

ROBIN'S TEN TOP TIPS FOR SELF-EDITING LIKE A PRO

(Make your copyeditor and proofreader adore you—and get more value from your editing budget!)

1. Spellcheck – with a twist!

- Start a custom dictionary file and make it your default.
- Enter all the names from your manuscript, as well as foreign or original (such as scifi/fantasy) words.
- Run spellcheck, which will now catch errors in spelling of names or original words, as well as standard spelling errors. (And your editor can cross this off the list of things to keep their eyes peeled for, which frees up energy and attention for other things!)

2. Format ellipses consistently!

One common way to style them is to add a space after the ellipsis if a new sentence is following it, and leave the space off if the same sentence continues.

“Harry, did you put this...this alien egg in the fridge?”

“Harry, what the... Did you put this alien egg in the fridge?”

You can use the **ellipsis character** or spaced periods, but choose one and stick to it. If spaced periods are your preference, your editor or formatter will probably suggest using nonbreaking spaces between them, so the ellipsis can't be broken in half if it occurs at the end of a line, or be separated from the word that precedes it.

3. Replace overused words.

Which words do you use too frequently? Some common ones: suddenly, just, really, great, try – **check here for more**, and read your own work carefully to figure out yours!

You can also use **this software** to count word frequency for you (there are online utilities that you can use as well). Often they can be simply omitted, and other times there are better, more accurate or more vivid words to use instead.

4. Correct and consistent use of numerals vs spelled out numbers (spell up to 100 per Chicago Manual of Style). **Here's my favorite resource** for info on styling numbers in fiction!

5. Check hyphen, en dash and em dash use. **Learn the difference here!**





6. Direct address capitalization:

Capitalize Mom/Dad when used as a name, but not when it's a common noun – “No, Mom won't let me.” / “My mom won't let me.”

The same rule applies to most professional or military titles:

"The captain says it's your turn to wash the dog." / "Don't tell Captain Jones that Snowball got into the ketchup again!" / "Hey, Captain, don't look in the kitchen, ok?"

7. Eyes vs gaze – gazes follow, cling, jump, crawl, etc., but usually it's best if eyes do NOT. If you can imagine it in a literal way and it's creepy, use gaze!

(The same can go for hands and other body parts. You don't want to distract your reader with an unintentionally funny or grotesque mental image!)

8. Dialogue tag/action punctuation:

- a. “Don't eat that!” said Mary.
- b. “Don't eat that,” said Mary, “it's rotten.”
- c. “Don't eat that.” Mary grabbed the apple. “It's rotten.”
- d. “Don't eat that,” Mary said, grabbing the apple, “it's rotten.”

9. Avoid redundant dialogue tags! For example:

- a. “What's that?” she questioned. (Obviously it's a question!)
- b. “Do as I told you, and quick!” her mother demanded.
- c. “Oh my gosh!” she exclaimed.

A few of these here and there won't break your novel, but too many will make the dialogue sound overdone and amateurish.

10. Quotation marks are double, not single (if you're writing for the US market), even when used to indicate something is “so-called.” Single quote marks are ONLY used for quotes-within-quotes.

RELATED BONUS TIP: Be sure your quotation marks and apostrophes are curly “smart” quotes and not straight quotes (hashmarks).

