

# Episode 8 SdTW Podcast Q&A pt. 2

**Suzy Vadori:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Show Don't Tell Writing with me, Suzy Vadori, where I teach you the tried and true secrets to writing fiction and nonfiction that will wow your readers, broken down step by step. This show explores writing techniques and shows you a glimpse behind the scenes of successful writing careers and coaches writers live on their pages so you can learn and transform your own storytelling.

Whether you're just starting out crafting, editing, or currently rewriting your first book or maybe even your 10th, this show will help you unlock the writing skills you didn't know you needed but you definitely do. I'm looking forward to helping you get your amazing ideas for from your mind onto the page in an exciting way for both you and your readers so that you can achieve your wildest writing dreams while having fun doing it.

Let's dive in. [00:01:00] On Friday, July 19th, we have a live day for hundreds of writers to celebrate the launch of this podcast. It was such a fun day. I had the most amazing guests. that you'll get to hear on the podcast. But I also hosted a live Q and A full hour with writers in order to answer all their burning questions about writing.

Here's an excerpt from that live Q& A. This is part two of three, and I hope you enjoy. Anonymous, I am stuck in the mud of revision land. I love that. I can tell that you're a writer, Anonymous. I understand I need to fix the biggest issue, quote unquote, first. But what if I can't tell what the biggest issue is or how to fix it?

Okay, so I'm not really sure what issues you're grappling with, but when you are revising, it is very easy to get overwhelmed. And what overwhelm is, is just when you haven't made a decision, then you get stuck, right? So you're talking about [00:02:00] stuck in the mud, that's exactly what it feels like. You go to a fork in the road and you don't decide, then all you can do is stand there and not move forward in either direction.

So first of all, it comes back to making decisions. What I like to do with writers is when you've got like a ton of suggestions on a revision pass, just deal with them one at a time. That's all you can do. And how do you determine what the biggest issue is without seeing what they are? Pick the one that you're the most excited about changing.

It doesn't, it doesn't matter, tackle something. If you know that you need to go in and remove all your filler words because you use so and just, which are kind of like the ums and ahs of writing, right? There's a whole list of them. But if you know that you need to do that, and that's what you're feeling that day, then go and do it because all of it has to get done.

But do that task and check it off your list and then you're done. So if, you know, in order of importance, I would say that the decisions, if you haven't made a decision, then do that first. If you haven't decided how your magic [00:03:00] works, people are talking about fantasy today. If you haven't decided how your magic works, go and do a brainstorming doc and figure that out because otherwise everything that you write is going to feel big and nondescript and it's not going to be very interesting.

So fix that first, and then methodically go through, if you know that there's scenes that you need to work on, pick the one that you feel like working on that day. At the end, you might end up with some sort of drudgery tasks. If you do it that way, that's okay, because if you know, if you've got your list, and you know that you had two hours to write, and you're not feeling it, because this happens, like you had a long day at work, and all of a sudden you have this writing time, you're like, ah, I just can't.

But you know that you have a task on your list that is to go and fix something, or to go and fix the indents, or whatever it is, right? It can be a small task. You can be really gratifying to knock those off in those times when you're feeling a little bit slumped. So I hope that helps. Do one thing at a time.

Do a bunch of passes. Don't try and fix everything all at once or you will get overwhelmed. And you'll never finish. Um, hey, Corey [00:04:00] E! How do you recognize when a scene or chapter needs to be moved to a different point in the story or removed altogether? Okay, really good question. One of the things that we go through in the Wicked Good Fiction Boot Camp when I teach that writing style is talking about what you want your readers to take away from the story.

So it's kind of like a theme, but I always like to flip things and talk about your readers and keep them in mind. Okay, so when they finish reading your book, what do you want them to take away? What do you want them to know, see, understand, feel, when they're, when you're done? That is a great way to test if you've got a scene that you really love, but it doesn't somehow further that, or teach that, or inform that, or mirror, or contrast, or provide tension before the reader gets there, throw it out.

