhaps you're working on a fantasy novel steeped in political intrigue and you have a friend with a political science degree — their insight could help you strengthen your system or find flaws that your characters can exploit later on.

This is also why it's important to include a diverse range of voices when you're seeking feedback. If you're only getting critiques from a specific segment of the population, whether it's white, heterosexual, neuro-typical or able-bodied, you're going to be missing important perspectives. This isn't meant to be used as a "cover your bases" situation, however. Diverse insight isn't intended to prove you didn't write something problematic. Instead it should be used to help you open your mind to a new point of view you hadn't considered before, which could in turn strengthen your work because it's making the piece more nuanced.

### **Someone whose feedback you trust**

While this may seem obvious to some, it can be easy to be so focused on getting the “best” input possible on our piece that we can sometimes forget that you need to actually believe in the person who’s offering the critiques. For example, if you’re working on a nonfiction paper and there’s multiple professors in your department who have experience with the topic you’re writing on, but you have a better rapport with one of them — even if the other is technically more qualified — go with the one you trust more. They are more likely to give up their time for you and will provide better feedback because of that connection. Even if someone seems like a really good fit for your piece, if their critique style isn’t one that works well with your own, that feedback won’t actually be conducive to improving your piece.

As a writer, it can be easy to fall into the trap of finding the “best” critics for your work that you end up devaluing your actual needs with the feedback you’re looking for. At the end of the day, you ideally want someone who is skilled at providing constructive feedback in a positive way, who can point out what *is* working as well as what still needs some extra attention.

### **Finding Beta Readers**

Beta readers are an integral part of the editing process. Their critiques help writers determine what sections work and what sections need more attention, but not every beta reader can provide the exact feedback you’re looking for.

When you’re putting together a beta reading team, you’re trying to find readers that offer the most useful insight into your story. Looking for readers with those qualities is important, but it can be a challenge to know where to find them and what factors merit valuable commentary.



**Seek the right readers for you**

First off, it's important to receive input from beta readers that are knowledgeable about the genre you're writing and are avid readers of books that have the same comparative structure and tropes. Those readers can spot that you're setting up the correct plot points in the right place to make the story flow and hit all its intended marks. They are also most likely to represent what the reviews of your intended readers will look like.

Although involving beta readers that are familiar with the genre you're writing will be the most beneficial to your manuscript, that doesn't mean you shouldn't also get insight from readers outside of your genre as well. If you have a romance arc in your book, getting feedback from a beta reader that specializes in romance will help you follow the correct beats to make that plot line feel more authentic. Betas who offer advice from outside your intended genre can also see different holes that could be present in your draft that other readers may miss.

**Know what you're looking for**

Outside of diverse perspectives, another factor to consider when looking for beta readers is the type of feedback you want to receive. Do you want a surface level overview of what could be improved or expanded upon? Or do you want beta readers to deep dive into how a character's arc progresses throughout the story?

Knowing what kind of critique you'd like to receive can better help you structure how beta's submit their comments. Some authors prefer to give their betas a questionnaire that tackles a breakdown of each chapter, some prefer comments and questions on the draft itself, and others would rather have it structured like a review pointing out the good and the bad. However you

prefer to receive your feedback, sharing that information upfront with betas will help them provide the best response to your need.

### **Recruit a variety of beta talents**

Every beta reader will bring something different to the table, and the variety of comments will be instrumental when going through beta responses. Having each beta bring a different specialty to the table will ensure that you'll have reviews addressing multiple elements of your draft.

It can be hard for one reader to touch on every aspect of the story, so finding beta readers with strengths in different areas will give you a well-rounded evaluation. For example, some readers may specialize in dialogue or description, while others are more plot, setting or character focused. These qualities all have their place, and it'll be useful to you as an author to have input reacting to different parts of your manuscript.

### **How to find beta readers**

There are multiple avenues an author can take to find beta readers. You can put out a call for betas on your social media channels to enlist potential readers — many authors will have a form available for prospective betas to fill out to determine if they'll be the right fit for you. You can also specifically ask other writers or readers you trust to dedicate their time to beta as well and offer a beta exchange, or even ask friends and members of your book club.

