**Editing**

Editing is critical to the writing process. The editing process is what distinguishes a good story from a great one. Editing should not be seen as a chore or burden, but as an opportunity to continue to work on something that you (ideally) poured your heart and soul into. A good story is one which you look forward to editing, not because you are making the story and writing better (which you are) but because you get to interact with your characters and their worlds. This sheet will provide you with some basic editing strategies as well as some basic editing resources.

**Subconscious Development (aka “Disassociation”):**

* By far the most effective method of self-editing. Have you ever had difficulty editing your writing simply because you cannot see the problems wrong with it? That is very common. Disassociation is the best way around that.

**Instructions:** Once you finish writing the story, put it down. Do not touch it, look at it, read it, or otherwise physically read what you have written. Instead, dedicate your efforts to reflecting on what the story itself should be. What should the characters feel like? Who are they? What do you feel when you think about them? What should happen? After 2 or 3 weeks of this, go back to the physical copy of the story. Reread it ***on paper***, and edit it ***by hand***. You catch many more mistakes and change much more when you read it on paper. It also provides you a physical copy of what the story was before the edits, so you can see the story’s evolution over time. You will find that, after 2 to 3 weeks of seriously reflecting on what the story should be like, you think what you originally wrote is pretty bad. The reflection and investment of energy into thinking about the story provides an obligation, both to you and your characters, that you fix your mistakes. Once you finish editing on paper, pass them onto the computer and repeat the cycle.

**Note:** It is important that you don’t over edit the story. Once you feel that you don’t want to edit it anymore, leave it. You might just need more time, or inspiration. Getting outside opinions on your story can help motivate you to make further changes.

**Plot-based Opinion Edits:**

* It is critical that this step is engaged with in some capacity. You absolutely need outside input and suggestions on how to improve the story because you cannot catch everything yourself. Find anyone who writes—your English teacher, your librarian, your family, even a classmate or a friend—to read the story. All they have to do is read the story and tell you what they thought and why.

**Instructions:** Find someone who writes and ask them to read your story. Tell them to specifically focus on big-picture questions such as: Does the plot make sense? Are the characters consistent? Are there any plot holes? What did you feel when you read the story? How well did it flow? Make sure you pressure them to read the story within a 2-3 week period, because they will likely never read it otherwise. During this period, continue to disassociate yourself from the story so that you are ready to receive feedback with an open mind. Remember: ***constructive criticism is not discounting what you have written; rather, it is someone else taking the time to help you improve.*** Do not bristle at feedback, because no one writes masterpieces first drafts. I recommend you finding 2-3 people to do this simultaneously, because then you can combine all of their feedbacks and see what is stylistically opinionated and what is universal. Do this until you, as the author, feel comfortable and happy with the quality. Remember: ***you have the last say in your story. Not everyone will agree with you, and not everyone will like it. So you advance when you feel comfortable advancing, or at least uncomfortable continuing to do the same thing****.*

**Copy Editing:**

* This is the final stage of editing. This is where you focus on fixing the small and obnoxious spelling, grammatical, word choice, and syntactical errors which avoided you.

**Instructions:** Gather your editors and “beta readers” and tell them to read through the newest draft, one by one. Have them specifically read the story looking for spelling, grammatical, and syntactical errors and note them down. You can also give them the option to note down word choice suggestions. Once the first person finishes their copy editing round, input their corrections. Then hand the draft over to the next reader and have them do the same thing. Once you get through all of them, read through it again, making sure that there are no further mistakes.

**Resources:**

* Teachers and librarians are great resources. While they are busy people, they would love to see one of their students actually dedicate time to write outside of class. If you ask them to help you with something that you’ve written, especially if it’s creative and outside of class, they likely would be excited. Remember, these are people who love books and reading, but who are simultaneously watching the decline of the humanities. Trusting in them and including them in your creative process is flattering. Just ask, you’ll be surprised.
* Another possible resource are family members and friends. While not super ideal, because they may not write seriously or you would feel uncomfortable sharing your stories with them, they also will likely to be flattered to be included. Especially if you talk to them about it and engage them. Most parents want to connect with their kids, but don’t know how. Writing can be a cathartic experience for you, and a bonding experience for your family. Granted, this doesn’t work in all cases or for all families, but it doesn’t hurt to ask or try.
* Finally, I am willing to be a resource for you. I spend a lot of time doing personal writing, and I have gotten pretty adept at it over the years (at my previous job I ran their short story competition and edited over 50 submissions, eventually choosing the winner). I love writing, and I love seeing more people try. Even if you don’t want to write seriously, it is a great hobby to have. I would be more than happy to read anything you write. Just send me an email at [mlerouxparra@college.harvard.edu](mailto:mlerouxparra@college.harvard.edu) telling me that you were in this class, and I’ll be happy to read what you send me. If I have time (which I will over the summer) I’ll even edit it. Thank you very much for taking this class, and I hope it inspired you to go out and write!