

HOW DO I GET THE MOST OUT OF MY EDITS?

It's simple. Thoroughly self-edit your document before you send it to an editor. The cleaner your document, the deeper your editor can delve in a single pass. Better for you. Better for your story.

There are several ways to edit your novel. I recommend doing ALL of them. First and foremost, look up words in the dictionary. When in doubt about the meaning or connotation of a word, look it up! Make this a habit as you write. I click over to Google's online dictionary and compare it with Merriam-Webster's online dictionary. They aren't always the same when it comes to hyphenation. It's best to follow Merriam-Webster's dictionary when in doubt, but any dictionary will do.

Other things to do. Read your novel forward while making corrections. Then edit backward line by line. Listen to your novel. Run it through ProWritingAid or another program. Save as a PDF and read on an ereader so you can see the whole page at a time. (You will be surprised at what this can show you.)

So let's begin. Tackle the following lists. Be sure to note your personal overused words when you read. We all have them. Chop chop chop!

And as with anything, there are exceptions to the rules. Besides, you might say these are more guidelines. The key is moderation in everything, even words.

Be warned. You will want to pull your hair out, but self-editing is worth it in the end.

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[Word Usage and Abusage](#). This list is a must before sending to the editor. Your beta reader friends will thank you too.

[How Participle Phrases Can Lead to Time Warps](#)

[Most Common Writing Mistakes, Pt. 44: Too Many Participle Phrases](#)

OVERALL OVERHAUL

What is the chapter's main point? It moves from what destination to what?

How long is the chapter? Does it need to be split?

How many scenes? What is the point of each scene?

What is the plot line revealed or resolved in each chapter?

Why is it necessary to the book?

Does the scene start with a *grab you* line?

Does the scene end with an *I want to keep reading* line?

Vary the paragraphs' beginning words.

Reduce dialogue tags. Change to action beats or omit altogether. Only use if necessary.

Does the action beat mean something—show a character's quirk or movements.

Have you expressed emotions by their actions?

How are the characters' descriptions in each section?

How are the scenes' descriptions?

Does dialog flow?

LOOK AT THE PARAGRAPHS

Does the paragraph need to be divided? Do you have enough white space on the page to give the reader's eye a break?

What is the paragraph trying to say?

Are the paragraphs in logical order as the character's thoughts unfold?

How many sentences? What is each trying to say?

What is the structure of each sentence? Did you put the main idea in the main clause?

Vary the sentence structure.

LOOK AT THE SENTENCES

Look at each sentence. Where is the modifier? Is it next to the noun it modifies?

Do you need to move the modifier?

Is the dependent clause essential or non-essential? If essential to the meaning of the sentence, it doesn't need a comma.

Does the sentence have redundancies? Get to the point in the least amount of words.

Get rid of limiting modifiers unless they are necessary.

Can you find a stronger verb? Get rid of the adverb. *He said quickly* is better as *His words slipped out*.

Can you change words like *suddenly* to *a sudden gust of wind . . .* or *the sudden impact*?

Can you simplify your adjectives to one awesome one?

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO EDITING A SENTENCE

Find the base noun-verb construction.

Strip out the modifiers.

Locate the sentence's main idea and make it the independent clause.

Subordinate minor ideas and coordinate ideas of equal importance.

Put limiting modifiers in front of the word they modify.

Repair dangling modifiers.

Identify phrases and clauses and make sure they modify the correct part of speech by putting them in the correct spot so readers can see what they modify.

Balance parallel ideas. Break the sentence into a list if necessary to see the connections.

Reduce clauses to phrases and phrases to single words where needed for pacing.

A FEW BASICS FIRST

Commas matter. Two independent clauses should be joined by *comma and* (, *and*), a semicolon, or made into two individual sentences. (Please, if you don't know what an independent clause is, you must pick up a writer's reference and educate yourself.) I often trip over sentences when I can't tell the logical separation between two thoughts. Follow my examples.

I went to the store, and I biked home.

I went to the store; I biked home.

I went to the store. I biked home.

Another comma error I see. **Commas are missing before participle phrases** (the -ing phrase). Some of these commas are so crucial for clarification!

I went to the store, skipping all the way.

I saw my aunt skipping up the street. (The comma is not needed here because the aunt is the object skipping up the street. But what if you put the comma in?)