When I say that, I say it respectfully. Know that it can be a scene in another story. You could change the characters or whatever, but you could end up using that same piece, if you love it, in another story. In terms of when [00:05:00] a scene or chapter needs to be moved, that's where the outlining comes in. Even if you've already written the book, take a look at the inside outline, see if you can pull it together.

Because what it does is it maps the arc, the character arc, and the plot line. And you can see really quickly if a scene doesn't belong. And one of the most common things that I see if they're in the wrong spot, well there's a lot of things that I can say when a scene is in the wrong spot, but some of the most common things that I see are like if you're on a character arc and they're going from meek to strong, or from strong to meek for that matter, somebody's getting broken down through the novel, And then they kind of go two steps forward and one step back and two steps forward and one step back and two steps forward and one step back and it can be really annoying to readers.

It feels like a yo yo and there's no arc. You can have sort of a night of the dark soul, right? Um, dark night of the soul, sorry. And you can have them progressing and have a blip, maybe two, but no more than that. And if you're finding that and your scenes are demonstrating something that takes your story [00:06:00] backward, then see if you can rearrange the order.

The other thing that happens a lot, when we're looking at tightening up word count and getting rid of extraneous scenes, watch for scenes that repeat information that the reader already has. Okay? So again, we're looking at it from the reader's point of view. If the reader already knows that, don't tell them again.

Don't recap and create a scene. Okay, I just went through this epic battle, and I'm the reader, and I went through it with your character, and it was heart wrenching, and I'm scared, and all the things, right? And then you have that person go and tell somebody else, and that person goes through that same arc again.

Remember, it feels like a yo yo? It's a step back. We already have that information. I already went through that heart wrenching thing. I don't want to do it again while another character learns that. That's not useful, right? So and so told them about the battle and move on, right? Cut that scene. That's a really common thing that I see.

Is we think about when the characters need the information and we forget that your readers already know it and it feels [00:07:00] like a repeat and it's boring.

Hopefully that helps. Okay. Shelby e. I noticed in my writing that I lumped some major events together or release a ton of information about the world early on.

Okay. Yeah. Info dumping and world building. How can I spread that out more and how do you pace a novel? Yeah, so I think I talked about this a little bit at the beginning, but take all of that out somewhere else. Don't count it as you're writing. You might need to write it yourself. You need to know as the writer.

I'm not saying that you don't need all that backstory or that world building. You do. But don't don't give yourself a gold star and say that you wrote a chapter. It's not a chapter. Take it out and then figure out where you want that scene to take place. Because one other thing that happens when you're giving a lot of world building details is you're always telling, right?

You're telling us. So when you build a scene, you want to be in a space. specific moment in time. If you're not in a specific moment in time, it is not a scene, right? There are some exceptions you can write in literary where you might have snapshots, where you [00:08:00] might go back and forth between scenes and then these other sort of non grounded scenes, but that is a style that isn't in most, I'm not sure what genre you're doing.

If you're doing literary, you might be okay. But any other one, you can't do that because your reader isn't in the moment and they're going to get bored, right? So it's way more interesting to be there and hear the joke firsthand, or see the person slip on the banana peel and be like, I can't believe that just happened, than to hear about it later and not get it.

And somebody say, Oh, you really had to be there. Okay, so I hope that answers your question. And last question, also from Shelby. I've really struggled with finding a writing group. Do you have any suggestions on finding a good writing group? Yeah, you know what? There's some good places. Goodreads is actually a place to find a writing group.

Also, feel free to meet people at events like this and see if they've got space in a writing group. Just post about what it is that you're writing so that people, people can find you. Yeah. And a writing group, just for those of you guys, it's great. It can have accountability. You may [00:09:00] also give critiques to one another.

So yeah, it's just find people that are interested in your genre and know something, right? Know, know a little bit more than you is usually helpful.

