

Julia Dudek speaks on Self-Editing



Julia Dudek is the author of *Pieces*, a psychological thriller with a twist of mystery and a wonderful blend of romance. She takes us inside the mind of Angelique "Angie" McCourt who has a perfect memory of everything--except for the murder of her best friend. As she struggles to put the pieces of the killer's identity back together, she ends up traveling down a dark path that threatens to alter who she is forever.

This was an excellent read, but what most impressed me was how well edited it was. When I found out Julia self-edited this book, I asked her if I could interview her, and she agreed to share her tips with anyone who is looking for ways to edit their own work.

1. What was the process you went through in editing this book?

During the first draft:

To my great surprise, the process of writing the book came easily. After some free-writing, soul searching, and meditation, I got to work, and it took me about five months to write *Pieces*—then began the real process of editing.

I didn't really know what to expect—setting out on writing my very first novel. The longest piece of writing I had tackled before *Pieces* was my fifty-page college history thesis. But since I'd spent six years writing college papers, and ten writing for newspapers off and on, I approached everything very systematically, which I imagine made the process easier for me.

I did proofread, rewrite, and edit each chapter as I wrote them, although the process afterward was arguably more intense in terms of truly “editing” the work. I printed the entire manuscript out, double-spaced, and threw it in a binder. Reading it this way, in a new perspective, helped to see things a little differently. Once I went through it this way, I headed back to the computer.

First round of edits:

I took each chapter individually, sometimes spending a couple days solely on one. Sometimes it wasn’t a matter of “incorrect” versus “correct,” but if something stopped me as I read, or struck me as awkward, I knew it would for the reader, too, so I made changes accordingly. But at this point, I was evaluating the flow and continuity, searching for any possible “holes” in my story (e.g., *where did Angelique get money for a cab if she ran out of the hotel and left her purse on the table? Ah, she can pull an emergency twenty out of her dress!*), and I was very cognizant of redundancy; if I used a certain expression, phrase, or word one too many times, I changed it up. I think I spent my first round of editing on this alone, which took a few weeks, and then I started from the beginning.

Second round of edits:

The way I progressed, the second round turned out to be a “search and destroy” mission for typos—especially the ones that escaped the word processor’s radar. And at this point, I felt most of the rewriting was done, with the exception of a few awkward sentences that I would tweak when I crossed them. I also took a week off here and there, walking away from the work so that when I came back to edit, I had a fresh perspective.

Third and fourth rounds of edits:

A third—and fourth—round was dedicated to grammar and punctuation. In retrospect, this step would have been better before the “typo” round, but as a first time novel writer, many of the issues in this step hadn’t caught my attention immediately. As I worked through the manuscript, issues like “may” versus “might,” “forward” versus “forwards,” or “farther” versus “further” came to light. The same went for comma placement, dialogue rules, etc. I spent a good month researching grammar and word usage for this book as I edited, and I’m happy I did. Now, this knowledge is something I have in my arsenal for my next novel ahead of time, and it will make the writing and editing process easier. And I must stress how important it is for any writer to know as much of these rules as possible, whether they intend on using an editor or not. The information is out there—I visited “Grammar Girl’s” blog almost ten times a day during the revision process!

(Here's the link to Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips: <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>.)

The final editing round:

After four rounds of editing, totaling about three months, I knew I was done when I got the final PDF galley, and my husband read it a couple days before I was to submit it to the publisher—he's got "eagle eyes" for mistakes. I think I needed to hear from another person it was good to go. Although, I'm not sure if my "four rounds of editing" should be a steadfast procedure for everyone. I think the point is a manuscript probably needs more than one round—successful editing comes in layers.

2. What was the hardest part of editing it?

The hardest part of editing was the fact I could never see the entire book as a whole through the process. Giving attention to one section at a time, one paragraph at a time, or even one sentence at a time, was like looking at a painting with a microscope. I think that's why editing requires more than one round. It was only at the end—when I received the final galley and read the novel as "a novel" and not as something in the throes of the editing process—that I knew for sure it was done.

3. What was the easiest part of editing it?

The easiest part of editing was the fact that for any question I had about the process was easily and readily accessible with the Internet. Long gone are the days of rifling through style guides in the basement of a library—if I needed to know if a comma was required for one sentence or another, I "Googled." Truth be told, I do have style guides in my own personal library, thanks to college requirements, and I did refer to them a few times.

4. If someone wanted to edit their own book, what advice would you give them?

I would tell them not to get lazy. I would tell them to expect it to be the most daunting process of writing, especially for a first novel. I would insist that a writer print out "The Ten (Comma)ndments" and tack it to his or her wall! And I would also suggest that if an answer to a particular style or grammar question doesn't seem to exist, then there is probably more than one right answer.

