

A Quick & Dirty Guide to Revising your Novel

Tackling Revisions, an Introduction

The purpose of this post (and my revisions workshop over the next week) is to help other writers avoid feeling **overwhelmed, daunted, or just plain lost**. I'm offering a starting point for you to bounce off of; I'm showing you how *I* avoid feeling overwhelmed, daunted, and lost; and I'm hoping you can use this info to ultimately find your own revising rhythm.

Please realize that while this method works for me, but it may not work for you. There is no "perfect solution" to writing or revising, and it's up to you to fine-tune your own approach. Now let's get started, shall we?

Revising a Novel

You've written a novel. Yay! Good job!

Now what...? You revise, right? And, er...how do you that? For some (probably most), the task is knee-shaking scary. Stomach-twisting terrifying. In a word, *daunting*.

But it doesn't have to be! In fact, revisions can be FUN. Revising is my favorite step of the novel-creating-process because I am 100% in control.

The key to tackling revisions is:

1. To have a very clear, specific end goal in mind.
2. To break it into small, manageable chunks.

Setting your Goals

You can't reach a goal if you don't know what the goal is. In other words, unless you know what you want to have at the end of your revisions, then you'll simply be revising aimlessly and wasting time. You need to have a **very clear, very specific idea of the book you want to have at the end of your revisions.** That way, when you work, you will always be working toward a clear, *measurable* objective.

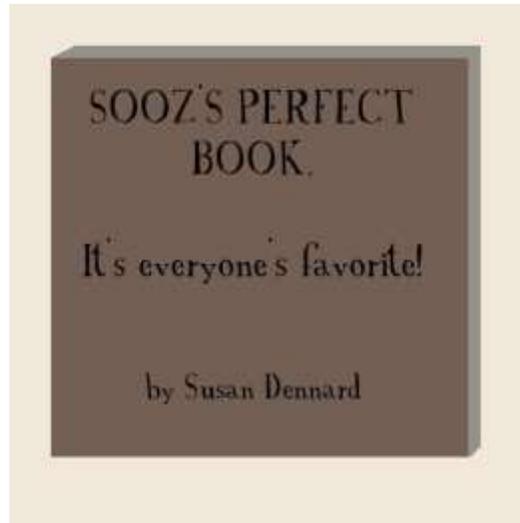
To establish what you WANT to have, you have to first know what you ACTUALLY have. And to know what you actually have, you have to first read your entire novel. Yes, the *whole* thing from start to finish, and preferably all printed out (though I realize that's not an option for most people).

As you read, you will be looking for **big picture** problems. You will be taking notes on a sheet of notebook paper, and you will NOT be writing on the manuscript—not yet. I learned (after wasting MONTHS) that editing small things now is useless since you might end up rewriting the scene or even cutting it. Just like working with an editor, you will do line-edits and small stuff LAST.

When you finish reading and determining where the big stuff falls apart, you will **then figure out what the novel would be like if it were perfect.** If you had just bought it in stores and none of those problems were there, what would it be like? This was a trick I learned in Holly Lisle's *How to Revise Your Novel Crash Course*. As she says, you can't hit a target you can't see.

Big Picture Problems: a.k.a. MANUSCRIPT DOOM

1. **Plot** plot holes, dropped plots, no conflict/tension, pacing issues
2. **character** inconsistent, too many, two-dimensional
3. **setting** info dump, white room, not compelling



This is your goal. That perfect novel is what you WANT, and that is what you will guide your revisions toward. Keep in mind, I'll have worksheets and a more in-depth explanation of how to find problems and how to define your goals in the workshop lessons.

Breaking it Apart

Now that you know what you WANT, you're going to break it apart to achieve it. I always—ALWAYS—create an outline of my novel before I edit. I usually use index cards, but simply typing works as well. The important thing is to write a single sentence for EACH scene in your novel and the page numbers for the scene. This way, you can always have a clear idea of the story without having to scour through it constantly.

(I do this even if it's my 20th round of revisions. I ALWAYS have an outline of the current book. It saves time and helps you stay organized. When it comes to revising on deadlines, it's a lifesaver!)

Now that you know your **big picture problems** and your **goal**, you're going to set up a **Plan of Attack**. This plan will allow you to

1. Form solutions to solve your big problems.

- Execute said solutions in an organized, logical fashion.



Once you know your solutions and the “scale” of each one, you’ll go to your outline (or index cards) and make notations on little post-its (or pen in the margins—just try to stay organized with multiple colors).

I color code my post-its and my pens, so I know all problems in (for example) blue have to do with plot and should be tackled first.

And then, I take my index cards and separate them by color. I work through blue first, then pink or green (depends on the size of the problems), and finally orange. I always know what each scene needs because it’s on my index card, and because I’m working on one big problem at a time, I can make sure the solution holds together.

1. Plot 
2. Character 
3. Setting 
4. Trim/tighten 

Note: I handwrite all my edits on the printed version, and then I double-check my edits when I type everything in at the end. It’s time-consuming, but effective!

In Summary

I realize this is dense...and probably confusing. But hopefully you can see that, when you don't travel in the dark and you take the journey one step at a time, revising is really quite manageable. Easy even (I find it easier than writing first drafts!) and most definitely fun.

You're 100% in control, and rather than creating something from nothing, you're refining what you already have.