

MACRO-EDIT DIAGNOSTIC CHECKLIST

1. **Intention:** Intention is the overarching aim of a work that guides both writer and reader. Ask yourself when you edit: What is it I want? What am I trying to do here? Where am I going with this?
2. **Character (Palpability, Credibility, Motive):** Make the motives of your main characters clear. Ask of your protagonist: What does she want? If you don't know, develop the character more until you (and the reader) do.
3. **Structure (Rhythm, Tension):** Structure can give your story a beautiful form; more pragmatically, it holds your work together and saves it from collapse.
Ask yourself when you read your draft: Does the drama feel undramatic? You may need to lengthen or shorten the path to it. A crisis or climax that culminates too early lacks tension, feels schematic and false. Too long a lead-up can kill the reader's interest.
You may also need to reorder the scenes. Tell a lot up front, you may ruin the story's mystery and the reader's pleasure in discovery; tell too little, the reader may not care about the people in your story enough to want to find out what happens to them.
Structural diagrams may or may not help you understand the long-term rhythm of your work. Do not obsess over making the perfect starburst or planetary system of narrative elements. Mere doodling or a simple timeline and chapter layout may work as well or better. At their best, diagrams reveal the underpinnings of your project and help modulate your work. At their worst, they distract from the more crucial work of writing and editing prose.
4. **Foreshadowing:** Make whatever you write a page-turner. Insert discreet signals to press the reader's subconscious toward revelation and/or to deepen a theme.

5. **Theme (Leitmotif):** When you edit, you may want to search out thematic symbols and gingerly sew them into a coherent, barely visible pattern. Laid in with a light touch, leitmotif can act like a refrain that keeps bringing the reader back to your central theme. The edit is a good place to finesse a leitmotif, to place it more purposefully and with apt proportions. You may choose a leitmotif early on, or discover one embedded in your draft when you edit.
6. **Continuity of Tone:** When you read your draft, ask yourself: Are the tone, atmosphere, and characters coherent? Don't let a British accent slur into Brooklynese, for example. Don't let a poetic, ominous atmosphere suddenly and for no good reason turn pedestrian and bright. If your work calls for discontinuity, let the reader know it isn't an accident.