

The Art of Getting Feedback

How to Edit (& be edited) like a pro!

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Types of Feedback

- 1) **Constructive:** Specific, actionable suggestions for improvement
- 2) **Descriptive:** Observations that describe what works and what doesn't in the piece
- 3) **Evaluative:** Judgments about the overall effectiveness of the writing (e.g., "This poem moves me," or "The structure is confusing")
- 4) **Formative:** Aimed at improving the process of writing (e.g., suggestions on drafting techniques or revision strategies)

Types of Editing

- 1) **Developmental:** Focuses on the big picture—structure, themes, and content. Ensures the work is cohesive and aligns with the writer's intent
- 2) **Structural:** Concentrates on organization and flow within the manuscript. It's about where elements are placed and how they work together
- 3) **Line:** Focuses on style, tone, and clarity at the sentence or paragraph level. Enhances the flow and rhythm of the text
- 4) **Copyediting:** Ensures grammatical accuracy, consistency in style, and correct usage of language.
- 5) **Proofreading:** A final check for typos, spelling errors, punctuation mistakes, and formatting issues.

Feedback vs. Editing

- They can be one and the same, or there can be multiple overlays, but in general:
- **Feedback** is about what *does* or *doesn't work* for the reader.
 - >>> **VIBES**: Emotional, informal responses to themes & voice
- **Editing** is about *fixing* and *refining* the text to meet professional or artistic standards
 - >>> **VIBES**: Analytical, technical guidance for the piece as a whole

* *You'll need/want both.* *

What comes first?

- Writing is an individual process for all, however, here are some common ways of going about things:
- You'll want feedback as you're developing your work (at this stage, your story structure or core ideas may feel incomplete and that's okay)
- You'll want an editor once you have a solid draft you've already revised with good feedback.
- Sometimes, people who give feedback are known as "beta readers"

How to Receive Feedback

1) **Identify Your Goals:** Define what you want to achieve by coming up with some “goal-framing questions”

>>>> Do my characters feel authentic and relatable?

>>>> Does the pacing keep you engaged?

>>>> Is the tone consistent throughout the story, or if there are tonal shifts, do they make sense?

>>>> Manuscript (Structure, Image Systems, Arrangement) / Poems (narrative, line-breaks, form, metaphors)

2) **Choose the Right Readers:** Friends & family who won't just give you the equivalent of the heart emoji, Writing communities, Trusted peers, Teachers/Mentors, Professional Editors

3) **Provide Context & Instructions:** Provide a summary or outline to help them contextualize your work. Or not?

>>>> **TIP: Limit the Scope:** If you're sharing a large manuscript, focus their attention on key sections or chapters.

4) **Be Strategic About Timing:** Share your work after you've done your best to polish it yourself. A messy draft can overwhelm readers, and you'll get better feedback if your writing is clear.

>>>> **TIP: Avoid** asking for feedback too early unless you're testing a specific concept or idea (e.g., "Is this premise engaging?").

5) **Consider a Critique Circle:** Critiquing others helps you develop a critical eye, which can improve your own writing. (This is one of the best things you can do!!!)

6) Analyze, Evaluate, and Process Feedback:

- >>>> Look for patterns: Are multiple readers mentioning the same issue/strengths?
- >>>> Assess relevance to your goals
- >>>> Separate subjective opinions from constructive advice: Not every suggestion will align with your vision — learn to separate the wheat from the chaff
- >>>> Alignment with Vision: Determine if the feedback aligns with your creative intentions. If it's not clear to you what you're doing, no feedback will take you there.
- >>>> Relevance to Audience: Consider whether the feedback improves the work for your target audience.
- >>>> Always be grateful! (This can be tough if the feedback isn't what you expected!)

8) **Prioritize:** This may not always be possible, but where you can, follow the 80/20 rule. Move forward.

>>>> Address major issues first (structural changes like plot holes, pacing issues, etc) and core themes/messages (ensuring your main message(s) are effectively conveyed).

>>>> Note: A theme isn't just an abstraction like love. It's an abstraction or a concept that makes a claim. For example: Love is impossible where abuse exists.

9) **Rinse, Rewrite, Repeat!**

What are you trying to say?

“The thing is that before I can discard the verse, I have to write it. Even if it's bad ... the bad ones took as long to write as the good ones. As someone once observed, it's just as hard to write a bad novel as a good novel. It's just as hard to write a bad verse as a good verse. I can't discard a verse before it is written because it is the writing of the verse that produces whatever delights or interests or facets are going to catch the light. The cutting of the gem has to be finished before you can see whether it shines”

Leonard Cohen, 1992

