

Editing for Story Elements

Karen Block

Editor

I Really Do Know What I'm Doing

- Classical Canadian education
- Stratford Teachers College graduate
- Voracious & precocious reader
- Professional technical writer since 1991
- Private editing clients since 2002
- Staff editor for Turquoise Morning Press 2011-2015
- TMP Editor of the Year 2013

The Perfect Manuscript

- Formatted correctly
- Genre appropriate
- Likeable/sympathetic hero/heroine
- Compelling/believable plot
- Loads of conflict and appropriate emotion
- Interesting back story
- Engrossing scenes all ending with a hook
- Lots of exciting/captivating dialog
- Punctuation perfect

First Impressions

- Manuscript formatted correctly according to established e-pub guidelines:
 - Times New Roman, 12 point
 - One inch margins
 - 1.5 line spacing
 - No flush left text; No tab; Auto indent instead
 - One space between sentences
 - No extra spaces after last sentence in paragraph
 - No funky fonts

Writing to Genre

Story is appropriate for genre you're targeting:

- Content
- Length
- Age appropriate if targeting YA or Young Readers

Ancient History

- You can't know where you're going, if you don't know where you've been.
- Back story is our glimpse into the Past but:
 - No info dumps.
 - Keep to a minimum.
 - Dribble in back story a little at a time.
- Most important prep work.
 - Determines H/H's personalities and motivation.
 - Sets up conflict and drives the current action forward.
- Be imaginative.
 - BORING☹ versus EXCITING☺
 - "What if..."
 - Light versus dark AKA 'Worse case scenario.'

Conflict: Not for Wimps

- Conflict is the Present. Drives the story forward.
- Put it on nearly every page
- Don't give major scenes to minor characters or the WRONG character. You will run out of conflict before you run out of story.
- Internal: Compromise a belief system
- External: Real **Conflict**, not **Misunderstandings**
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Make 'em mad.
 - Make 'em hurt.
 - Make it real.
 - Worse case scenario.
 - No compromise possible.

Point of View

You'll lose marks if you:

- Head hop
- Are Ms. Omniscient or the Narrator

You'll be my new BFF if you:

- Mastered deep 3rd POV
- Gave the scene to person who had most to lose
- Cleverly dribbled in back story to reveal motivation & character of POV person

Dialogue

- Does anybody really talk like that?
- Cut to the chase.
- Ask the right question.
- Women are women but men ain't.
- Stop interrupting. Just let 'em speak!
- I like "beats."

Pacing

- Dialogue, Narration, Action!
- No dilly-dallying.
- Cut the boring stuff.
- Leave out the filler to pad word count.
- Remember action first—then reaction.

Scenes

- Start in the middle of the action.
- Hook us with the first line.
- Every scene counts. Don't include if doesn't relate to plot.
- Every scene should fulfill its purpose.
 - Reveal character or advance the plot
 - Taut with suspense or danger OR filled with emotion (pathos, joy, anguish, anger, etc.)

Hook Us Like a Fish

- Every scene/Every chapter.
- Bated breath is best. Don't end scenes at a natural ending spot.
- Leave us hanging. Avoid the wrap-up which diffuses tension.
- Deliver what you promise.

Emotion

- Integral to any romance.
- Load 'er up.
- This can't be happening!
 - Make me weep.
 - Tug my heart strings.

Characterization

- Everybody's different. Show us how.
 - Value system
 - Speech pattern
 - Act/react to stress or conflict
 - Posture
 - Mannerisms
 - Clothing/Grooming
 - Environment
- Get inside their heads so we can become them.

The Devil's in the Details

- Question everything.
- Check the facts.
- Check the spelling.
- What's that idiom again?
- Research! Be historically correct.
- Don't assume you know. My experience is you don't.

One Last Word

- Choose an intriguing title.
- Minimize use of pet words.
- Use the right word (e.g., goad versus beg)
- Introspection versus deep 3rd POV.
- Dig deep to make sure your story is unique.
- Make us believe.

Testimonials

- To my editor Karen ‘The Hammer’ Block. She taught this teacher a thing or two about writing. With her tough love, I bring you a tale worthy to read. (Scott Kramer, *Kara*)
- Dedicated to Karen Block and her sharp red pencil (Jan Scarbrough, *My Lord Raven*)
- Karen, you made my book better. For your close attention to tagging dialogue, baiting hooks, and involving your daughter in pill bottle retrieval—in all these things, thank you. (Jennifer Johnson, *Rescuing Riley*)
- My fantastic and very patient editor, Karen Block, for her dedication to making *Blind Spot* a great book. (Judy Romaine, *Blind Spot*)
- Heartfelt acknowledgments to editor extraordinaire Karen Block. (Suzanne Barrett, *Loving Luke*)
- Thank you a thousand times for your edits. I have read the report and skimmed your other notes and have already learned so much. By the time I'm through I will have gotten a right thorough education! (Michelle Benningfield, *Something for a Season*)

The Hero/Heroine of my Romance