If you want to look outside your network, Facebook also offers a host of different beta reading groups where the service is free of charge such as [Beta Readers](#), [Beta Readers & Critiques](#), and [Beta Readers and Critique Partners](#). One thing to keep in mind with Facebook

groups, however, is that beta readers acquired from the group can still try to redirect to charging. Make sure when you're working with them to be upfront about it being for no charge so there is no room for misunderstandings.

Even though there are a lot of free options for beta readers, if you're willing to spend a little bit of money, you can also hire professional beta readers for their services. You can post about your beta reading needs on freelance sites like [Upwork](#) and [Fiverr](#) — this is one of the avenues I've connected with beta readers on — or through editors that offer the service along with editing, such as [Your Beta Reader](#),

The benefit of hiring a beta reader is they're experienced in providing feedback and already know what to look for. If you're looking for a particular perspective in a beta reader, this is also a good option because professional beta readers will make it clear what services they offer in terms of genre knowledge and quality of feedback. As someone who offers beta reader services for genres I specialize in, I can attest that going in with a business arrangement helps ensure that I'm giving deep, thorough feedback.

## **Authenticity Readers**

As writers, we are used to creating characters that have different life experiences from our own. And while there are some things we can learn through intensive research, such as historical background and different career paths, there are some things like sexuality, disability, gender and race that are much harder to accurately portray without that background.

This is where authenticity readers come in. **Authenticity readers**, formerly known as sensitivity readers, are a critical part of the beta reading process and help the author from making cultural errors, insensitive comments or unrealistic characters.

### **Why and when should you use authenticity readers?**

There are many different instances when an author would want to utilize an authenticity reader. If you have a character with a different race or ethnicity, hiring an authenticity reader that shares that culture or race would ensure that you're doing the character justice by making them more realistic and not accidentally offending your readers. The same goes with instances of disability or different sexualities and genders, there are certain aspects that you may think you understand, but you might not have fully accurate.

Of course, depending on the kind of story you're telling, you may need to hire multiple authenticity readers. While an authenticity reader can provide detailed feedback that you might have missed, one authenticity reader cannot be the authority on a whole group of people, which is why it's helpful to have multiple perspectives.

It's also important to utilize an authenticity reader that has the same specific trait or upbringing as the character. For example, a beta reader who is gay is going to have a different experience than a lesbian or bisexual individual, and won't be able to speak to those specifics, even if there are overlapping experiences of homophobia. The same is true with any other marginalization. Finding an authenticity reader with the closest identity to your character increases the likelihood of having more accurate feedback.

**How are authenticity readers different from beta readers?**

While beta readers focus on the overall content and flow of the storyline and its characters, authenticity readers focus particularly on their area of expertise and guide the author through any challenges that arise with a character or plot device. Depending on how broad the beta community you're pulling from is, you may find that some of the beta readers you're using may also double as authenticity readers, or are willing to provide that feedback in a beta-capacity.

For historically underrepresented authors, it is also common to exchange authenticity edits with a colleague in the writing community as an alternative form of payment. If you don't have a lot of diversity within your beta readers, however, hiring an authenticity reader can help bring a different perspective that's more in line with specific aspects of your story.

Another difference between authenticity readers and beta readers, is that often you hire authenticity readers for their time because they are providing a service that extends beyond the realm of beta reading and have training in this area of expertise.

Think of authenticity readers as you would an editor — you don't want to release a book filled with grammar errors or story development issues, you shouldn't want to release a book that is insensitive or harmful either.

**Where to find one**

Similar to beta or editing services, authenticity readers can be found through social media channels, google searches or through small presses. There are even organizations set up to help put writers in contact with a professional, such as [Writing Diversely](#) or [Kevin Anderson & Associates](#). Some professional authenticity readers highlight this service on their own websites,

offering their own established rates for reads, such as Niesha Davis, Antoinette Scully, Shenwei, and Hans.

For a more informal process, some writers will also use their writing networks to ask if a colleague would be open to doing an authenticity read for your novel for a fee. I have personally been reached out to through the contact sheet on my website or in Instagram DMs about authenticity reading, and have always accepted the opportunity, but keep in mind that not everyone is open to those cold calls, so it's better to reach out that way to people you have a familiarity with.

### **Incorporating feedback**

Same as an editor or beta reader, the feedback that is given to you from an authenticity reader is meant to benefit you and your story. It's important to listen to what suggestions and advice your authenticity reader gives you — even if it's not necessarily what you want to hear. Revising is always a part of the writing process, and the notes you receive from an authenticity reader are just as valuable as comments from a beta reader or editor.