I saw my aunt, skipping up the street. (This would mean that the subject of the sentence, I, is skipping up the street. To further clear this up, the phrase can be moved to the front of the sentence.)

Skipping up the street, I saw my aunt.

But I would prefer this for clarification.

While skipping up the street, I saw my aunt.

Those quote marks and apostrophes must face the correct direction! What do I mean? Some marks are straight and some are what are called smart or curly. Often when authors are copying and pasting parts of their documents from different programs, the marks end up being a mix of straight and curly. Use search and find function to replace all your quote marks and apostrophes from straight to curly. But after that, you'll have to go through your document and make sure they are facing the right direction.

Go get 'em. (wrong)

Go get 'em. (right)

Clare said, "I'm going to repeat her words so you understand. 'Go get 'em.'" (right)

TIGHTENING THE MANUSCRIPT

Reduce prepositions. No more than three prepositional phrases in a row. *He jumped off the bed beside the door onto the rug.*

Hyphenate compound adjectives before nouns.

Cut filter words: (see FILTER WORDS below for a complete list) saw, see, hear, heard, felt, feel, thought, think, watch, notice, know, knew, understand, realize, believe, remember, imagine, wonder, touch, look, seem, decide, note, experience, surmised

The *was* and *is* trap. *She was skiing.* Just say *she skied toward.* *She is dancing.* *She dances.*

Limit adverbs. Limit -ly words that modify a whole sentence as well. Apparently, gradually, suddenly, hopefully, obviously, etc. No comma is needed after them. (Use *I hoped.*)

Cut play-by-play descriptions. *She reached out and shook his hand.* Just say *she shook his hand.*

Limit direct addresses. Most of the time we don't say each other's names in conversation unless we want to grab someone's attention. Don't forget the comma to set the names off from the rest of the sentence. (*Nice to meet you, Mark.*)

Limit conjunctions at the start of a sentence. *And, but, so, and or.*

Cut unnecessary words. Often a noun is already doing the action, and it is unnecessary to say starting, tried, etc.

Appear -ed -ing -s to

Attempt -ed -ing -s to

Seem -ed -ing -s to

Start -ed -ing -s to

Try -ed -ing -s to

Begin/began/beginning/begins to

Had—Establish past tense with the first use of *had* (past perfect) and then write the rest of the paragraph or backflash in simple past. And end with past perfect (*had*) again so the reader knows the backflash is over. **Had is grossly overused.**

It—Define all uses of *it* if *it* doesn't have an antecedent. **It was**—it was what? Ask yourself, what does *it* refer to?

Only/merely/just—Condescending when used to describe a noun.

This/that—This what? That what? Put the noun after the pronoun or define the pronoun. **That**—Cut or replace with *which, who, or whom.*

There is/there are/there was/there were—Cut and reword.

Was/is/are/am—Describe the action or event. Instead of saying *I was there*, describe what the character is doing.

Stood. Grossly overused. *I stood there with my mouth hanging open.* Better as, *My mouth hung open.* Often the reader knows the character is standing. I call using this a Captain Obvious. Watch out for other uses of Captain Obvious.

JUNK WORDS (These words take up space. Cut them, especially the bolded words.)
Including the base word and all its forms –s –ed –ing

absolutely	going to	possibly
actually	had	probably
additionally	have to	quite
after all	if only	rather
again	in a manner of	reach
all	in order to/for	really
allow/allowing	it	since any
almost	it could be	some
already	it is/was	somehow
always	just	somewhat
anxiously vs. eagerly	let/letting	supposedly
back	literally	sound
basically	maybe	still
both	merely	that
certainly	might	the next thing
completely	nearly	then
currently	need	totally
definitely	never	typically
down	next	unique
even	not	up
ever	now	usually
every	often	used to
finally	of which	very
frequently	only	virtually
generally	perfect	
got/get	perhaps	

OVERUSED WORDS (Don't tell the reader that characters are *sitting* while *waiting* or *staring*, or *standing* in silence or awe. The reader should already know if the character is sitting or standing.)

a tad/a bit/a little/tiny

adjectives (Can you narrow down to one or two awesome adjectives instead of a list of three or four?)

adverbs (Can you use a better verb?)

back (She smiled ~~back~~)

reach/reached (You do not need to tell a reader when a character is reaching for something.)

silence/silent

sit/sat

smile/grin

stand/stood

stare/staring

still (Characters don't always have to be still.)

turned (Or turning before they walk away. Just have them walk away.)

walk/walked (Use better verbs to describe how they walk.)

