
SAMPLE DEVELOPMENTAL EDIT LETTER

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ISSUE TO IMPACT

Issue

This work focused on Book 1 of a planned literary fiction series. I conducted a developmental edit on Book 2 and the author asked me to revisit Book 1, which the author had previously considered finished. My Book 2 edit letter revealed issues that spanned both manuscripts and impacted how the two manuscripts connected. Also, both were over the word count norms for the genre.

Solution

I read Book 1 three times during the developmental edit and created this letter, annotated the manuscript with inline comments and margin notes, and created a chapter-by-chapter revision workbook to help the author interpret and incorporate the feedback. These three documents referenced each other, enabling the author to seamlessly use them while revising.

Impact

The author recognized the key overarching issues impacting the manuscript's structure, characterization, and connection to Book 2. The author reduced word count by cutting unnecessary scenes and enhancing others. The letter, manuscript annotations, and revision workbook helped the author mitigate the overwhelm that often comes with editing feedback. Instead, the author had a clear revision path.

Note: What follows is an excerpt from the Book 1 developmental edit letter.

Robyn Wagner Skarbek

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[Date]

[Author] -

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct a developmental edit on [Book1]. It is as wonderful and heartwarming as the first time I was introduced to [Characters]. This story is compelling, engaging, and well written. I think it will resonate with readers of all ages and truly believe this story could be known for generations to come for its timeless themes of belonging, loss of innocence, rebellion, and self-discovery. It finishes with a well-earned ending that is satisfying and sets the stage for [Book2] without being a cliff hanger.

This letter focuses on overarching areas as well as specific plot and character issues. Use this letter in conjunction with the annotated manuscript and the chapter-by-chapter revision workbook.

There are three main structural challenges with [Book1]:

- What does this book want to be?
- The opening hook
- Part Two

The rest of the book works well. It would benefit from a healthy line edit because there is extraneous detail provided; you'll see examples of that in this letter. I don't believe [Book1] needs a rewrite or a lengthy revision. The three structural challenges are the areas to focus on before diving into revisions.

Focus Areas

What Does This Book Want to Be?

[Book1] reads as part novel, part memoir (which it's not). Given your comments about Book2, I think this is a coming-of-age novel/historical fiction that is inspired by real places and world events, but it is not a memoir. If you align with that, then focus on the areas outlined below.

The Fourth Wall

Breaking the fourth wall (speaking directly to the reader) is a polarizing narrative choice, but can create a sense of intimacy with the reader if done well. Those moments interrupted the pacing (at least for me). All of them are called out in the manuscript and the revision workbook.

Next Step: As you read the manuscript again, watch for them and see how they impact your reading. Note, leaving them in leans the manuscript more toward memoir than novel.

Author's Note and Preface

These two elements serve different purposes.

A preface is an essay that explains *why* a story was written (which is different than a prologue which is part of the story) and comes at the beginning of the manuscript. The author's note provides insight into *the creative process* and is positioned at the end of the manuscript. In historical fiction or realistic fiction, it provides information on where events were real, where liberties were taken, and shares social, historical, or thematic elements that make the novel relevant today. The latter is a bridge between the author and the reader.

You should keep one, not both. This novel can stand on its own with only one of those options.

Next Step: Determine the purpose and revise for whichever one you decide to keep. My two cents are to keep the author's note and remove the preface.

Before making any edits, be very clear on the answer to "what does this book want to be."

Opening Hook

It takes a long time to for the story to get going. I think the backbone of the story is that MMC wants to go to [Location] after graduation and he has a crush on FMC. He's chasing independence and the girl. He gets both, loses both, and, with a suddenly murky future ahead of him, makes the only choice he feels is available.

MMC is influenced by external forces ([Location] is part of the plan because he sees a poster, [Character1] is there throughout the book, [Redacted] is a quick win, he does [Redacted] because of [Character2], etc.). While he has a pretty strong inner compass, he's learning to stand up for himself. [Book1] beautifully sets up [Book2].

The opening meanders more than grabs the reader. You mentioned starting all the books with [Redacted]. I think that's okay for books 2-6, but not this one. Seeing MMC as a relatively typical kid who wants his independence and to win FMC's heart is an important foundation. Immersing the reader in life in [Location] and MMC's senior year makes [Redacted] more jarring when it comes later in this manuscript and in [Book2]. If you start with MMC [Redacted], that sets a very different tone for this story and the current one is quite good. It also impacts the "fall from grace and redemption" story arc that is going to span the books. MMC has to be seen as a stable, fun-loving, somewhat happy and typical teenager to make that story arc plausible. Not every reader [Redacted], but all readers have loved, lost, and sought independence during their teenage years. Every reader can see a part of themselves in MMC in [Book1]. Readers relating to MMC is critical for engagement and series pull-through.

Next Step: There are two versions of Chapters 1 and 2 in the manuscript. Review them, along with the first few chapters and figure out: what's the hook, what information does the reader need, and what's the most engaging way to share that without a data dump, and then revise. There are detailed notes in the manuscript and revision workbook to help.

Part Two

Comprised of 36 chapters and over 50,000 words, Part 2 is essentially a book in itself. The [Redacted] takes up most of Part 2. There are important pieces in this story: acquiring the [Redacted]...