



ART OF LIVING QUEST

Step 10: Writing Prompt

Editing Your New Story

I hope that you've written an inspiring first draft of your new story! Maybe it's already just right for you, and you won't change a word. Or maybe, upon reflection, you'll think of a number of changes you'd like to make. Or, even if you're happy with your story, you may find it valuable to heartstorm alternative elements.

In any case, it's always worthwhile to take a step back, look at your work, and consider how (or if) it might be improved.

In other words: edit.

By this point you're familiar with the writing/editing process, letting your creative side pour out its dreams and visions, unencumbered by our inner editor. And now that you've done that, your editor can step in, not for the purpose of criticizing what you've written, but to work on the same team as your creative side, moving you closer to the shared goal of creating the best story possible.

Many editors make multiple passes through a story checking for different elements with each reading (e.g., starting with big-picture elements, then making a pass where they check for facts, and finally proofreading for spelling and grammar). In your story, we're not going to focus on spelling or grammar, but let's check to make sure that your story is consistent with your highest values, personal passions, and your sacred work in the world.

Big Picture

Let's start with your big-picture impressions and then consider some specifics.

First Impressions

Reread your first draft and write down your first impressions including any parts that you'd definitely want to keep, delete, or change in any way. You can also note what comes to mind and how you feel as you read this draft.

What were your first impressions when you read your draft?
What parts of your draft do you definitely want to keep?

What parts of your draft do you want to delete?
What parts of your draft do you want to change? How?
Any other thoughts (general or specific) about this draft?

Checking for Values

Now let's explore some specific areas of your first draft starting with values.

Your story might have an inspirational plot that simply leads to a happy ending, but does it reflect your highest values? For instance, if it's a story of a woman who thrives in business and climbs to the top of his profession, but does so by backstabbing and manipulation, that probably doesn't reflect your highest values.

That doesn't mean, however, that you need to throw out the entire story and start over. (Again, we can keep the "baby" and throw out the "bathwater.") In this case, you may keep the part about thriving in business, but change the way it's done perhaps by having the woman use her talents to serve others...while loving the entire process.

So, first take a moment to clarify your highest values, then see if they're reflected by your story.

Your Values

What are the qualities or other elements of life that are important to you?
How have you reflected (or not) in your story?
What changes would make your story reflect your values more than it currently does?

Checking for Character

Just as you checked your story to make sure it reflected your values, let's make sure that the lead character is the person you want to be. (Just because they seem "good" and embody your most cherished values doesn't mean that you'd want to live their life!)

For instance, you may have written about a doctor who volunteers at a low-income ER, using her expertise to save lives and give back to the community. A great story!





A great success! A great example of wonderful values! But you may have absolutely zero desire to be a doctor! In other words, it may be a great story...but just not YOUR story!

So, take some time to make sure that you're writing YOUR story, the one that lights your soul fire, that reflects your values, and also embodies the person you want to be.

Your Shero

How would you describe your "Shero" (that is, the PERSON) you'd like to be?

How are they reflected (or not) by your current story?

What changes would make your story reflect your ideal Shero more than it currently does?

Checking for Story Gaps

Maybe everything in your story is perfect, it all fits with your values and really feels like YOU. But that doesn't mean that it's complete. Is something missing from your story? This is your chance to check.

Just like you reverse engineered your story, starting at the end and working your way back to the present, you can also extrapolate from the present into the future, making sure that this story does indeed lead where you want it to, and does so without any obvious gaps or missing pieces.

For instance, if a mathematician wrote that $1 + 2 + 3 = 10$, they'd probably see that something was missing (in this case, + 4).

Likewise, a would-be painter who writes the story, "I decided to be a painter, and the next day I held my gallery exhibit," has left a pretty gaping hole in their story: the part about learning to paint and actually doing it!

As you review your story for possible gaps, you can also see if it all leads naturally to the ending you desire. If it doesn't, simply think of what additions, subplots, or other changes may support to bridge the gap...or simply add more life to your story.

Mend the Gap

Are there any obvious gaps in your story? How would you like to fill them?

Subplot

Even if it's not directly related to your main story, would you like to add a "subplot" an element that makes your story and SHero more three-dimensional? (For instance, would you like to travel, give yourself a hobby, or perhaps a new love interest? Remember, YOU'RE the author, and this is YOUR story so don't hold back!)

