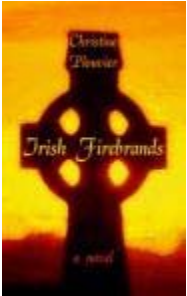


## The Joys of Editing



This article was very well received by the blogging community. Perhaps this newsletter issue will encourage someone who has sadly shelved a potential masterpiece, in the belief that because professional editing was unaffordable, their great storytelling would never see the light of day.

If other Artists can be legitimately self-taught, so can Writers; and by extension, Writers can also be legitimately self-taught editors. The tools of the editing trade are a grammar textbook and a dictionary: the same tools that prepared you to write your story, in the first place.

Even if you re-write as you write (as I do), when you reach “The End,” that’s the beginning of proofreading and editing. These strategies helped locate most of the things that needed fixing in *Irish Firebrands*, bringing the writing well within modern “professional editing” standards in today’s “professionally published” books.

1. Saved chapters as separate documents. Used a spreadsheet program to track chapter word count. To do this, I made the program exhibit a color-coded bar graph. This helped keep the chapters reasonably uniform in length (roughly 5,000-6,250 words, about 30-40 minutes’ reading). It was much more manageable to wrestle baby alligators instead of The Big Mama.
2. Used a notepaper cube to jot down a brief description of each scene, flagged with chapter number. One sentence was enough. This helped find a couple of scenes that were in the wrong place, and it revealed small plot holes.
3. Checked POV by writing down the point-of-view character in each scene, along with the sentence

describing the main event. This was to see if there were any “wandering POV” problems (there weren’t), and to decide if the best character was chosen to portray the POV in each scene (one swap made here).

4. Put the story on a calendar. This helped ensure continuity, as well as to keep things like seasons, the weather, and cultural stuff in context. (*Irish Firebrands* takes place from May 2007 to December 2008.)
5. Programmed the spelling & grammar checker to do only one or two tasks at a time.
6. Converted each chapter to Adobe PDF, and used Adobe’s “Search” function to ensure that as many spelling and grammar issues as possible were found and fixed. An Adobe PDF was also easier to read and spot errors, especially when displayed book-style. The full-screen view helped with page-by-page proofing (black background, no distracting sidebars).
7. Read the manuscript on a CRT monitor, not just an LCD screen. Trust me: it made a difference.
8. Printed it in various formats: first as a double-spaced manuscript (and used a red pencil to mark changes); then each chapter in “book fold” format, single-spaced, to see it as it might appear on a real page.
9. Read the chapters in reverse order. This helps prevent the brain from making a sort of Gestalt out of what’s being read. A Gestalt obscures the appearance of errors when reading chronologically, by making you perceive the whole instead of its parts.
10. Listened to the book be read aloud by a text-to-speech generator. Try **Balabolka** (free download).

Some specific editing flags and tasks:



# Author in Residence

Vol. I ☼ No. 6

A Newsletter for Readers & Writers  
by Christine Plouvier, Novelist

1. Failure to communicate: GUBU grammar can happen to anybody.
2. Vocabulary: context clues lacking, or terms inadequately or unnecessarily defined.
3. Continuity issues: Person, place, time, subject or scene out of order, or lacking follow-up.
4. Information dump: Excessive or unnecessary detail in summary or expository paragraphs, and ruminations or dialogue that were not appropriate in content and quantity. Back-story or background information had to establish the setting or character, foreshadow or justify action, be in character for the speaker to think or talk about it, and be reasonable for one character to want to say it to another character.
5. Couldn't tell the players without a scorecard: Inadequate or incorrect dialogue attribution tags (didn't find any).
6. Typographical and punctuation errors: This included italic words and punctuation (some of these still escaped). The decision whether or not to use "Oxford commas" should be consistent.
7. Made sure that every idiomatic expression, cliché, alternative verb, adjective and adverb maintained voice or developed characters.
8. Checked that research truths plausibly glued together the fictitious stuff.
9. Rooted out any possible copyright infringement and made all necessary acknowledgments.
10. Examined the text for foreshadowing, repetition, symbolism and parallelisms, and made sure they linked (none of them were planned – they were all *ex post facto* discoveries).

The calendar was probably the most useful thing I

did. For the most flexible format, I didn't use a calendar template, but just constructed one from a table, to which I added rows of days, as I combed through the manuscript. I noted on it the important daily developments, my characters' work schedules, and even the daily temperatures that I gleaned from the *Met Éireann* weather bulletin archives.

I read my manuscript aloud, too, but because some of the effect of the story is due to aberrant thought processes and pressured speech, it was to make sure I wasn't using the uniformly correct punctuation that goes with "good" dialogue, phrasing and sentence structure. Because I come from an academic-technical writing background, I had to break the habit of writing "right."

Are you still awake? If so, go take a nap. If you have an editing project ahead of you – especially if you write epics, like *Irish Firebrands* – you're going to need the rest.

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Christine Plouvier is a retired Registered Nurse. She is the author of *Irish Firebrands*, a full-length literary fiction-fusion fiction novel framed as a contemporary romance; her current work-in-progress is *The Passions of Patriots*, a historical novel written as a family saga prelude to *Irish Firebrands*. Her interests include the life transitions that can drive – and be driven by – the hidden agenda of the mind. She lives in Indiana with a white cat that has black spots, soft fur and a good disposition, and which answers only to "Kitty."



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## Irish Firebrands

<https://www.createSPACE.com/4252718>

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