FILTER WORDS (Cut these babies to decrease distance between the reader and the character.)

Including the base word and all its forms –s –ed –ing

appreciate	identify	savor
ascertain	imagine	scent
assume	infer	see
believe	intuit	seem
bring to mind	knew	sense
catch	learn	sight
decide	like	smell
deem	listen to	smell like
delight in	live through	sound
detect	look	sound like
diagnose	make/made	spot
discern	move	suffer
discover	note	surmise
distinguish	notice	suspect
eavesdrop	observe	take in
enjoy	overhear	taste
experience	perceive	think
face	posit	touch
feel	reach	undergo
gather	realize	understand
get	recognize	watch
glean	regard	whiff
go through	relish	wonder
guess	remember	
hear	reveal	

INTERJECTIONS (You can cut down on these to move the pace along. Also called QUICKSAND WORDS because, you guessed it, they slow the pace.) Boldfaced words are the worst offenders.

ah	huh	um
alas	indeed	well
bazinga	meh	whew
boo-yah	nice	whoa
cool	no	wicked
dear	oh	wow
duh	oh my God	yahoo
eek	oops	yeah
eh	ouch	yes
geez	oy	yikes
good	phew	yippee
ha	sweet	yo
hello	ugh	yuck
hey	uh	yum
holy cow	uh-huh	
hooray	uh-oh	

REDUNDANCIES (I think you can figure these out.)

nodded ~~head~~

palm ~~of hand~~

pointed ~~finger~~

~~hand~~ reached (~~with her hand~~)

rose ~~up~~/ lift-up

sat/sitting ~~down~~

shrugged ~~shoulders~~

stand/stood ~~up~~

heart pounded ~~in chest~~

~~first~~ created/met

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK

Watch out for the double *l*. *traveled*, not *travelled*.

Opening “if” clause needs a comma

Then vs. than, search for “, than”. If/then clauses

? --- asked (question marks need an asked tag)

Too. Check to see it is should be *to*.

Change *(wo)man that, those that, beings that, people that, many that, someone/one that* to *(who)*

A couple (of) other/hours/days/ weeks/times

Use himself/herself only if the pronoun matches the subject of the sentence

Couldn't help (but) verb OR *couldn't help being*

Between *Ahna*lyn and *me* (not I)

Ending clauses don't always need commas. Search for (, when) (, before) (, unless) to delete.

Alright—the word is *all right*

And then—just use *and*. And don't use *comma then* (, then). That makes a comma splice.

Of the _____—make possessive. Instead of *edge of the field* write *field's edge*.

Towards—the word is *toward*, same for *backward, forward*

USING ALL AND ALL OF

There is often confusion over *all* and *all of*. As a very general guideline, use *all of* when the next word is a pronoun (e.g., us, you, it, him, her). For example:

All of us...

All of you...

All of it...

There is no need to use *all of* for normal nouns. You can just use *all*. For example:

All the soldiers...

All the nurses...

I need all of the chairs.

(The word *chairs* is not a pronoun. This is not wrong, but it is not as succinct as *all the chairs*. The word *of* does not add anything. It is redundant.)

All of the divers returned safely.

(The word *of* is redundant.)

CONTRACTIONS (Please, for the love of everything, make narrative and dialogue natural by using contractions.)

cannot	he would	she would
could not	I am	was not
did not	I have	we will
do not	I will	will not
does not	I would	would not
have not	it is	you have
he is	she is	you will

WHIPLASH WORDS (You don't need these words. When action happens, it just happens.)

all of a sudden
before he knew it
immediately
out of nowhere
quickly
suddenly
swiftly

TIME WARPS (I beg of you, stop making the impossible happen.)