Extrapolation

If you told your new story (in its current form), where would it be likely to lead you in 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, or beyond?

Happy Ending?

Does this extrapolation lead to the happy ending you desire? If not, what changes will lead to the end you are calling in? (Note: Even if it DOES lead to the happy ending, you can still heartstorm for possible revisions that may allow you to reach the destination in flow.)

From Good to Great

You may have written an amazing first draft. You may have answered the question of how to fulfill your needs and benefits in positive ways. You may have drawn inspiration from others and incorporated those elements into your story in original ways. You may have created an appealing story that leads naturally to your happy ending.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that you're done.

I invite you not to stop as soon as you find one viable path or "answer." Yes, to your first thought or first draft. It might even be excellent! But there may be other outstanding options that are even more appealing to you options that you may never consider if you stop looking after your first response.

So, I invite you to look back over your first draft again, consider if there are any elements that you can enhance taking them from good to great.

Even if it's already great, see if you can find alternatives to any elements in this draft. Who knows, this draft might be good (or even great!), but the next one could be your living masterpiece!

Enhancements

What elements of your first draft can be improved namely, how could they express who you are AND who you are becoming?

Heartstoring

Find an area of your first draft that works. Then think of alternative ways that it could also work. And then another and another and another. The more alternatives you give yourself, the more options you'll have when it comes to your next draft, so you'll be able to choose the best of the best, which is just what you and your story deserve!





The Pitch

Now summarize your proposed life-story in a nutshell, as if you were pitching it to a producer.

The Producer

If you were a producer who heard the pitch you just described, would you be interested in this story? Would you produce it, or would you pass on it? What revisions might make it more appealing to you?

You've certainly got plenty to keep in mind when you edit your story and write the next draft.

Regardless of which details or processes you focus on, my hope is that you're getting a sense of the amazing possibilities that are available to you as the author of your life... creating, editing, and revising your own life story!

But I also would like to remind you of another power that's just as important: you get to decide what it all means!

What's the Meaning of All This?

Writing a story of any kind goes far beyond merely laying out the facts. It's about choosing which facts to write about. And which ones to focus on the most (or the least). And how you discuss them. And your point of view (or "POV" an abbreviation you'll almost certainly see again and again if you read any book on writing especially screenwriting). And the significance that you ascribe to the facts. And, perhaps above all, your interpretation of those facts.

In other words, you get to determine your story's meaning.

There's no such thing as a purely objective story. Even a supposedly objective newspaper shows their bias simply by publishing a story, which indicates that they believe that this story is more important than those they didn't publish.

Even a history textbook brings a specific POV to the material. (For instance, what American textbooks refer to as the "American Revolution" might be seen as a "Civil War" from the British POV.)

Even in casual, everyday conversation, the words that people use, their tone of voice, body language, and everything about the way they present their stories clearly convey their attitude toward the material, it conveys what they think the story means.

(E.g., Depending on how it's said, "Can you believe this costs \$10?!" could mean, "What a great deal!" or "What a rip-off!")

Interpretation

A story is not just the facts. It's the narrative built around the facts, and the attitude, significance, and meaning ascribed to them, all of which is determined by our interpretation.

For instance, if a stranger yelled at you for no apparent reason when you were five years old, you may have developed VERY different stories around this event:

- I probably deserved it.
- Don't talk to strangers.
- Adults are so mean!
- I've got thick skin, I can handle it!
- They probably had my best interest in mind, even if I didn't realize it at the time.
- They probably had their own issues, which they were simply projecting onto an innocent little kid.
- It's not my fault, and it had nothing to do with me or my worth as a human being.

(I would venture to guess that if you ascribed the last story, it would have been in retrospect, rather than as a five year old...)

There are numerous stories that you could tell about this or almost any other fact or event, depending on what interpretation and meaning you ascribe to it.

And here is the incredibly empowering part of this: although we don't always get to choose the facts, circumstances, and external events in our life.

WE ALWAYS GET TO CHOOSE HOW TO INTERPRET THEM!

You get to choose what they mean for you! You get to choose how to FRAME the events! So, because it's your choice, why not choose the most empowering interpretations possible?

Why not tell your story in ways that serve your highest good, uplift you (and your loved ones), and empower you to move forward in healthy ways?!

Why not choose to put your story in the best possible frame?

And remember, if you don't like the frame it's currently in, you can always REFRAME it!

Blessed Be

