



# Self-Edits Tool Kit

11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Self-Editing Tool Kit: 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor



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## Self-Editing Tool Kit: 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

# First Things First

I wish nothing more than for every aspiring author to achieve their publishing dreams. Getting there, however, can feel like a weighted uphill climb. That's why I've developed this resource: to help make the process of self-editing a little easier to navigate.

Why is self-editing important? Because you'll want to deliver to your editor the most polished version of your first draft manuscript possible. Otherwise, some editors charge per edit, which means the more work they must do, the higher the cost. Similarly, some editors charge by the hour, so the cleaner your manuscript, the sooner you'll have it back and ready for agent-pitching or self-publishing.

Now, for those of you who are thinking, "Yeah, but is hiring an editor *really* worth it? What if I'm able to make all the corrections myself?"

I hear you. And I have no doubt that you are an excellent writer and stay on top of your Ps and Qs. Nevertheless, prior to self-publishing, please allow someone you trust to provide feedback. I promise you won't regret it! And I'm sure you don't want to compromise your integrity by publishing a book that isn't as polished as you'd expect. Let another set of eyes have a look; they will see small things that have gone unnoticed by your eyes alone. It's normal to miss extra words, spelling errors, and other oopsies—our eyes become comfortable, and our brain is wired to skip over and fill-in gaps.

To help you prepare, please read this resource thoroughly. The tabs at the top of each page will help you navigate; however, in the next section, you will find the following topics:

- |   |                                     |
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This or That—Common Misused Words

English is... difficult. There are words that sound the same but are spelled differently (homophones), words that have the same spelling but different meanings (homonyms), and words that have the same spelling but are not pronounced the same and have different meanings (homographs). Before sending your manuscript to your editor, check to be sure you’ve chosen the correct word for the intended context.

Although I am sure there are more, I’ve compiled a list of the most commonly misused word doppelgangers and fraternal word twins I could find in the English language.

This?	That?
Affect Verb: To cause a change	Effect Noun: The result of an action
Capital Uppercase, punishment, money, cities	Capitol Physical building or surrounding area
Elusive Avoids being caught	Illusive Based on illusion, not true or real
Every day Each single day	Everyday Occurring daily, commonplace, ordinary
Evoke Passively causing an emotional response	Invoke Actively seeking a response or change
Farther Relating to physical distance	Further Figurative or metaphorical distance
Flesh out To explore, plan, or make fuller	Flush out To send away or cause an exit
Lay down The action of placing something flat	Lying down Already in position
Peek A glance or quick look	Peak A pinnacle or climax
Pore over Reading, skimming, or scanning	Pour over Pouring liquid over something
Principle Rule or primary	Principal Headmaster or leader
Then I’m making coffee and <i>then</i> writing.	Than I have more coffee <i>than</i> you.
To Toward or until	Too Also or excessively

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Words That Are Not Words

Dictionary editors are adding new words every single day; however, at the time of developing this *Self-Edits Tool Kit* the following words and phrases are *not* included. Therefore, before emailing your first draft to your editor, pore over the following list to be sure you haven't used them.

The issue...	Incorrect	Correct
[Name] and I's [thing].	The readers really liked Mandy and I's short story anthology.	The readers really liked Mandy's and my short story anthology.  Rule: The correct possessive pronoun is <i>my</i> . <i>I's</i> is not a word (unless used in some dialects).
Irregardless	This is not a word.	Regardless; Regardless of
Anyways	This is not a word.	Anyway
Supposably	This is not a word.	Supposedly
Heighth	This is not a word.	Adding an <i>H</i> to this word is easy to understand, what with <i>length</i> and <i>width</i> . However, the correct word is <i>height</i> .
Deep-seeded	This is not correct.	Your family traditions might feel deep-seeded way down in the dirt, but <i>deep-seeded</i> is not the correct phrase you'll want to use. The correct phrase is <i>deep-seated</i> , as in firmly established.



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Overused Words

Like anything that is interwoven into culture and changing over time, the English language goes through trends and styles. From the adoption of new words and phrases to dialectal evolution, English is not only a difficult language to learn, but it’s also adaptive, and sometimes words can be overused to the point that their meaning becomes lost and/or exaggerated.