<https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/how-participle-phrases-can-lead-to-time-warps>

SIMILAR WORDS (Double check all these in your script)

~~acknowledgement~~ vs. acknowledgment

a while (noun) vs. awhile (adv.)

alter vs. altar

any more (quantity) vs. anymore (no longer)

breath vs. breathe

bulging vs. bugling

bulk vs. balk

cloths vs. clothes

conscience vs. conscious

course vs. coarse

descent vs. decent

dived vs. dove

dredge vs. drudge

drunk vs. drank

escalade vs. escalate

further vs. farther

grey/gray

hunches vs. haunches

hurdle vs. hurtle

judgment vs. ~~judgement~~

lay vs. lie

lead vs. led

leaped vs. leapt

leech vs. leaching

mediating vs. meditating

nauseous vs. nauseated

passed vs. past

provinces vs. providences

resent vs recent

shallow vs. sallow

shown vs shone

shudder vs shutter

sliver vs. silver

soar vs. sore

sparring vs. sparing

split vs. spilt

statue vs. stature

steal vs. steel

sunk vs. sank

taunt vs. taut

verses vs. versus

EXPRESSIONS (Use a variety of these.)

EYES/BROWS

line appeared between brows
batted lashes
blinked
brows drew together
brows knitted
brows snapped together
corners of eyes crinkled
eyebrows rose
eyebrows waggled
eyelids drooped
eyes blazed with
eyes bored into
eyes burned with
eyes closed
eyes darted
eyes flashed
eyes flickered with
eyes flooded with tears
eyes gleamed
eyes glinted
eyes glistened
eyes lit up
eyes narrowed
eyes sparked with
eyes sparkled
eyes swam with tears
eyes twinkled
eyes welled up
eyes went round
eyes were glossy
eyes were wet
eyes widened
forehead creased
forehead furrowed
forehead puckered
gaped
gave someone a once-over

gawked
gazed
glanced
glanced up to the ceiling
glared
lashes fluttered
leered
lifted an eyebrow
looked heavenward
observed
peered
pupils flared
pupils were dilated
pupils were huge
raised a brow
rolled eyes
scrutinized
shut eyes
sized up
something glowed in eyes
squeezed eyes shut
squinted
stared
studied
surveyed
tears filled eyes
tears ran down cheeks
tears shimmered in eyes
tears shone in eyes
took in the sight of
was fighting back tears
winked

NOSE

nose crinkled
nose wrinkled
nostrils flared
sneered

sniffed
sniffled
stuck nose in the air

MOUTH

beamed
bit lip
chewed on bottom lip
corner of mouth lifted
corner of mouth quirked up
corners of mouth turned up
drew lower lip between teeth
faked a smile
forced a smile
gave a half-smile
gave a lopsided grin
gnashed teeth
grinned
gritted teeth
ground jaw
jaw clenched
jaw dropped
jaw set
jaw tightened
jaw went slack
lips drew back in a snarl
lower lip quivered
lower lip trembled
mouth curved into a smile
mouth fell open
mouth set in a hard line
mouth snapped shut
mouth twisted
mouth twitched
muscle in jaw twitched
nibbled on bottom lip
plastered a smile on face
pouted

pressed lips together
pursed lips
simpered
smile faded
smile slipped
smiled
smirked
snarled

SKIN

blanched
blushed
cheeks turned pink
color drained out of face
face flushed
face reddened

flush crept up face
paled
turned crimson
turned red
turned scarlet
went white

WHOLE FACE

awe transformed face
brightened
expression closed up
expression dulled
expression hardened
face contorted
face twisted
face went blank

fear crossed face
frowned
gave a dirty look
glowered
grimaced
recognition dawned on face
sadness clouded features
scowled
screwed up face
scrunched up face
terror overtook face
vein popped out in neck
went poker-faced
whole face lit up
wincing

SYNONYMS SECTION (Definitely check the ones with *)

MOVEMENTS (Use a variety of these.)

Mouth sounds: hiss, rasp, gasp, grate, wheeze, growl, snarl, snapped, spat/spit, scoff, croak, squawk, squeak, howl, groan, moan, whimper, cry, grumble, gripe, pant, choke, gulp, swallow, cough, whistle, shout, bawl, yell, roar, bellow, thunder, holler, bark, grunt, huff, puff, sigh, whine, exhale

Inward expression: seethe, boil, simmer, rage, rant, rave, storm, fume, smolder

Body moments: wince, grimace, flinch, twitch, shrug, start, shudder, quiver, jerk, jolt, shrink, recoil, convulse, spasm, tremble, shiver, tremor, pang, twinge, dart, stab, prick, shake

