

1 Be kind. If this is your first draft, don't be too hard on yourself. You've done brilliantly to complete a book at all.

2 Read it aloud. Reading your text aloud will help you scan your writing for rhythm, sense, and authenticity. And for repetition. If something sounds odd, or if you find yourself stumbling over it when you read it, it probably needs cutting.

3 Beware exposition. Another common pitfall for writers is including long sections of exposition; where the writer or the narrator tells us things. This is part of the age-old show don't tell writing rule. As Chekov said, 'Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.'

4 Don't start late, don't end early. So many of the books we see start too late, and end too early. Analyse the beginning of your book. Do you need really that prologue? Or all that backstory?

5 Look out for pet words. Every writer has them. Unusual words they want to show off. Firstly, check you're using them correctly. Always keep a good dictionary handy. Secondly, if it's a very unusual word, use the search function (CTRL + F in Word) to make sure you don't use it more than twice in a book. Readers *will* notice.

6 Screen for clichés. We all know what they look like, from phrases to character types. Get rid of them. Find new ways of saying, and of describing.

7 Check your facts. Cross-reference your dates, locations and events. Pick out anachronisms. Readers will notice if you're writing a contemporary political thriller, and you've got your politicians mixed up, or if your historical fiction character uses a phrase that wasn't invented till a hundred years after the time in which your novel is set.

8 Learn the distance technique.

*A *long distance* approach looks at the genre, the market, the story arc and character development.

*A *middle distance* approach looks at chapter structure, balance, overall voice, beginnings, middles and endings.

*A *close-up* looks at sentence construction, language consistency, spelling, formatting, grammar.

9 Check your story for sense and logic. It might help to make a timeline for your book. Separate out plots and sub-plots for a clearer idea of how they fit together. Make sure the characters' goals are consistent, and that their reactions are logical, believable and in character.

10 Summarise. This handy exercise helps put longer projects into focus. Write the content of each chapter into one paragraph. Narrow this down again, into one sentence. Line up your sentences in order. Does it still read like a story?