

Lesson 12 Handout

Self-Editing

NOTE: For those writing for the Christian market, I've included editing tips from the *Christian Writer's Manual of Style*.

This list of self-editing tips is based on what I see most often as an editor. Before sending an article or manuscript to an editor, take a little time to look for little details, which can be easily missed.

A word about auto-correct: It isn't always correct. Words can be confused (there, their, they're) or the pure grammar of it doesn't fit the writing: ain't. Look careful before accepting auto-correct changes.

Spaces

- Use Find and Replace to check for extra spaces.
 - Double space at the end of sentences.
 - An extra space at the end of paragraphs.

Pronouns

- Generally, a first- person, plural point of view is used in most non-fiction writing. Look for places where other pronouns may have slipped through, particularly "I" (except when telling a personal story).
- If the manuscript is a memoir, use first person.
- Gender pronouns. It is now a common practice to write in gender neutral language unless the audience is a specific gender. If the book or article is intended for women, use female pronouns. Otherwise reword sentence to be gender-neutral.
- *Christian Writer's Manual of Style* calls for deity pronouns to be lower case. If the manuscript is for a publishing house, use their style. Those who are self-publishing, use either style.

Consistency

- Look for consistency of terms and punctuation. One of the most common is a serial or Oxford comma. Pick a style and stick to it.

Spelling

- The most common spelling problems are words the spell checker misses. Is it to be "there" or "their"? Is it "your" or "you're"?

Numbers

- *Chicago Manual of Style* (used for most books) calls for numbers one through ninety-nine to be in words. One hundred and greater are in numbers, except at the beginning of a paragraph.

Hyphens

- When to use hyphenated words is often confusing. The *Chicago Manual of Style* has an extensive list of hyphen rules. The most confusing comes with ages. Hyphens are used for nouns and adjectives: a five-year-old (noun), the five-year-old girl (adjective). When in doubt check a dictionary. The CMOs has an extensive guide of hyphenation.

Overuse

- Each of us has a favorite word or punctuation. Mine is “that.” Before I send a manuscript to an editor I use the Find feature to look at all instances of the word. Most of the time I can remove it.
- Exclamation points are often overused. An exclamation point expresses strong emotion: “The car exploded!” It’s like shouting at your reader. It should be used sparingly.
- Upper case letters are often used for emphasis. Please don’t. It’s also like shouting and can be overused. Let the context tell the importance of each word.
- An em dash looks like a long hyphen (—). Sometimes we tend to use it when we’re not sure whether a period or comma is appropriate. Use a reference, such as CMOs, to learn when an em dash is appropriate. An em dash has no space before or after.
- Every writer needs a professional editor (Great-aunt Lucy who is a former English teacher is not a professional editor). An editor loves writers who will take the extra time to look for these common errors.

Scripture references

- The following is the correct format for Bible verses in a paragraph:
“For God so loved the world,^[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ESV).
Please note where the period is at.
- When using the same version throughout the manuscript, it does not need to be noted for every verse. The version information will be put on the copyright page.
- For quotes, longer than 100 words (whether Scripture or not), it should be set as a block quotation. A block quotation is indented as a block and is set off from other paragraphs. In the case of a block quotation, quotation marks are needed and the reference does not need to be in parenthesis.

Resources

Chicago Manual of Style www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/

Christian Writer’s Manual of Style (Amazon)

Proofreading Secrets of Best-selling Authors (Amazon)

Merriam-Webster Dictionary www.merriam-webster.com

The Christian Proofreaders and Editors Network (PEN) www.thechristianpen.com