Muscle movements: tighten, clench, flex, taut, tense, harden, solid, firmed, rigid, stiffen, grip, grasp, grab, clutch, clasp, hold tightly, seize, press, squeeze, hug, snatch, cling

Body parts: body, head, neck, shoulders, arms, legs, stomach, torso, back, thighs, chest, hands, feet, muscles, skin

Sagging: drop, droop, relax, dangle, hang, flop, loll, slump, wilt, curled, coil, tuck, wind, twine, entwine, wrap, spiral, coil, wreath, twirl, swirl, curve, bend, twist, twist and turn, loop, meander, snake, corkscrew, zigzag, kink

DESCRIPTIONS (Use a variety of these.)

For larger individuals: well built, sturdy, brawny, burly, broad-shouldered, muscular, muscly, rugged, Herculean, bulky, hulking, strapping, heavily built, thickset, stocky, solid, hefty, large, tall, huge, gigantic, fat, stout, portly, plump, fleshy, paunchy, corpulent, obese, full-figured, big-boned, buxom, roly-poly, rotund, well fed, hunky, beefy, husky

ADJECTIVES

Ache: pain, tingle, prickle, cramp, twinge, pang, gnawing, stabbing, stinging, smarting, soreness, tenderness, irritation, discomfort, sorrow, sadness, misery, grief, anguish, suffering, agony, torture, hurt, throb, pound, burn, grieve, long for, yearn for, hunger for, thirst for, hanker for, pine for, itch for, crave, desire, covet, **agony**, torment, affliction, trauma

Adventure: journey, travel, trip, expedition, excursion, tour, trek, voyage, junket, cruise, ride, drive, jaunt, road trip, crossing, passage, flight

Amazing: astonishing, astounding, surprising, stunning, staggering, shocking, startling, stupefying, breathtaking, awesome, awe-inspiring, sensational, remarkable, spectacular, stupendous, phenomenal, extraordinary, incredible, unbelievable, mind-blowing, jaw-dropping, wondrous

Angry: upset, irate, mad, annoyed, cross, vexed, irritated, indignant, irked; furious, enraged, infuriated, in a temper, incensed, raging, fuming, seething, outraged, livid, ticked off, teed off, pissed off, wrathful, wroth, heated, passionate, stormy, bad-tempered, ill-tempered, ill-natured, acrimonious, bitter

Beautiful: attractive, pretty, handsome, good-looking, alluring, prepossessing, lovely, charming, delightful, appealing, engaging, winsome; ravishing, gorgeous, stunning, arresting, glamorous,

bewitching, beguiling, graceful, elegant, exquisite, aesthetic, artistic, decorative, magnificent, divine, drop-dead gorgeous, easy on the eye, killer, cute, foxy, beautiful, comely, fair

Blur: flash, whip, wink, slip, dart

Blush: flush, redden, pink, face burned/ing

Big: large, sizable, substantial, great, huge, immense, enormous, extensive, colossal, massive, mammoth, vast, tremendous, gigantic, giant, monumental, mighty, gargantuan, elephantine, titanic, mountainous, towering, tall, high, lofty, outsize, oversized, goodly, capacious, voluminous, spacious, king-sized, man-sized, family-sized, economy-sized, jumbo, whopping, mega, humongous, monster, astronomical, ginormous, expansive

Burn: be on fire, be alight, be ablaze, blaze, go up, go up in smoke, be in flames, be aflame, smolder, glow, set fire to, set on fire, set alight, light, ignite, touch off, incinerate, scorch, singe, sear, char, blacken, brand, sizzle; scald

Calm: serene, soothe, tranquil, relax, unruffled, unperturbed, unflustered, untroubled; equable, even-tempered; placid, unexcitable, unemotional, composed, self-possessed, unfazed, nonplussed, pacify, placate, mollify, appease

Relaxed: softened, loosen, slacken, unknot, unclench, weaken, lessen, moderate, modify, temper, ease, ease up on, lighten, dilute, weaken, reduce, decrease

Enterprise: undertaking, endeavor, venture, exercise, activity, operation, task, business, proceeding; project, scheme, plan, program, campaign

Excruciating: unbearable, harrowing, agonizing, severe, acute, intense, violent, racking, searing, piercing, stabbing, raging, unendurable

