

Writing Advice: First Read Throughs

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Make your first read an out loud read to yourself. You'll hear things you won't in a silent go-through.

But what comes next?

Read to someone else.

The first time a new writer shares a piece, whether she's handed over pages or a link or read her work aloud, her ears flare red and her heart thumps. Every mistake (mistakes she was probably unaware of just seconds earlier)--a laboured image, an accidentally repeated word--feels as painful as a twisted arm. Now her friend/lover/editor/agent knows what she suspected all along--she is bad, so bad that she should get aversion therapy, shocks every time she tries to slip envelopes into a post box or tries to hit "send" on Submittable.

What once was finished has grown fangs, turned and bitten her.

I used to drive my ex around the twist. "What do you want from me?" she'd plead when I finished reading a new piece, and I was puzzled, too; what did I want? Something, urgently, but what? It was only over time that I discovered that I didn't really need her reaction. What I needed was just to hear myself reading the piece with someone else's attuned (long-suffering) ear in the room, because this second set of ears became, by its alchemy of distancing, critiquing ears for me. Then I could go back and rework.

And rework. And rework.

Before critiquing and edits.