



## DEBRA'S PERSONAL EDITING TIPS

### Polishing Your Prose

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***Finished with your article? Wait! Don't send yet.  
Take a look at these tips for checking the fine print.***

**1. Read your writing with fresh eyes.**

- Read your writing from a different point of view. Change seats.
- Take your writing outside in the sun and read it there.
- Sit in your car with your writing; read it there.
- Take your writing to the porch or the living room couch; read it there.

**2. Read your writing aloud.** Whenever you stumble, tick the words or line with a yellow highlighter. Rework these passages when you return to your writing desk.

**3. Allow your writing to grow cold.** Leave it alone. Don't read it for at least a week, when possible. Then, return to it with fresh eyes and hearing.

**4. Write tight to write right.** On a hard copy (printout) highlight all the "ditch words," all the little words that lay in the ditch between the big words. Words such as *to, of, it, for, up, out, this, that, which, from, with, and, in, on, how, but, however,* etc. See how you might rewrite the sentences deleting 10-30% of the ditch words. (It can be done!)

**5. Use your word processing software to insert a page break** after each paragraph, giving each paragraph (or section of dialogue) its own page. Read these smaller sections, paying attention to whether every word, every sentence adds to the whole. Is there action or forward movement in every paragraph? Is something happening in each section? Cut down on long passages of expository writing when you can.

**6. Use your word processor to re-format** your writing into columns to represent various publishing formats (two or three columns in normal view for magazines, two columns in landscape view for trade paperback). Change margins to fully justified. Notice the balance between white space and long sections of text. Edit to allow for consistent paragraph length.

**7. Use your word processor's spelling checker for suggestions ONLY! Try it, don't trust it.** And while we're on the subject of word processor overrides, forget about **ALL** grammar checkers. You are the writer, not the computer. Write like you speak.

**8. Read your manuscript backwards,** looking at each word individually for possible errors in usage and spelling.

**9. Create a "window marker"** by cutting a hole in a plain piece of paper the width of two lines of text. Use it as a pull-down marker to review your text two lines at a time.

**10. Ask an expert when in doubt.** Don't mar your reputation in your specialized field by minor mistakes in grammar, usage, punctuation, and syntax. Your article, newsletter, or ebook represents **YOU**. Impress them with your tips; wow them with your prose.