



Browse

Log In

are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

</> Embed

Most Common Issues I See as an Editor

My thoughts on some of the most common issues spotted during each of the three main stages of editing.

by Naomi Hughes a year ago 139 Views



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



How about a lightning [#writetip](#) round today? Here are the most common issues I see as an editor for each of the 3 main stages of editing:

7:49 AM - Nov 15, 2016

👍 69 🗨️ 27 people are talking about this



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

First, here are the most common issues I see in developmental editing (big-picture revisions that focus on the story itself).

7:50 AM - Nov 15, 2016

👍 7 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Most common issues at big-picture editing stage:

1. No character arc
2. Passive main character, no agency
3. False stakes or no escalation

7:53 AM - Nov 15, 2016

👍 36 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

No character arc = the character is pretty much the same person at the end as they were at the start. No true growth or change.

7:56 AM - Nov 15, 2016

👍 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

A problem with having no character arc: if your story doesn't impact the character (by challenging them to grow), why would it impact us?

7:57 AM - Nov 15, 2016

👍 18 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Flat-ish character arcs do work okay in some genres (ie, mystery series), where readers come for the plot much more than the character.

7:58 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 8 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

But in the vast majority of cases, stories are greatly improved by having your main character be somehow fundamentally changed by the plot.

7:59 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 7 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Passive main character= tugged through plot by other people's decisions & external events instead of acting to move the story themselves.

8:02 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Passive main characters tend to be reactive (react to plot).
Active main characters tend to be proactive (create plot w/ their own actions).

8:03 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 10 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Related to passive characters is the issue of agency: the ability of a character to cause plot changes, to move their own story forward.

8:05 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 7 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Here's a really great post by @ChuckWendig that I always use when I talk about character agency:
terribleminds.com/ramble/2014/06... #writetip

8:06 AM - Nov 15, 2016

Just What The Humping Heck Is “Character ...

Whenever I talk about character in storytelling — seriously, I’ll talk about this stuff with Target clerks, zookeepers, parking meters, carpenter
terribleminds.com

♥ 28 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets

i

Naomi Hughes
 @NaomiHughesYA

🐦

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Also of note: the vast majority of passive main characters that I see are girls. Even "warrior" or otherwise "strong" girl characters.

8:10 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets

i

Naomi Hughes
 @NaomiHughesYA

🐦

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Just because a girl character is a warrior doesn't mean she's a "strong character." She needs agency, a 3D personality, flaws, motivations.

8:11 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 8 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets

i

Naomi Hughes
 @NaomiHughesYA

🐦

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Here's a post (again by @ChuckWendig) about "strong female characters." Does she pass the action figure test?
terribleminds.com/ramble/2015/02...


8:12 AM - Nov 15, 2016

Thompson
21
endig A female character but does nothing else ha
icy than the one who exi
y a man.
15

How “Strong Female Characters” Still End ...

The idea of writing a “strong female character” isn’t enough. As shorthand, it sounds noble. It seems spot on. But a lot of writers — and writing
terribleminds.com

♡ 14 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets ⓘ


 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @nicoleatone

.@nicoleatone For my own stories, I find that sometimes a character arc is the last thing to coalesce. Took 3 rewrites for my current story.

8:14 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 3 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets ⓘ

 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

To sum up:
"Strong female character" != warrior girl. It just means any female character w/ agency, flaws, motivations, layers, etc.

8:17 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 12 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets ⓘ

 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Okay, on to false stakes! That's when your stakes--the "or else" of the plot, the thing at risk--don't actually matter.

8:19 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 8 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets ⓘ




Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

False stakes also happen when the thing that seems to be at risk isn't *really* at risk. There's a safety net, or a misrepresentation.

8:20 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 6 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

To find out if your stakes are false/too low, ask "so what?" So what if Terrible Thing happens? What would the character's life look like?

8:21 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

If the worst thing that could happen would only result in a recoverable bump in the character's life, your stakes are too low.

8:23 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 8 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA


Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Stakes of some sort need to always be present in your story. They also need to escalate--evolve, get bigger & more personal.

8:25 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 5 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA




Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Ways to escalate stakes:

- Take a safety net away from character
- Give them an even stronger reason to need to win
- Strengthen the opposition

8:28 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 21 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets






Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @emkayanders

.@emkayanders I totally agree!! I think passivity (lack of agency) & lack of power are very different, though.

8:34 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 2 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets






Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

.@emkayanders I also think authors can (& do!) thoughtfully use passive characters to portray/explore society's influence, & do it well.