You’re a serious writer, and you’ll want to be respected as such. However, at present time, the following two words have been so overused that including them too often and/or out of context in your writing might cause your editor (and your readers) an exaggerated eye roll.

Literally

Amazing

Therefore, unless your book proves to wow readers with the *exact* feelings of *wonder and excitement*, try refraining from the excessive use of these two literally amazing words.

Synonyms

Literally	Amazing
actually	awesome
completely	fascinating
directly	incredible
plainly	marvelous
precisely	stunning
really	surprising
simply	unbelievable
truly	wonderful

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Side-by-Side: Queen’s vs American English

I am not here to argue with the Queen, take a side on one pond or another, or give you a history lesson on colonization and the introduction of the English language. However, before having an editor review your book, be sure your words have taken a side.

Use the following graph for clarification on the difference in spelling of words shared across the various types of English language.

International English Spelling Chart





			
United States	Canada	United Kingdom	Australia
color	colour	colour	colour
center	centre	centre	centre
realize	realize	realise/ize	realise
analyze	analyze	analyse	analyse
traveling	travelling	travelling	travelling
defense	defence	defence	defence
computer program, concert program	computer program, concert program	computer program, concert programme	computer program, concert program
gray	grey	grey	grey
fulfill	fulfil(l)	fulfil	fulfil
aging	ag(e)ing	ageing	ag(e)ing
judgment	judgement	judgement	judgement

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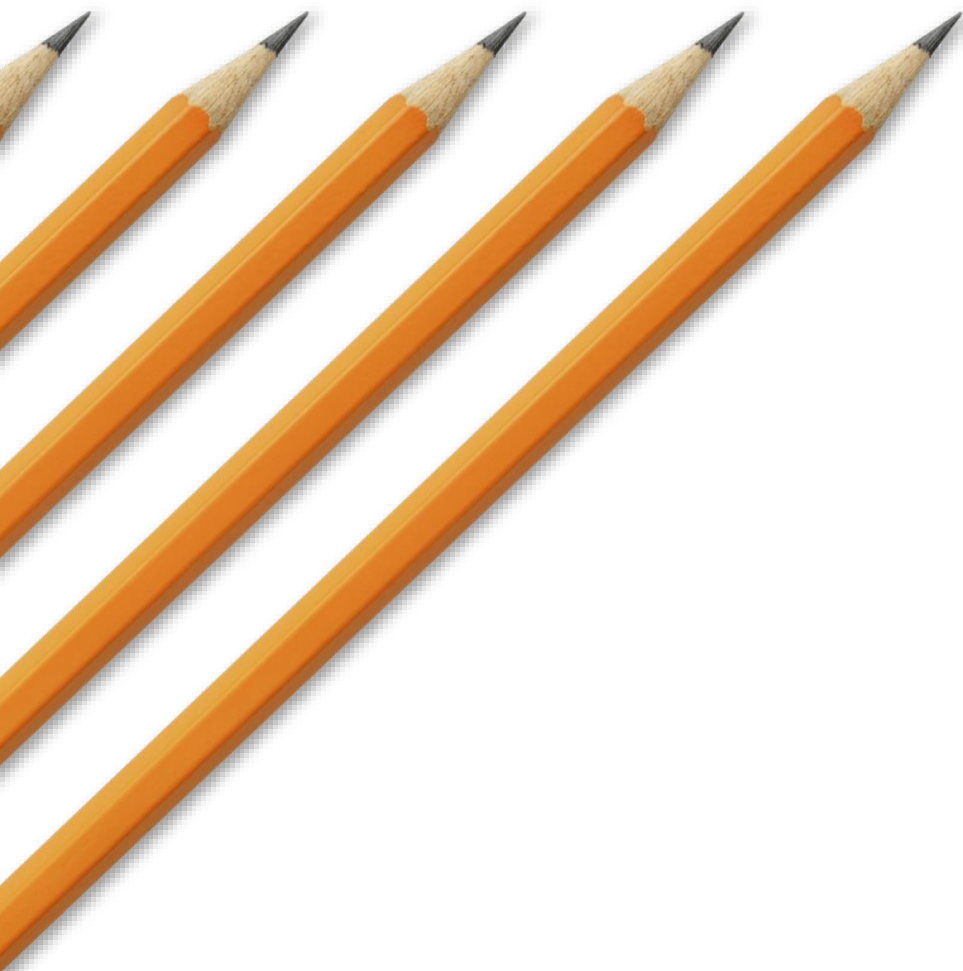
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## Repeats

