

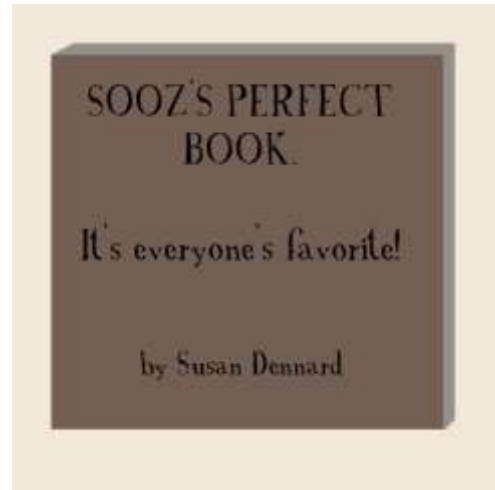
A Quick & Dirty Guide to Revising your Novel

Lesson 3: Dreaming up the Perfect Book.

So, for the sake of this lesson, I'll assume you've finished your outline in Lesson 2. If you haven't finished, no worries! Come back here when you're ready.

Today we're taking a tip from Holly Lisle, the Queen of Revisions. She calls it "Setting your Target" because how can you expect to hit a target that you can't see? According to Lisle (whose expensive but life-changing workshop, [How to Revise your Novel](#), I recommend to everyone), if we don't set our goals before we start revisions, we'll be revising aimlessly.

Um, she's right. I've done it--it wasn't pretty. As such, I learned this step from her, and now apply it faithfully to my own revisions method *every single time I revise*.



Supplies Needed Today:

- Worksheets
- Pen and paper (or a word processor)

The Perfect Book

If your book was finished and placed in a bookstore, readers will pull it off the shelf, devour it, and then log into Goodreads to declare how amazing it was. That book they just finished is the perfect version of your book--**The Perfect Book**.

Sometimes it's really easy to know what my Perfect Book would be because my agent or my editor has told me--"This character needs to be spicier", "This character needs to be more of a father figure, so we need some more screen time with him"--but MOST of the time, it's up to *me* to figure out what that Perfect Book is.

If you're revising a first draft, you might find that The Book You Wrote is markedly different from The Perfect Book. That's okay. You have more work ahead, but at the end of revisions, your book will be BEAUTIFUL.

The Book You Wrote

If you're like me, then first drafts get messy. Even with an outline, I wind up with lots of things I didn't expect to have (both good and bad pieces), and I wind up not writing pieces I thought I'd need (again, this could be good or bad). I plan no subplots before I write, and often times, they creep into the first draft--particularly in the second half.

As such, a huge portion of my revisions includes making sure all those subplots are started early on, woven in throughout, and wrapped up at the end.

Oftentimes, my secondary characters are flat or contradictory. So, when I revise, I focus on making sure these characters come across as I want them to--or as my editor calls it, "making the characters pop".

I have two extremes with setting: I either write absolutely none or I write far too much (infodump alert!).

1. By now, you should have a pretty clear idea of where your first draft falls apart. You should know the big plot problems, the big character problems, and so on.

2. HOWEVER, some of you may want to dig deeper. If this is your first time revising a novel, you might want a clearer idea of what your problems are. These worksheets are for you:

- [How to Use the Book You Wrote Worksheets](#)
- [Finding Plot Holes](#)

- [Summarizing the Book You Wrote](#)
- [Character Evaluation](#)
- [Setting Evaluation](#)

I used to do step #2, but my ability to recognize problems has grown tremendously in the last year. If you feel you have a clear idea of the Book You Wrote, then move on to #3!

[Dreaming up The Perfect Book](#)

3. You've just received a letter from a fan. The fan *gushes* about how much she loved your novel. What exactly does the fan say?

- Did she love how swoon-worthy the romance was?
- Did she love the main character's strength?
- Did she love how she had no idea who the murderer was until the very end?

4. Pretend you are your fan. Write (or simply imagine) a letter to yourself describing all your favorite pieces of the story.

- I did this recently for *Something Strange and Deadly* because I was nearing the final round of editorial revisions, and I wanted to make sure everything *I* wanted for readers was in there.

Dear Susan,

I loved Eleanor! She was so strong and so sympathetic. The way she took charge even though she had no idea what she was doing--that's what a real hero is!

The setting was so vivid. I didn't want the story to end because I didn't want to leave the world behind. I can't wait for book 2 and more 1876!

I'll spare you the rest of the letter since it's chock full of spoilers! But hopefully you get the idea.

5. You've finished your letter. Now it's time to fill out some worksheets to really specify your goals. If you know *exactly* what you want in your Perfect Book, it makes writing it much easier!

- [How to use the Perfect Book Worksheets](#)
- [Summarizing the Perfect Book](#)
- [Honing the Perfect Character](#)
- [Honing the Perfect Setting](#)

6. Take your time filling out these worksheets! This is quite possibly the most important step, and we can't create our **Plan of Attack** until we know what we want to have after the attack.

Wrapping Up

When you finish your Book You Wrote worksheets, your fan letter, and your Perfect Book worksheets, you're ready to move on. Don't rush--this isn't a race. And trust me: you'll be glad later on that you really dug deep on this lesson.

Lesson 4 will have us **writing a new outline** and **producing our Plan of Attack**. Now get to your Perfect Book dreaming!