8:36 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 1 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

.@emkayanders I think it's about intention--whether a character is passive to portray a deep theme, or b/c passivity was easier to write.

8:39 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 3 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

.@emkayanders I'd say having a MC w/ no agency is like breaking any writing "rule." Done meaningfully & intentionally, it can work great. :)

8:42 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 3 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Okay, now for the most common issues for the next stage of editing: scene-level edits!

8:43 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 4 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Most common scene-level issues:

- Lack of scene-level conflict
- Scenes where MC has no goal
- Scenes (& esp. chapters) that don't end on hooks

8:45 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 14  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



Naomi Hughes

@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @maseditor

Excited to hear your thoughts if you come back later! You always have good stuff to add. :)

8:46 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 1  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



Naomi Hughes

@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

EVERY scene needs to have at least 1 (& usually more) small-scale conflict. Internal, external, romantic, interpersonal, etc.

8:46 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 10  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



Naomi Hughes

@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Ideally, every scene-level conflict should play into a larger, subplot-level or story-level conflict.

8:47 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 4  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



Naomi Hughes

@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

How to create scene-level conflict: your character wants something. They try to get it & are stymied. They win, fail, or their goal evolves.

8:49 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 8  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 





 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Your POV character should come to every scene with some sort of story-relevant goal (they need to care whether they attain it).

8:49 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 6  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

If your character is having a conversation, they should have a goal for that convo. Get info, figure something out, manipulate someone.

8:51 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 7  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Ideally, *every* character should come to *every* scene with some sort of goal, explicit or implied, even if it evolves during the scene.

8:52 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 7  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 

 **Naomi Hughes**
@NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

When I say scenes should end on hooks, I don't mean you need a GASP WORTHY OMG PLOT TWIST!!! at the end of every scene. That gets old fast.

8:56 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 5  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Ending a scene on a hook means leaving a tantalizing bread-crumble trail to lead readers on to read the next scene instead of stopping.

8:57 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 10 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Scene-ending hooks can be plot twists, new situations that will require plot-relevant action, or reminders of simmering background conflict.

8:59 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 6 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



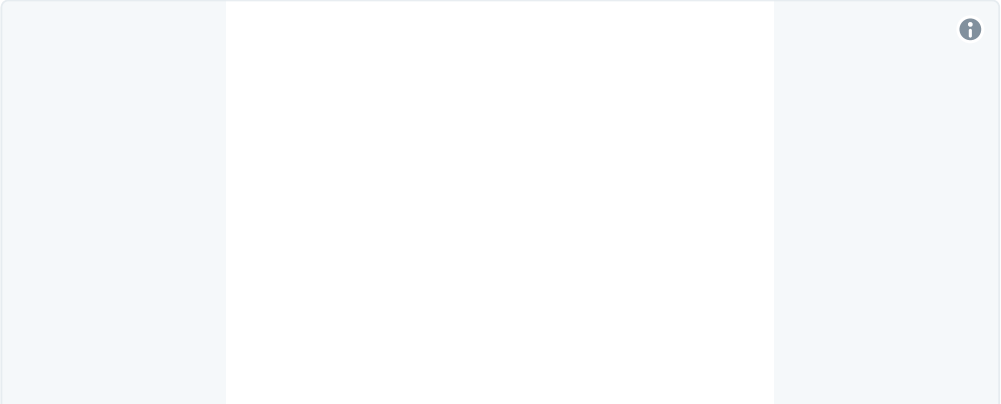
Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