From sentence starters to adjectives to dialogue tags, check to be sure your story isn't stuck on repeat.

Before emailing your editor, comb through every line in your book and ensure that you're not repeating words. A simple solution is to consult your thesaurus and make a swap. Who knows? You might even stumble upon a better alternative.

Problem	Solutions
I was <i>surprised</i> to find the book was so <i>surprisingly</i> expensive.	<p>I was shocked to find the book was so surprisingly expensive.</p> <p>I was surprised to find the book was so remarkably expensive.</p>





## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Punctuation Dos and Don'ts

Providing you with a list of every punctuation rule in the English language would mean drafting a tome. In the interest of time, my aching joints, and carpal tunnel strain, I've curated a selection of what I feel are the most important punctuation considerations to make while self-editing your work of fiction.

## Capitalization

**Capitalize** the first word in a sentence, proper nouns, and sometimes the first word in quotations and following a colon.

**STOP OVERUSING ALL-CAPS TEXT** and too many exclamation marks in your fiction writing!!!!

All-caps text is perfect for emphasizing anger, shock, and excitement, but overusing the style can make your character(s) seem melodramatic and/or shrill. Correct usage of all-caps text includes the mentioning of advertisements, legal documents, book titles, and newspaper headlines.

The same goes for more than one exclamation point. In fiction writing, even when a character is spewing ALL-CAPS RAGE at another, a single exclamation point will sufficiently punctuate their message. Save the multiple exclamation points for social media and text messaging. Just don't yell at your momma.

## Colon and Semicolon Use-Made-Simple

**Colon:** In fiction writing, colons are best for pausing a sentence in order to list one or more objects, people, places, or ideas.

Example: While Mandy loves all colors, she has two favorites: haint blue and periwinkle.

**Semicolon:** Semicolons are used to connect two independent clauses (a group of words that contain a subject and a verb but are not necessarily a complete sentence). Simply put, if you want to connect two phrases that sound like sentences and relate to one another, use a semicolon rather than a comma or a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet).

Example: The book was easy to imagine adapted as a screenplay; the setting, characters, and plot made me feel like I was reading a movie script.



## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Punctuation Dos and Don'ts, Continued

## Space Jam

Hear ye! Hear ye! (especially Boomers and Gen-Xers) You no longer have to add two spaces after a period and before starting a new sentence. **One space is acceptable** for all major style guides.

## A Lingering Thought...

The purpose of an **ellipses** is to indicate that words have been excluded from a quote. However, in fiction writing, especially in dialogue, you'll want to include all the necessary words.

Alternatively, an ellipses can be used to suggest a character trailing off in thought, hesitating between two statements, or being interrupted by another character.

Examples:

"Come with me to the store," she said. "I need to get eggs, butter, bread..."

"I have to work on my novel," he interjected. "The book isn't going to write itself, not even in exchange for breakfast."

## The Hyphen-Dash Dilemma

**The hyphen-dash dilemma**—the distinction between the two is as different as night and day.

See what I did there? The small line connecting two words is a hyphen, and the long line preceding (and sometimes following) a complete thought is a dash or "em dash."

**Hyphen** Examples: Self-discovery, Two-year-old, Instructor-led, One- and two-sided

**Em dash** Examples:

Many writers love using dashes rather than semicolons to connect two phrases—Emily Dickinson and R.L. Stine included dashes so often that the punctuation became part of their writing style.

When penning a novel, I work best if I'm not distracted—I have to completely shut down my phone and unplug my TV—although my dogs walking in and out of my office isn't bothersome in the least.



## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Punctuation Dos and Don'ts, Continued

## Quotation Marks

In fiction writing, there are three most common uses for **quotation marks**: when punctuating dialogue, quoting someone, and when emphasizing a word or phrase. Before sending your book to your editor, check for the following quotation mark concerns.

**Punctuation goes inside quotes, not after.**

Examples:

Correct: "I did not want to stop writing today."

Incorrect: "I did not want to stop writing today".

**Single quotes are acceptable for British English writing and when quoting inside quotes.**

Example of the latter: "My editor said I didn't 'show the story' enough in my first draft," the writer told me.

**Use quotation marks for emphasis.** However, sometimes italicizing can be a *more stylish indicator* of emphasis.

Example: She said she was "writing," but I saw her scrolling through her phone and checking her email.

## The Apostrophe: A Writers' Misuse of the Apostrophe's Placement

Okay, that was extra, I will admit. But the above phrase *does* provide two examples of correct apostrophe usage: *writers'* is plural possessive, while *apostrophe's* is singular possessive. While editing other writers' work, I often see the following **apostrophe mix-ups**.

**Its vs it's:** Remember, a singular possessive apostrophe indicates ownership or responsibility. *It's* a contraction of "It is." However, the word *its* also shows ownership. Here are the differences:

Examples:

**It's** my fault I did not meet my word count goal today.

As soon as I got home with my pizza, **its** toppings had shifted across the entire pie.



## Punctuation Dos and Don'ts, Continued

## The Apostrophe, Continued

## Acronyms and Apostrophes

When regarding acronyms, the use of apostrophes looks a little different. Keeping in mind how apostrophes indicate possession (something *owns* something else), do not use an apostrophe when writing about more than one acronym. Here's an example:

Correct: DVDs and RPGs

Incorrect: DVD's and RPG's

To your editor and reader, that apostrophe indicates that the DVD and RPG own something: The DVD's case; the RPG's frame rate. When you mean to say more than one DVD or RPG, you would write *DVDs* and *RPGs*.

## Save the Date

As for writing dates, the apostrophe precedes the abbreviated year; otherwise, leave it out entirely.

Examples:

Correct: '80s or 1980s

Incorrect: 80's or 1980's



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## Things to Avoid

As you self-edit your work, there are a handful of factors to avoid altogether as they can compromise your integrity as a serious writer.

A **cliché** is a phrase that might have been clever and/or interesting in the past but has grown boring from overuse. Mostly idioms, metaphors, and other statements that have fallen out of style, clichés can make your writing seem lazy and unoriginal

Therefore, check your work before sending it to your editor. Here are a few cliché examples:

It is what it is.  
To each his own.  
At the speed of light.  
As red as a rose.

**Using emoji in your writing.** Unless included within a text message or email that's part of your story, stick to using words to demonstrate your narrator's and/or characters' emotions.

**Using acronyms and shorthand in place of actual words** might resonate with your editor and readers like the cliché: lazy and immature. And like the emoji, unless a language acronym or shorthand is part of a text or email between two characters, keep your LOLs, WTFs, BRBs, and NVMs for text and social media *IRL*.

**Save AI for data analysis and predictive analytics.** Embrace your humanity and write *your own* book with your own ideas and plot lines. No matter how advanced AI becomes, I am convinced that nothing programmed can replicate a human being's genuine creativity, expertise, intuition, and unique voice.

**Stereotyping** is not only cliché, but it's also insensitive and ignorant. However, if you are unsure whether you have stereotyped a person, people, or culture in your story, invest in a sensitivity reader who can help educate you. Please keep this in mind with regard to writing characters with whom you do not share the same race or ethnicity.





## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Dialogue Best Practices

Keep your character conversations as convincing as possible. Even if you're writing fantasy, be sure the exchanges are realistic and relatable to your readers.

Be careful about dialect, accents, and pronunciations. While you will want to honor languages and cultures that are not your own by representing them as respectfully and authentically as possible, excessive emphasis can render your work unreadable. To this point, I tried to remain extremely careful while writing Pinkie Perideaux, a Haitian Creole character in my duology *The Scars We Choose*.