It's starting to become standard practice to utilize authenticity readers, with many authors listing their authenticity readers in the acknowledgements section of their books. As this resource gains more traction, it'll become even more important to be familiar with the value of authenticity readers going into the editing process.

## Chapter Four: Implementing Feedback

### Determining What's Useful Feedback

Beta readers are usually the first real readers that you'll get outside of your critique partners that will offer insight into your story. It's an important stage of the writing process because their comments will help you determine what's working in your story and what still needs some work.

Once you have their notes though, it can be hard to know where to begin. Each reader has their own set of opinions that may or may not match up across the board. How do you determine what comments you should listen to or disregard, and what should you do if you have conflicting feedback?

As the author, you have complete control over what you want to use from beta readers. Although you shouldn't immediately ignore any criticism you disagree with, here are some tips to help you better implement beta feedback.

### When to add versus ignore

The key thing to consider when you start sifting through beta feedback is: Does this feedback actually align with the direction I want this story to go?

It can be easy to be swept up in the suggestions beta readers make and wanting to utilize every single comment because you want your readers to be happy, but it's important to view these critiques with a critical eye. Ask yourself how adding this feedback would change the

story: Will the story be more dynamic? Will the characters be more nuanced? Does it fit the vision of the story you're telling?

If the answer is yes, then you should implement the feedback. If the majority of your readers bring up the same kind of comments or concerns, that is something also worth listening to — even if it's something that you hadn't considered before. If multiple readers think something isn't working, then it probably isn't. Utilizing their feedback can help you see where the misstep is and how you can correct it.

When it comes to ignoring feedback, make sure that you're disregarding it for the right reason. Does the suggestion not align with the theme of your story? Are they saying they hate a facet that you absolutely love? It's okay if you don't want to change something, but see if there's any other lesson you can glean from the comment that can help you better contextualize your thought process for the story. Even if readers don't like something, if they can understand where the writer is coming from it can still enhance their reading experience.

### **When you get conflicting feedback**

Conflicting feedback is to be expected. Maybe one of your beta readers loved a character or a plot point that another one didn't care for. It can be confusing at first to have such stark, differing opinions, but depending on the number of readers you elicit comments from, it may be accurate to how your future readers will experience the book. If you get feedback that's pretty evenly split over certain sections of your book, you should determine what exactly it is that made a reader like or dislike that scene or character. Were there any nuggets in the feedback that you could use to get a better sense of what the real divider is? Maybe it's not the character that's the issue, but a particular trait that could be tweaked to better endear the reader to the character.



It's also worth considering if you're okay with conflicting feedback. There's always going to be readers who like or dislike a part of your book. If the content is something you think is integral to the story, maybe it doesn't need to be changed necessarily, but it can give you some insight on what aspects readers will gravitate towards or pull away from. You can decide what's most important to you there, and if you need to strike a balance.

### **When you don't like *any* of the feedback**

Let's take a moment here to dive a little deeper into the "why" you didn't like any of the constructive criticism your beta readers provided. Oftentimes, our first reaction is to go on the defensive of our work and assume that the reader didn't "get" the story. Although an emotional reaction is natural, it may not be the most conducive when it comes to revisions. Take some time away from the comments and your story to digest the critiques.

If you come back to it and you still don't like any of the feedback, that probably means something big in your story isn't working. Maybe the plot is too clunky or the world building is confusing, the character's are one-dimensional or the romance is lacking. While it's hard to hear, that doesn't mean your work is unsalvageable — you just have more work to do than you thought. Sure, it may be disappointing, but you now have a guide on what exactly it is that needs improvement.

Another instance when you might not like any of the feedback might be because the feedback points to you not being the right person to tell the story or the story has some deep-seeded flaws. This is where looking at beta wording is important. If your beta readers are implying that the story has harmful tropes or your portrayal lacks the needed depth —

particularly if your beta readers are from historically underrepresented backgrounds — that’s your cue to zoom out and really ask yourself what you’re trying to do with this story.