5. Do you have a background in editing or take a class that helped you?

I have worked as a freelance news writer on and off for about ten years, although all of that writing went straight to an editor before it was published anyway. Though, the experience had certainly helped to develop my writing and editing skills throughout the years. And I went to college; I was a history major for my undergraduate degree, and history is mostly writing, so that helped, I'm sure. And my Masters Degree is in Education, so again, I had ample opportunity to write, revise, and edit—and learned how to teach others to write, revise, and edit. But I don't think a person needs to be college educated to learn the same process. In fact, I think writing is a craft that a person can improve on exponentially as long as they keep doing it. I look back at some of my old writing, even some that have won awards, and think "*Oh God, what was I thinking?*" or "*How did I miss that?*"

6. Are there situations where you think an author is better off hiring an editor?

I think that having editors available as a service can be both a great thing and a bad one. Having professionals out there that are trained and experienced in the editing process is undoubtedly a good resource. However, I have spoken to one self-published writer that claimed she handed her work over to an editor, paid the average \$2.50 per page fee, and got it back "horrified" at the changes that were made. Yet, another writer happily encouraged me to seek out an editor for even a portion of my book before I began the process, claiming that he was able to see how his editor operated and followed the same procedure for rest of his novel himself. Perhaps this disparity suggests that in order to be comfortable with someone else editing your work, you need to accept the loss of some control of your project, in a way—and willing to take a gamble. Would it be cheating to answer the question with the proverbial "To each his own?" All things considered, I strongly encourage all writers to never let their manuscripts go to print without a fresh pair of eyes proofreading their work.

7. Are there any specific trouble areas that authors might want to focus on when editing?

From experience, a few pointers...

Watch when you use popular sayings or phrases; be sure they are used correctly and spelled right. (e.g., “For God Sakes!” *wrong* “For God’s Sake!” *right*). I think a lot of times we write the way we speak, and don’t catch the mistake immediately.

Commas are a tricky thing, so Google “The Ten (Comma)ndments.” But one of the most valuable tricks I learned is the “**FANBOYS**” rule...commas after **F**or **A**nd **N**or **B**ut **O**r **Y**et & **S**o. It also helped when I read that a comma is used before the word “and” when the next part of the sentence has a different subject (“I have to go, and you need to stay.) There is a lot more on commas in terms of proper placement, and it’s worth an hour or two studying the rules.

While there may be some interchangeable words that neither are considered “incorrect,” (e.g. toward versus towards), I think it’s important to stay consistent with your usage throughout your work. I always lean toward the American version as opposed to a form more popular in British English.

If you second guess yourself on the spelling or usage of the word, make sure you follow up. If I hadn’t been ultra-critical of my writing, or hadn’t had a peer proofread my manuscript, a few embarrassing mistakes would have slipped by, like “grizzly” instead of “grisly” or “taught” instead of “taut.”

Beware the dreaded “accept” versus “except.” Also, “further” and “farther” actually have different meanings; “farther” is the one used in terms of physical distance. All these things need to be considered if you want your work to appear “polished.”

“Past” & “Passed”—one is a noun, and one is a verb in the past tense. I would argue most writers have misused these once or twice. Keep an eye out!

Capitalization rules—seems simple, but don’t assume you know. Some issues pop up that you may never have considered before, like whether or not to capitalize the phases of the moon. Or even the word “moon.” Same goes for using italics or quotation marks. It can be tricky, but look it up and stay consistent.

Tense can sometimes be tricky, too. Past, past participle, conditional... My biggest challenge here was when I didn’t know whether or not to use “sank” or “sunk.” As it turns out, “sank” is “correct” but some sources have indicated that this form is almost never used. And although “sunk” is the past participle, and not the past tense, it is still widely accepted. It’s enough to give you a headache!

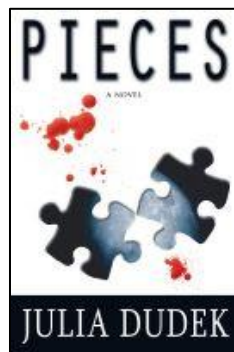
And after you've edited, go back and do a search of your document for some of the trouble areas to be sure you didn't miss one.

Oh, and most important, NEVER RELY ON SPELL OR GRAMMAR CHECK!

8. Will you edit your next book? What will your next book be about? Do you have a title for it? Tell me anything you want to include about your sequel.

Yes, I will edit my next book, which is already in the works. It is a sequel to *Pieces* entitled *Falling in Two*. I expect it to be done and available in the early spring. As a teaser, I will say "Angelique's past comes back to haunt her in a way she never saw coming." I have already posted the cover on Facebook and my official website.

For more information on Julia and her book, please visit these websites:



Julia Dudek's website: <http://www.juliadudek.com/>

Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/people/Julia-Dudek/746710205#/profile.php?id=100000332923051>

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