Ground: earth, soil, dirt, clay, loam, turf, clod, sod, land, terrain

Hard: forcefully, forcibly, roughly, powerfully, strongly, heavily, sharply, vigorously, energetically, arduous, strenuous, tiring, fatiguing, exhausting, wearying, back-breaking, grueling, heavy, laborious, difficult, taxing, exacting, testing, challenging, demanding, punishing, tough, formidable, onerous, rigorous, difficult, puzzling, perplexing, baffling, bewildering, mystifying, knotty, thorny, problematic, complicated, complex, intricate, involved, insoluble, unfathomable, impenetrable, incomprehensible, unanswerable

Happy: cheerful, cheery, merry, joyful, jovial, jolly, jocular, gleeful, carefree, untroubled, delighted, smiling, beaming, grinning, in good spirits, in a good mood, lighthearted, pleased, contented, content, satisfied, gratified, buoyant, radiant, sunny, blithe, joyous, beatific, thrilled, elated, exhilarated, ecstatic, blissful, euphoric, overjoyed, exultant, rapturous, in seventh heaven, on cloud nine, walking on air, jumping for joy, jubilant, **glad, grateful, thankful, appreciative, relieved**

Intensity: power, potency, force, severity, ferocity, vehemence, fierceness, harshness, magnitude, greatness, acuteness, extremity, passion, ardor, fervor, fervency, zeal, fire, heat, emotion, eagerness, animation, spirit, vigor, strength, energy, fanaticism

***Look:** admire, appear, attend, behold, consider, contemplate, examine, explore, eye, eyeball, feast, flash, focus, follow, gander, gape, gawk, gaze, glance, glare, glimpse, glower, goggle, heed, hunt, inspect, investigate, look, mark, mind, notice, observe, ogle, over, peek, peep at, peer, pore, probe,

quest, read, regard, research, resemble, rubberneck, scan, scout, scowl, scrutinize, search, see, seek, seem, spot, spy, stare, study, survey, take in, track, up, view, watch

***Moment:** (most cases you can cut and use a more descriptive explanation of what the moment is)
Instant, time, minute, second

Prick: pierce, puncture, stab, perforate, nick, jab, trouble, worry, distress, perturb, disturb, afflict, torment, plague, prey on, gnaw at, sting, pinprick, prickle, pang, twinge

Scared: frightened, afraid, fearful, petrified, terrified, horrified

Shimmer: glint, glisten, twinkle, sparkle, flash, scintillate, gleam, glow, glimmer, glitter, wink

Simple: straightforward, easy, uncomplicated, uninvolved, effortless, painless, undemanding, elementary, plain, unadorned, undecorated, unembellished, unornamented, unelaborate, basic, unsophisticated, no-frills; classic, understated, uncluttered, restrained

Small: little, compact, tiny, miniature, mini, minute, microscopic, minuscule, toy, baby, poky, cramped, boxy, teeny, teensy, itty-bitsy, itty-bitty, pocket-sized, half-pint, little-bitty; wee, short, little, petite, diminutive, elfin, tiny, puny, undersized, stunted, dwarfish, midget, pygmy, wee, teeny, pint-sized, inadequate, meager, insufficient, ungenerous, measly, stingy, mingy, pathetic, stubby, midget, vertically challenged, knee-high to a grasshopper

Smile: grin, smirk, beam, mouth curled

Tall: big, large, huge, towering, colossal, gigantic, giant, monstrous, leggy, long, high, big, lofty, towering, elevated, sky-high

Task: objective, goal, undertaking, job, chore, mission, end design, plan, aim

***Walk/went:** see other paper as well: stroll, saunter, amble, trudge, plod, dawdle, hike, tramp, tromp, slog, stomp, trek, march, stride, sashay, glide, troop, patrol, wander, ramble, tread, prowl, promenade, roam, traipse, proceed, advance, progress, leave, depart, withdraw, set off, start out, get underway, retreat, retire, make off, clear out, run off, run away, flee

Wonderful: marvelous, magnificent, superb, glorious, sublime, lovely, delightful, super, great, fantastic, terrific, tremendous, sensational, incredible, fabulous, fab, out of this world, awesome, magic, wicked, far out, killer, brilliant, peachy, dandy, neat, swell