Okay. Travis, why is word count important? Okay. So yeah, there's a bunch of schools of thought on this Travis. And you know, I hear this advice given out and it's It's so, it's so difficult for writers to figure this out because again, it's, it's sort of a personal choice, but because people will say, well, just write until it's done or however long it is, it is.

And that's a great philosophy from a creative standpoint and from a fulfillment standpoint. However, When you choose what type of book you're going to write, it is a contract with your audience, right? And it is a contract with your readers. So if you say that you're writing a certain type of book, they may expect it to be a certain length.

And if it isn't, they won't enjoy it. And it's just the way it goes. So know when you're breaking expectations. You can break the rules, but typically as a debut author, [00:10:00] no publisher will allow that, okay? So one of the biggest things is not having a book that's too long. So people come to me sometimes and when I interviewed Sherry Joseph, the publisher literally told her cut 17, 000 words.

That was, that was it. Like this is, we'll publish it, but this is the rule. Right? And the reason that publishers do that is a bunch of reasons. Mainly cost. It is expectations, yes, so that it hits a certain market, and that it is the size that they expect. Yes, that is very important, but also it's cost.

Publishing is a business like anything else, and whether you self publish or go with a publisher, At the end of the day, I hope that you're making money, right? We as artists need to make money. We need to make money and you deserve to make money. If you've put in that work and you've written a great book that people love, you deserve to get paid.

If you've written a book in a genre, that's typically a hundred thousand words and you wrote 300, 000 words, you're, you're giving them three books and you're not splitting it. You didn't do that work. You didn't know. And so you just decide to publish it anyway. I mean, guess what happens. [00:11:00] Your cost for editing is three times what that other book is.

Your cost for layout is three times if you're paying somebody else to do the layout. You'll also be paying if they buy a print copy. You'll also be paying more because paper is actually very expensive. You'll also be paying more for the audiobook, which is a huge part now of, of launching a book is to have an audiobook to go with it.

To record those hours, to edit those hours, all of that costs either your time For your money, and you can't turn around and charge 100 for your paperback. You can't do it. So you could charge 25 and if you split it into three books, and when I say split it, don't just cut it. There's ways to do that. And it takes a little bit of work, right?

Then you would be selling three books, then you could recoup that. Right? So part of it is profit, and part of it is expectations. So, know your, know your genre, and, and take a look at other books, and don't compare yourself to that breakout novel that breaks the rules in your genre. There will be, [00:12:00] potentially, you know, if you're looking to go the traditional route, You, you may find two out of a hundred agents that are willing to overlook the fact that you didn't do your research because they're so interested in your book.

Most of them are going to go, Oh, 300, 000 words. This author clearly is just new to the scene and hasn't done the research. Right? Unfortunately, they're not going to look at your pages and decide it's so good. It doesn't matter. They're not going to look at it at all. Right. And I want to tell you that they're not going to look at it at all.

When I meet with agents, I've worked with several agents over the year and I am agented myself. And they, you know, some of the stats that they share are just absolutely stupefying. They get 8, 000 queries a year, and out of that 8, 000 queries, they may ask for 50 partial, they may ask for 5 manuscripts, and they may sign 2.

So those odds alone are daunting. They're not reading everybody's manuscript and then weighing it. They're looking at the query, they're seeing, and if they see something like that, it's out. There may be [00:13:00] an exception. You might find somebody who is willing to overlook that because they looked at your hook first, or they looked at your pages first, and they didn't reject you just based on the length of your novel, but you're shooting yourself in the foot, you're making it so much harder because you're only getting two out of a hundred agents to look at it, right?

Versus 98. And people talk about, it's a needle in a haystack, or the odds, just send out a thousand queries, and then you'll finally get that one person. All you need is one person. I hear writers encouraging one another, and I love the sentiment of it, but it just isn't true. It's not what the experience is.

