

10 Self-Editing Secrets for Screenwriters

Presented by



by
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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

In this guide's context, "editing" refers to basic proofreading of the text along with the format, as the two are more entwined in screenplays than in most prose.

—*Tammy Gross*

10 SELF-EDITING TIPS

BEFORE STARTING YOUR SCREENPLAY &/or prior to editing:

- Turn off “Auto Correct”
 - in MMSW: TOOLS > PAUSE AUTO-CORRECTION (or change in PREFERENCES > SPELLING)
- Keep software on “Auto Fill” (SmartType or QuickType) for character slugs & other elements

MMSW = Movie Magic Screenwriter

FD = Final Draft

1. Spell-check (w/grammar where available)

Seems obvious, but it's easy to forget or ignore those squiggly lines.

- FD: TOOLS > SPELLING
- Celtx desktop: TOOLS > CHECK SPELLING
- MMSW: TOOLS > SPELL CHECK
- Word: TOOLS > SPELLING & GRAMMAR
- Scrivener: EDIT > SPELLING & GRAMMAR
- FadeIn: DOCUMENT > CHECK SPELLING

2. Auto-check format

Some apps will allow you to scroll through or simply auto-fix any format issues.

- FD: TOOLS > FORMAT ASSISTANT (&/or REFORMAT for more control)
 - FD11’s Format Assistant causes new problems due to poor code, so you may have to manually correct the errors Format Assistant finds until they come out with an update that corrects it.
 - FD10 & earlier have no issues with Format Assistant.
 - Use Format Assistant **one last time** to eliminate any introduced spacing errors.
- MMSW: TOOLS > RUN SMARTCHECK
- FadeIn: DOCUMENT > FIND ERRORS

3. Check character names for consistency & contrast

Find misspellings or unintended name changes by checking the alphabetical cast list.

- FD: DOCUMENT > SMARTTYPE > REBUILD > ALPHABETIZE
- Celtx online: SCRIPT > CATALOG
- Celtx desktop: click REPORTS tab > CHARACTER
- MMSW: click in any Action paragraph: in windows: shift+control+c; on mac: shift+⌘+c
- FadeIn: PRODUCTION > REPORTS > CAST REPORT > alphabetical

4. Check scene headings for consistency & flow

By listing the scenes you'll see things clearly. Most apps have more than one way to list them.

- FD: TOOLS > SHOW NAVIGATOR
- Celtx: click left pane (scene breakdown)
- MMSW: NAVIDOC > SCENES
- FadeIn: PRODUCTION > REPORTS > ELEMENT REPORT > SCENE HEADING

5. Look at alphabetized lists of EACH element to check for consistency

Find misspellings &/or inconsistencies for character names, scene locations, scene times & transitions.

- FD: DOCUMENT > SMARTTYPE > choose element > REBUILD > ALPHABETIZE
- MMSW: FORMAT > USER LISTS > click element > COPY FROM SCRIPT (just LOOK at the list)
- FadeIn: PRODUCTION > REPORTS > ELEMENT REPORT > choose element

6. Read backward

Technical mistakes will jump out at you if you scroll UP instead of down.

7. Let your script speak to you

Text-to-speech can read any text aloud. In some apps you can assign character voices.

- FD: TOOLS > SPEECH CONTROL (opt to ASSIGN VOICES first)
- MMSW: TOOLS > SPEAK SELECTION (must first ASSIGN VOICES)
- in any program:
 - on MAC: SYSTEM PREFERENCES > DICTATION & SPEECH
 - Google “text-to-speech” app for your device/OS

Low-tech solution: Read it aloud yourself or in a table read at a meetup.

8. Print it out

If budget & supplies allow, it's sometimes easiest to see things on an actual page. At very least, look at the PDF version using any PDF reader that has basic annotation/highlight ability. Without any app distractions or the ability to change the text while reading, you can highlight actual issues & move on.

9. Walk away

Leave your script for a month. Come back to it with fresh eyes.

10. Let Grandma read it with a highlighter in hand (or in Adobe Reader)

- If loved ones can't figure out what's going on because it's too technical, *it's too technical*. Specs are stories first, scripts second. Ask loved ones to highlight anything they don't understand.
- Loved ones don't want to hurt your feelings about the story, but they'll be happy to show you how smart they are when it comes to grammar & spelling. Let them find glaring issues you missed.

11. BONUS TIP

Contact <https://ProofMySpec.com> for a thorough, professional edit before you send your script to anyone for consideration or evaluation.

Regardless of the software you use, Proof My Spec editing provides the following as a BASIC service:

- **HUMAN DFY editing by Tammy Gross (DFY = done for you in your master file):**
 - GPS proofread
 - grammar
 - punctuation
 - spelling
 - syntax edit
 - format edit
- **BOT editing:**
 - 3rd-party software check to act as a 2nd pair of “eyes”
- **COMPARISON pdf:**
 - 3rd-party software creates a PDF that highlights every edit; just hover to see original text