Don't rely on your characters to *tell* your story. Weighing down your dialogue with info dumps can tarnish the luster on both your story and your writing.

If "said" is the best dialogue tag for a statement, use it. However, keep in mind other alternatives that might be more appropriate and descriptive. Additionally, break up some of your dialogue tags with action beats. Here's an example:

"I'm not sure, but I will find out." Mandy saved her work before grabbing her phone. "Hey, Suri, what are the best synonyms for the word 'said'?"

## Instead of "Said"

<b>agreed</b> acknowledged assented conceded consented seconded	<b>argued</b> bickered contended contested contradicted countered debated denied disagreed disputed objected opposed protested quarreled quibbled squabbled	<b>begged</b> beseeched entreated implored petitioned pleaded prayed pressed requested urged	<b>commented</b> asserted mentioned noted opined remarked stated	sniffled sneveled sobbed squalled wailed wept whimpered yammered yowled	<b>exaggerated</b> boasted bragged distorted elaborated embellished enhanced expanded expounded fabricated inflated romanticized overstated	<b>imitated</b> aped echoed impersonated mimed mimicked mocked parodied parroted
<b>animal sounds</b> barked chirped croaked crowed growled hissed howled panted roared snarled squawked squeaked yapped yelped	<b>asked</b> challenged grilled inquired interrogated pried probed queried questioned quizzed requested	<b>blamed</b> accused alleged attacked charged claimed rebuked reproved	<b>complained</b> bemoaned bewailed fretted fussed griped groaned grumbled moaned pouted sneveled whimpered whined yammered	<b>criticized</b> blasted chastised chided disapproved lambasted nitpicked reprimanded zinged	<b>explained</b> clarified described detailed illustrated interpreted paraphrased summarized translated	<b>interrupted</b> blurted inserted interfered interjected
<b>answered</b> reacted remarked replied responded retorted returned		<b>chatted</b> babbed blabbed chitchatted gabbed gibbered gossiped jabbered prattled	<b>cried</b> bawled bemoaned bewailed blubbered grieved groaned howled lamented moaned mourned sighed	<b>declared</b> announced asserted broadcasted confirmed informed proclaimed professed stated	<b>gasped</b> choked gulped heaved panted snorted wheezed	<b>intimidated</b> badgered browbeat bullied coerced harassed hounded



11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

Show vs Tell

If you are a fiction writer, you will most likely recognize the statement “Show, don’t tell.” Although this advice can be redundant, it’s important. While writing, *showing* your story—which includes using descriptive language, metaphor, and dialogue—offers the reader an experience, rather than simply *telling* the story and expecting readers to take your word at face value.

Sensory writing—using words and phrases that make a connection to the five senses—can enrich one’s storytelling with depth and nuance, offering the reader a virtually immersive experience. You can learn all about *Storytelling vs Story-SHOWing* in my resource and blog post of the same title.



Learn more.

Show vs. Tell Examples

Senses	Telling	Showing
Sight / See	The girl cried.	Tears carved rivulets down the girl’s blushed cheeks.
Sound / Hear	The song was beautiful.	My skin erupted with chills as his fingertips tickled the piano keys.
Smell	The food smelled delicious.	When the server brought out the fajitas, my mind wafted with memories of eating chopped steak and onion hoagies at the autumn carnival.
Touch / Feel	It felt great to be hugged.	She melted in her lover’s embrace.
Taste	The coffee tasted so good.	As the latte warmed her belly, a ribbon of sweet foam lingered on her lips.

## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Formatting Your First Draft

Before sending your manuscript to your editor, be sure the document is ready for review. The following checklist can help you format your first draft.

Your page should be white, 8.5 X 11 inches, and with one-inch margins.

Alignment should be left justified (aligned left, jagged right).

Use a standard font, such as Times New Roman or Arial, 12pt size.

If you changed the color of your text to help with self-edits, be sure to go back to black.

Double-space your text. This helps the editor read clearly with room for comments and/or handwritten notes.

