

# The Difference Between Revision and Self-editing

February 25, 2008

If writing a manuscript is like building a house, revision is modifying the basic structure—from major work such as putting up or taking down walls to moving windows. The essential construction is already there, but revision starts with the rough work of reorganizing the big pieces.

Revision takes you from the first draft to the second. *Self-editing* takes you from the last draft to the final version you submit to an agent or publisher. This means you should complete your revision before you fine-tune your prose. In other words, don't paint the drywall before you cut it, nail it to the studs, and patch the seams. Sure, you can clean up along the way, but self-editing is the ultimate spit polish before you drop your manuscript in the mail.

Revision is remodeling; self-editing is detailing—when every sentence and each word count. David Michael Kaplan says in *Revision* (Cincinnati, OH: Story Press, 1997):

A weasel word here, a passive construction there, and you've got a limp, mushy sentence. A few of those sentences, and you've got a limp, mushy paragraph. Enough of those paragraphs, and you've got a limp, mushy story—and a disinterested reader. (193)

Self-editing is a crucial step to keep readers—and editors—interested.

Next week, we'll begin to examine specific writing problems and their solutions.

—Lee Allen Howard