At the end of the day, beta readers are an outside perspective to prepare you for what readers might think before you put your book out in the world. You shouldn’t go into the beta process expecting that everyone will only have “amazing” things to say about your work, but you should get a sense of professionalism and genuine interest. Of course, beta readers aren’t editors, but their insight is still valuable and worth considering while you continue through the editing process.

## **How to Know if You Should Shelve Your Project (For Now)**

The hard truth of writing is that sometimes it’s not the right time for your story or article. Whether the publishing market isn’t seeking those types of stories or your work needs more time to marinate, there will occasionally be times when you have to put a project on hold. There are a lot of reasons why writers will choose to shelve a project (whether it’s indefinitely or for the time being), and there’s no shame in stepping away from a piece if it’s not working in its current form or at this exact moment.

To clarify, this is not about shelving your work for when you’re “a better writer.” Those thoughts aren’t just detrimental to your creativity, but it’s also not quantifiable. While our writing will always improve as we strengthen our craft, if you find yourself putting off your current draft or article because you’ll suddenly be better in a few months or years — that’s probably not the real reason you’re wanting to put it away. What other issues have you been

having with the piece? What headspace have you been in that could be impacting your creative process?

Even though it may not always feel like you have a choice in terms of shelving a project, such as if an agent or a publisher just aren't connecting with this piece, it doesn't mean you should delete anything you've written or assume that it was all for nothing. Not only is there always a chance that you could return to that piece again in the future, but writing something that won't be published is a very common part of the writing process. It's still an experiment in craft and is beneficial to you on your journey as a writer.

It's a hard decision to put something you've worked so hard on away, but coming to terms with the *why* can be surprisingly affirming. Here are some things to consider if you're wondering if the time has come to shelve your project.

### **It's not *working*.**

Maybe you've been through multiple rounds of self-edits and beta readers, and your story just isn't clicking with your intended audience. Maybe you're stuck on a challenging plot point you created and you just don't know how you're going to unravel the web you created. Maybe you don't know exactly what the problem is, but you can feel it in your bones: something isn't *working*.

As creatives, we're used to telling stories that are ripe with complexities that may take some time for us to untangle the knots. But at a certain point, if you've been at a complete standstill for months (or years even) and are still no closer to discovering what thread you need to pull to release the tension and let the words flow out, it might be time to take a different approach. There's a possibility you've been so focused on this project that you've closed off any

other opportunities for further creativity, which could foster the energy you've been looking for. By taking a step back from a project and giving yourself an actual break from thinking about it, you're tricking your brain into considering more potential avenues.

Giving yourself permission to embrace something new or different will also help you live in a more prosperous creative headspace. Not only can you explore more of the ideas you have on your story list, but who knows — while you're in the middle of working on something new, you might stumble across what you were looking for the whole time.

Personally, I've shelved a manuscript halfway during the editing process because I realized I wasn't exactly sure if the story I was telling was the one I actually wanted to tell, and having just come out of a pandemic, the subject matter was a little too heavy for me. While I still plan on returning back to that story in the future when I have a better plan for it, right now I'm focusing on other projects that are bringing me more joy. Many authors have stories about an essay, article or manuscript that they shelved for various reasons, which is important to remember that you're not alone for making this decision and you're not a worse writer for it.

### **You've lost your love for it.**

There's nothing like that passion and thrill that comes from diving into a new creative project. Everything is so new and exciting, and you find yourself falling in love with all aspects of the story. Over time, that "love at first sight" starts to wane as you realize that there's actual work that needs to be done, but the goal is for that love to deepen into something stronger, something that will help guide you through all the rough points, like multiple rewrites or intensive edits.

You're spending a lot of time with your piece, especially if it's a long-form medium. There's a reason why so many authors say that you have to love the story you're telling, because there will always come a time when the obstacles seem insurmountable, and it's going to be that love and passion for your story that will keep you sticking to it.

Sometimes, though, you may realize that you might not be as in love with this story as you thought, or every time you come back to the story it feels like a slog. The honeymoon period is over and the thought of spending every day working to complete the story sounds strenuous.

There's no reason for you to suffer through writing a book that you're not enjoying, especially if this is before you've sold it to a publisher. If you're already struggling with the story, it's only going to get worse as you get edits on it and you're expected to complete them by a deadline. Sometimes we enter into a story and realize that while the concept may be interesting, you just don't have the determination to see it through the end — and that's *okay*. Putting away a story that you're no longer interested in writing will give you the opportunity to write stories that you do love.