Indent your paragraphs.

Insert a page break between chapters.

Add page numbers.

Add a copyright tag to your footer. Example: Copyright © 2023 Amanda Hughes. To get the copyright symbol, hold the *Alt* key while typing 0169 (Windows) or hold *Option* and press the *G* key (Mac).

Format your title page. Here is an example:

Amanda Hughes  
1725 Slough Avenue  
Scranton, PA 18503  
717-555-0177  
mandy@haintbluecreative.com  
<https://www.haintbluecreative.com>

Approx. 143,000 words

ONLY THE ROCKS THAT FLOAT

by

A. Lee Hughes

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## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

### Formatting Your First Draft, Continued

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## 11 Self-Edits to Make Before Sending Your Book to an Editor

## Last Call! Before Hitting “Send”

Use your spellchecker and/or Grammarly <https://www.grammarly.com/>

Proofread your book one more time by doing one or more of the following:

- Rest your eye and come back to read your work later.
- Changing your font color can help you see things you might have missed while writing. Just be sure to change it back to black when finished reading.
- Read the book aloud. Screen readers can also help.
- Print out your work so you can physically mark your edits.
- Edit line by line. Don't move on to the next line until the one you're reading is polished.

I hope this resource is helpful! For continued support of your writing and self-publishing efforts, check out my shop, [The Intuitive Storyteller Hub](#). You're sure to find tools to help elevate your storytelling efforts and books that haunt the heart.

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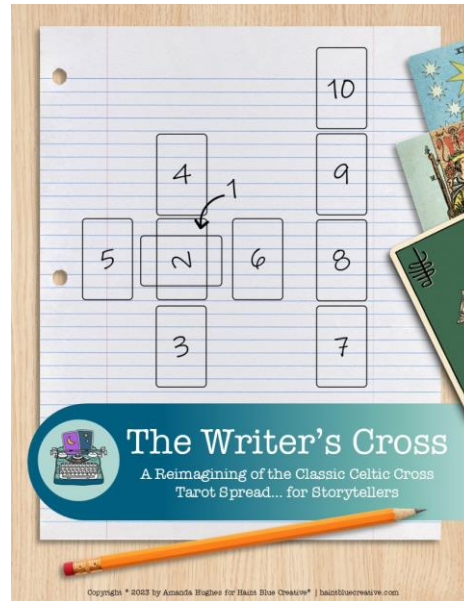