And if you listen to the podcast, and you listen to the writers that I speak with, what happens is, we either get no response, or we get a big response. That is

way more typical, and I would say a lot of factors depend on that. Trends depend on that, and the timing of the market, how well the query is written, how well the book is written.

When it's ready, you get, you get warm feedback, and you get people talking to you about your book, and if all you're getting is rejections, then it's not ready, and [00:14:00] so, yeah, that's what happens. Hopefully that's helpful. I'm trying to be positive. It can happen, but you got to put in the work. But that's why you have to pay attention to word count because it's one of those things that you don't want to be just disqualified right out of the gate.

Also, if you self publish, you want to make a profit. I'm Shelby. I'm a really wordy writer. Okay, perfect one to ask next. For example, my book draft is over 180,000 words. Uh, what, what genre is that in? I mean, there's no genre where that's okay, actually. But um, but you could be close if you're sort of epic fantasy or you're space opera.

I mentioned those already. You could be close or if you're in romance or something that you're way, way over. I really struggle with cutting things and Ruth being ruthless, feeling as if everything is important. How do I wait? How do I wade through that? Do I have any advice? Yeah, I, I mean, I have tons of advice.

I work with writers on this all the time. And the first thing is Figure out, you know, if it's urban fantasy, you probably want to be right around a hundred, maybe even under. Anywhere from 90 to 110 is [00:15:00] probably acceptable. There are a lot of things that you can do. I teach these in the boot camp and I'll mention a few of them here, but there are a lot of things that you can do to tighten up your writing without changing anything!

Without changing anything, without changing your dream, without changing your scenes, without cutting it, without splitting it in two. The answer is not split it in two. It's probably overwritten because you have some quirks in your writing. So there's extraneous things. You can look for filter words, things like she realized she, she watched all of those things that put a filter between your reader and the point of view character.

You can take those phrases out. I bet you've got thousands. There's also filler words. You can search on those. I bet you'll get thousands, right? There's also dialogue tags in urban fantasy for adults. You should not be using dialogue tags that often unless you really need it. Instead use an action beat.

So what I mean by that is he said, she said, you don't need them. You can put your quotations and then put it an action beat directly after it. So I'm not saying don't have any, and then we have no idea who's talking, but instead of [00:16:00] using those dialogue tags, you can actually put an action beat. Tightens up the writing.

It's more interesting. They won't stumble on it. And the other thing is, is when you're reading, you kind of skip over those, so it's not a big deal, but now with the advent of audiobooks, that he said, she said, he says, she says, it just sticks out like a sore thumb. You do need them if you're reading middle grade or somewhere where you want to keep the reading level lower.

But for adults, I would, I would target those things first. You might be surprised. Then I would look for repeated scenes. I would look for, I mean I could go on all day, I have no idea. I would look for characters that we can combine. Are there characters that are similar? I would look for just the organization of scenes.

And, and see whether, like pay attention all the way through, does my reader already have this information and cut it, right? There's things that you can do that aren't going to change your book. That will probably cut, in my experience, you could probably cut 20 or 30, 000 words that way. And then you've got some decisions to make.

So good luck. Okay. What is an action beat? Okay. So an action beat. Deb. Because I just mentioned that and I [00:17:00] didn't explain it. I explained the dialogue tag. But I could say, hello, wonderful writers, Susie said, and then she hit the balloons. I don't know. So what we've got there is we've got some dialogue.

Then we've got Susie said, which is the dialogue tag. And then we've got an action beat, which is I hit the balloons, right? So in that instance, what we could do for those of you listening on the podcast, I have some balloons here when I'm recording it live and I just hit them. So what you could do instead, if you wanted to drop the dialogue tag and you already have an action beat, it doesn't change the sentence at all to say, Hello wonderful writers!

Susie hit the balloons, right? So you're just including that action beat there and it makes it very clear. It's immediately following. It's on the same line after the closed quotation marks. It's on the same line. It's called an action beat. So that could be anything at all. Could be Susie smiled or whatever that is, right?[00:18:00]

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