

Lesson 5: Editing and Refining Anti-Hero Writing

Common Mistakes

No one gets it right with the first draft (#sorrynotsorry). There will be holes, character misfires, and places that need cut or expanded.

While there's a ton of things to consider when you're editing/revising a novel, there are some aspects around anti-hero writing that you should keep in mind when drafting as it will make it much less work for you to go back and make sweeping changes later on.

Here are some common mistakes to look out for:

1. **Lack of Subtlety:** Anti-heroes can be complex characters, but it's important not to make their flaws too obvious or heavy-handed. Make sure your character's flaws are nuanced and subtle. Also, make sure they make sense given your character's backstory and history. It won't make any sense if your character has been a non-drinker for most of their life and then all of the sudden becomes an alcoholic on a random Tuesday. There needs to be cause and effect.
2. **Lack of Character Development:** Hands down, one of the biggest mistakes writers make with their anti-hero is underdeveloping the character. The audience needs to have some idea of how this character acquired their anti-hero tendencies and that requires careful character development. And while anti-heroes don't necessarily have to undergo a complete transformation, they should still show some growth or change throughout the story. Make sure your character evolves in some way, whether it's a small shift in perspective or a major realization.
3. **Inconsistencies:** Make sure your character's actions and dialogue are consistent throughout the story. If your character suddenly starts acting out of character, it brings the reader out of the story and feels like the writer doesn't have a firm grasp on who their character is. If your character scowls at someone waving good morning, don't suddenly have them waving back in another chapter unless there's a valid reason why they are doing it.
4. **Lack of Empathy:** Anti-heroes are NOT villains. So, while anti-heroes may not be the most likable characters, it's important to still make them relatable and compelling in some way. Make sure your character has moments of vulnerability or empathy so readers can understand their motivations and see beneath their hard exterior. Anti-Heroes are flawed, yes, but they are not the same as villains.
5. **Lack of Conflict:** Anti-hero stories can sometimes lack a clear conflict, which can make the story feel aimless. Make sure your character is facing some sort of obstacle or challenge that they need to overcome, even if it doesn't necessarily result in your the character changing or growing.

In addition to these common mistakes, it's also important to keep in mind the pacing of your anti-hero story. Anti-heroes often have a slower and more introspective storyline, but that doesn't mean it should drag on or feel tedious.

Make sure there's a good balance of action and introspection, and that the story is moving forward towards a clear goal or resolution.

Stay Consistent and True to Character

One of the hardest parts of being a novelist is trying to hold and contain all of the moving parts in your head. Over the course of drafting a novel, you discover so much about your characters that become engrained within you. We call this the "burden of knowledge." We, the authors, know things about our characters that our readers never will, and sometimes we forget that our readers don't have the same information we do in our brains. This is almost always the #1 mistake made with all books, not just anti-heroes.

However, anti-heroes are often singled out for this mistake because they are already inherently going against the grain in some form or fashion. So when readers see that the character is a jerk to his parents for half of the book and then he transforms into the son of the year, they become understandably confused and frustrated. Why the sudden change?

Well, it's typically because we've simply forgotten to ensure consistency throughout the character's traits and storyline.

How do we fix it? During the refinement stage, we want to be sure that the character's actions, dialogue, and motivations align with their established personality and backstory.

It's also important to ensure consistency in the storyline. Make sure that events and choices made by the character have consequences and impact the overall story. Avoid plot holes and inconsistencies that pull readers out of the story and make them question its believability.

When All Else Fails...

Remember the lyrics to the Taylor Swift song, *Anti-Hero*: "Hi, it's me. I'm the problem, it's me."



Taylor Swift - Anti-Hero (Official Music Video)

Official music video for "Anti-Hero" by Taylor Swift from the album 'Midnights'. Buy/Download/Stream 'Midnights': <https://tayl...>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1kbLwvqugk>

Editing/Refining Checklist

- Is my character *actually* an anti-hero?
- Does your anti-hero have legitimate flaws and some form of moral ambiguity?
- Is your anti-hero aware or unaware of their flaws and character traits?
- Are you using any common tropes with your anti-hero and have you subverted or changed them up?
- Is your anti-hero relatable but unpredictable?
- Does your anti-hero complicate situations because of their flaws or moral ambiguity?
- Does your anti-hero have a unique voice that captures their true essence?
- Does your anti-hero use certain language (both verbal and nonverbal) to convey who they are?