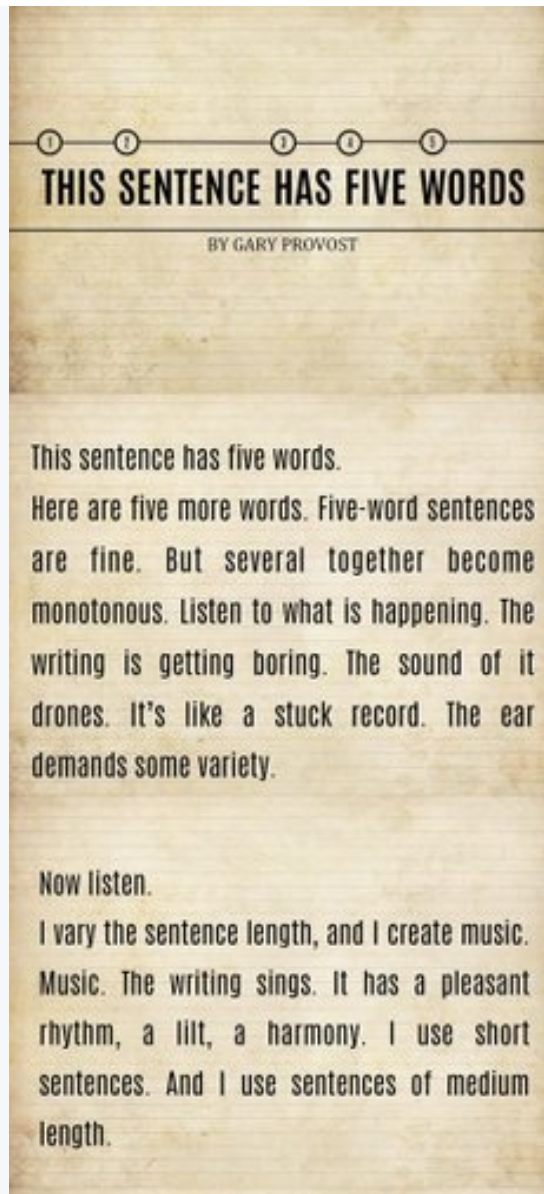
Most common line editing issues I see:

- Similar, repetitive, &/or monotone sentence structure
- Rambling dialogue
- Filtering

9:02 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 8  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

I talked about sentence structure I think a few days ago, but here's a refresher! :)

9:03 AM - Nov 15, 2016

❤️ 18 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

The most common type of repetitive sentence structure I see is clause-comma-clause. Make sure you vary up the rhythm of your writing!

9:04 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 7 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

On dialogue: in real life, people ramble. In stories, every single sentence needs a purpose that serves both the characters & readers.

9:06 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 10 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

The biggest challenge of writing dialogue might be making your characters sound realistic AND succinct.

9:08 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 8 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

A good tip for writing strong dialogue: watch movies. Dialogue there **MUST**, by nature, serve many purposes at once & also be succinct.

9:09 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♥ 11 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets





Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Filtering is the most common type of telling (vs. showing) that I see. Once you know how to spot it, it's EVERYWHERE. Like dust bunnies.

9:11 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Filtering essentially means you're telling us what your character is perceiving about a scene instead of showing us the scene itself.

9:12 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 9 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Filtering = using verbs like see, hear, think, realize, & felt (there's lots more!) to inform us of what your character is sensing.

9:14 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 7 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets



Naomi Hughes
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA



Filtering means readers are constantly told what the character is experiencing instead of allowing us to be immersed in the story itself.

9:17 AM - Nov 15, 2016

♡ 6 👤 See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets










 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

When you remove filter words, you can often replace them with way cooler & more evocative/impactful verbs that enhance your scene & story.

9:19 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 9  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 



 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

A related issue: main characters who always "look/glance at" everything. Just show the thing itself! We'll assume they're looking at it.

9:27 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 19  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 

 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA



Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

You only need to tell us your character is looking at something if the ACT of them looking is somehow important or meaningful to the tone.

9:28 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 9  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 






 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

How to fix filter verbs:
"She saw the truck" --> "The truck careened toward her."
"He realized he'd been wrong" --> "He'd been so wrong."

9:31 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 16  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 


 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA

Whew! Okay, that's it for today's editing tip-spllosion. Feel free to @ with questions, though! :)


9:32 AM - Nov 15, 2016



 11  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 

 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Good Q! Filtering = even LESS necessary in 1st person. Everything in the narrative is already automatically something they're perceiving. :) [twitter.com/tracylrodgers/...](https://twitter.com/tracylrodgers/)

9:34 AM - Nov 15, 2016




 2  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 

 **Naomi Hughes** 
@NaomiHughesYA

Replying to @tracylrodgers

.@tracylrodgers So there's even less of a reason to say "I saw x" b/c if it's in 1st person, & he's describing it, we know he's seen it.

9:36 AM - Nov 15, 2016

  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 





 **Melissa Ann Singer** @maseditor 

Replying to @NaomiHughesYA
my take on stakes, and why High Stakes aren't the only thing that matters (dovetails w/@NaomiLHughes):
twitter.com/maseditor/stat...




10:30 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 1  See Melissa Ann Singer's other Tweets 

 **Naomi Hughes** @NaomiHughesYA 

Replying to @maseditor
Sometimes a really good scene can be a hook itself--a hint of what the writer is capable of, promise of more good stuff to come.

10:38 AM - Nov 15, 2016

 1  See Naomi Hughes's other Tweets 

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