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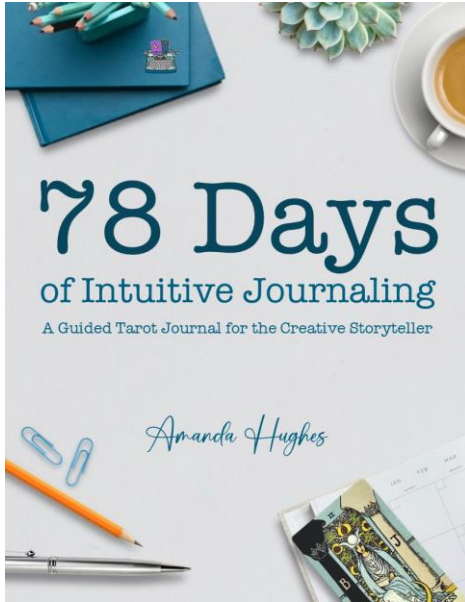
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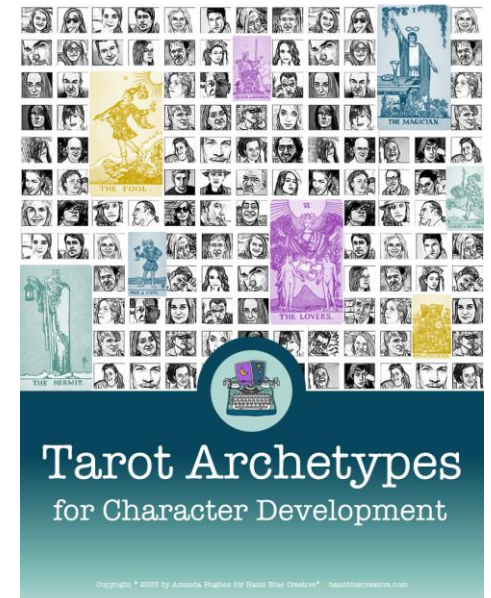
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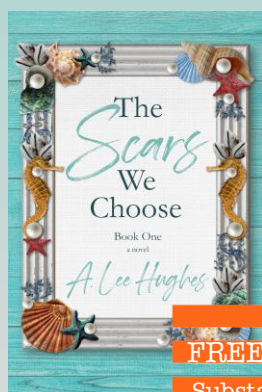
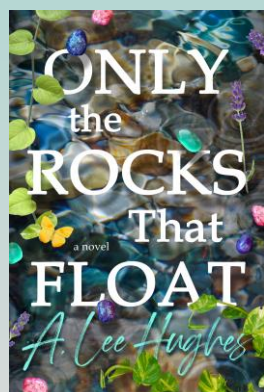
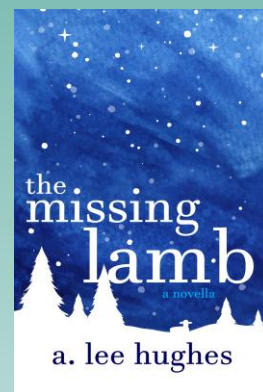
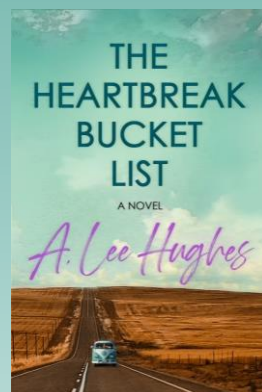
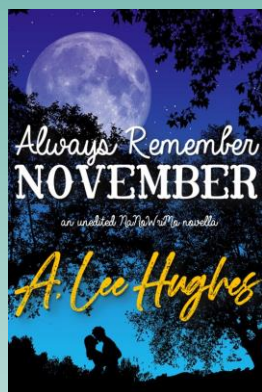
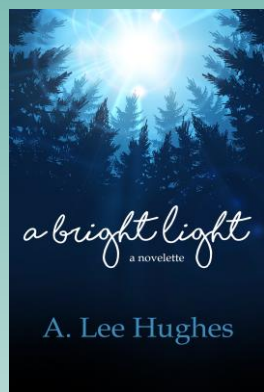
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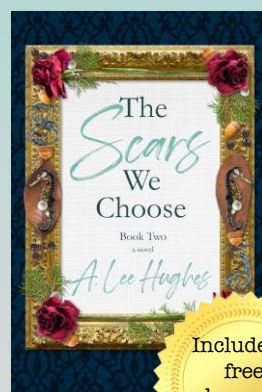




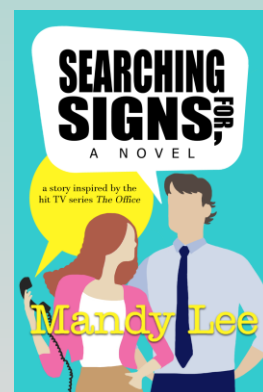
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free  
character  
back story







## »————« About Mandy »————«

In her more than thirty years as a storyteller and visual designer, Amanda “Mandy” Hughes has written and designed over a dozen works of literary, Southern Gothic, and women’s fiction under pen names **A. Lee Hughes** and **Mandy Lee**.

Mandy is the founder of Haint Blue Creative®, a space for readers and storytellers to explore, learn, and create. She holds a Bachelor and Master of Science in Psychology, and she has worked as an instructional designer for nearly twenty years.

When she’s not writing, Mandy enjoys the movies, theater, music, traveling, nature walks, birdwatching, and binging *The Office*. She is a tarot enthusiast who uses the cards to enhance creativity and foster wellness. She lives in Georgia with her husband and four sons, two of whom are furrier than the others (but not by much). Visit her website at [haintbluecreative.com](http://haintbluecreative.com) and follow her on Instagram @haintbluecreative.

