

Revisions & Rewrites

Revisions and rewrites—they kind of sound the same, but they're not. Not by a long shot. In my experience, revisions are just a step or two above tweaking. Simple problem, easy fix. A rewrite is just what it sounds like, taking the editing chainsaw to a manuscript to fix some serious issues (aka screw ups). At least once, most writers experience that special moment when they realize that their precious project is a skanky, stinky pile of tripe. Yep, I've been there and had to fix that. It was a lot of work and it wasn't pretty, but the results were intensely satisfying once the dust settled.

To avoid the embarrassment of having your critique group/beta reader/agent/editor witness your writer "duh moment," it's preferable to discover for yourself where your plot train derailed. The red flags for me should have been characters behaving uncharacteristically and more than a few chapters that didn't propel my story forward. They would have been red flags if I hadn't been too close to the book to see them. Fortunately my agent was there to tell me where my plot train had derailed—and crashed and burned. In the instant when she pointed out the problem, I immediately saw how that problem had spawned a snafu, which had caused my first sub-plot to . . . well, you get the picture. I metaphorically smacked myself in the forehead for being too dense not to have seen it all myself. I knew I had a rewrite on my hands, not a revision. At that point, there was nothing left to do but put on my hazmat suit and wade in.

I had a book contract and was on a deadline, so not fixing the book was not an option. But if you're what I like to call "pre-published," you might be tempted to throw in the towel when faced with what you see as a book with insurmountable problems. I'm here to tell you that it's never as bad as you think. If your core story is solid, everything else can be fixed. The key is to fix one problem at a time. And if your solution causes more problems further on in the book than it solves, you simply discard it and find another solution. For me, the key was to keep my emotions out of it, to look at my book from a dispassionate point of view, and to dissect it to find the best way to fix it—not the *easiest* way, but the *best* way—the way I knew would give me the best book possible.

And when the rewrite was done, the dust had settled, and the finished book was on my editor's desk, I was proud of more than that book. I was proud of myself for digging in, doing the work, and not giving up.

So who was my literary problem child? My second book *Armed & Magical*, which went on to become my first national bestseller.