### **It's not the right time.**

The hardest reason to decide to shelve your work is when it doesn't feel like a choice. There are many things that are out of our control once we start to query or go on submission and sometimes things don't go the way we want them to. Maybe an agent loves your story but just can't find the right publisher for it — which happens! It might have nothing to do with the quality of your book, but more to do with what the landscape of publishing is looking like at that moment. Maybe a certain genre or theme has been less profitable or there's a specific quota that publisher's have filled. (Unfortunately, this is extremely common for historically

underrepresented authors to experience.) When that happens, it'll be time to switch gears to work on something else, but as publishing continues to shift and new editors join houses, there's always an opportunity for a story to come back around.

When it comes to querying, the lines can get blurrier. Marie Lu shared during *Y'allwest* that she received over 600 rejections for her debut novel. While we expect to get numerous rejections, there comes a time for many authors to decide if they should keep trying to find a champion for their story, or if it's time to set it aside for the moment and try to sell another. Similar to publishers, agents also have quotas and know what it is publishers are looking for — and no matter how hard it can be, sometimes the story you're writing isn't as marketable as it needs to be at that specific moment.

Some authors have succeeded by being tenacious and fighting through the rejections, and some decided to write something else instead that did get published. There's no right or wrong answer, but sometimes if you have a feeling that maybe now isn't the right time for that specific story, you set it aside.

## **Determining When You're 'Done'**

When it comes to finishing a first draft, it's easy to tell when the story has reached it's natural conclusion. You've made it to the end of the adventure, the characters are either living happily ever after (or not), and you've written the magic words: *The End*.

Unfortunately, when it comes to *editing* that same draft, it's a lot more challenging to determine what exactly constitutes being finished. There's a reason why writers say that you can edit a story for forever — there's always something you can tweak, add or delete that will keep you stuck in editing purgatory.

Fortunately, there are a few markers that authors can cling to that will help you determine if you should take one more pass at the story or if you can finally put that red pen down.

### **You've been fine-tuning for forever**

While “forever” may be dramatic, we all understand the sentiment. When you've been pouring over your writing for months and months, and are now at the stage where you're taking a magnifying glass to evaluate each word choice for the umpteenth time — that's a good sign that your book or project is done.

There's always something you can change about your story, and the danger of sitting in the editing process for too long is that you start to do your work a disservice because you're hyper analyzing each choice you made up to this point.

At a certain point, once you have a manuscript, story or article as polished as you can make it, it's time to hit send and submit it.

### **You've captured the story's truth**

Another good marker to evaluate if your piece is finished is if you feel you've captured the truth of the story you're telling. Have you dived deep enough into the subject matter that you've added something new and interesting to the conversation? Is this draft the best representation of what you're trying to communicate?

When you're editing it can be easy to be swept up in making the story *better* so that you can lose sight of the story you're trying to tell. Staying true to the message of your piece and viewing these edits through the lens of achieving the full essence of the story will help you

determine whether you've said all that you want to have said from your angle, theme or character viewpoint.

### **Trust yourself**

At the end of the day, as the writer, you'll know when you're done. Maybe it's intuition, maybe you've just gotten absolutely sick of rereading your book for the 20th time, but there will come a time when you'll know that you got your draft to the best possible point you could.

Although this truly comes down to intuition, you do have to trust yourself and your abilities that you have achieved what you set out to do when you first started this journey. You've done all the hard work that you needed to do, you've made the necessary edits, you've reread the piece, you have a masterful grasp on the story you've weaved together.

For some, this feeling may come to you like an exhaled breath — edits have reached their natural conclusion and you just feel in your bones that the piece is ready to be submitted or sent out into the world. For others, the feeling could be of pure exhaustion or a weary grunt of relieved agitation. You might not *feel* ready but you've reached the end point. Trust yourself and your intuition as you go through the revision process, because it will help guide you to the end of the project.



## About the Author

Aliya Bree Hall is a writer and occasional journalist based in Portland, Oregon. She writes romance and horror that predominantly features dramatic sapphics. Hall is also the author of *Now Comes The Hard Part: The Authors Publish Introduction to Marketing Your Book* and *The Forest's Call* published in the Quill & Crow Publishing anthology, *Bleak Midwinter I: The Darkest Night*.