Ardith's Notebook

September 2012

Copy editing and proofreading: What's the difference?

Copy editing and proofreading are two editorial skills that are often confused. Copy editing focuses on spelling, grammar, style, and syntax. The copy editor will often also check facts, maintain internal logic within the text, and organize headings and subheadings. Copy editing takes place during the manuscript stage.

Proofreading, on the other hand, happens when the book is in finished pages, which means that the material is laid out and looks like a final product. The proofreader will make sure that materials were properly transmitted from the copy editing stage; check page numbers and headings; mark up any aesthetic issues, such as too many hyphens in a row or a bad break; and act as a final set of eyes to catch grammatical and style issues that may have slipped through in previous stages of the editorial process.

Up until the last decade, copy editing and proofreading were done pen to paper. Today, however, most editorial work has moved to onscreen: copy editing is done using a word processor such as Microsoft Word, and proofreading is done using document reviewing software such as Adobe Acrobat.

Writing horror stories

This is a part of a series on writing genre fiction. <u>Click here</u> *to read about writing science fiction.*

What makes the shower scene in *Psycho* so shocking? What makes Shelley Duval's fear go through the roof when Jack Nicholson comes "home" with an axe through the door of the room where she's hiding? Why do children find the idea of monsters under the bed so scary? It's the twisting of somewhere familiar and safe—the bathroom, a bedroom—into a scene of fear and terror. This is always a good theme to keep in mind when writing a horror story.

As with other genre fiction, horror relies on plot, character, and place for its power, but perhaps more than any other, the setting can contribute much to scaring the wits out of readers. After all, what's more frightening: an idyllic picnic interrupted by a killer or a spooky cemetery haunted by a vampire? Actually, it's the picnic: readers expect vampires in cemeteries, and the element of surprise is everything in horror.

It's best not to have too many characters in a horror story because it will be more powerful if readers identify with them and feel that they really know and care about these people before they're killed off in some horrible way or driven crazy by the psycho hiding upstairs in the spare bedroom. And do feel free to be inventive in your bloodletting methods: true fans of horror want to be shocked and appalled, terrified and sickened by the events they read about, perhaps to make them appreciate their own quiet lives even more.

Plots can come from history, from the daily news, and from your own twisted imagination. There are as many images of things that go bump in the night as there are people to fear them, so whatever your fantasy, it's bound to scare somebody. Just be sure to have lots of shocks and surprises along the way to keep your readers looking over their shoulders and under their beds once they've finished the story.

Ardith's Notebook is a monthly newsletter for writers and self publishers.