**How to Revise a First Draft**

Brenda Haas follows the following basic steps, done in the order presented, to wrangle the monster and push forward to something resembling a second draft. These initial steps do NOT cover the fine line editing that a final draft will need.  
  
1. **Properly format.** Using industry standards, format your manuscript. This should include one-inch margins on all sides, a 12-point common font such as Times New Roman, an automatic page number in the header, double spaced lines, etc. Look on writersdigest.com, for reliable guidelines.

2. **Set chapters.** Even if you aren't 100% sure you know in what order they will end up, determine chapters, give them a working title, and insert a hard page break after each, so the chapter becomes its own entity.  
  
3. **Print a hard copy.** There are many benefits to going “old school” and using a hard copy during the first draft editing process. See below.  
  
4. **Post-It.** When reading the first draft for the first time, have handy a red pen and five different colored sticky Post-It notes. While reading, make notes in the margins and use the Post-Its to physically color-code the following initial concerns:

* **Plot:** Plot issues should be noted and dealt with as a first priority.
* **Requires research:** Indicate anything that requires further research. If your story includes something based on reality (city, person, type of job?), and you didn’t do it justice during the first draft, mark the spot with a designated Post-It, so you can easily go back later after doing more research.
* **Character:** Post-It any character concerns, such as stereotyping, ineffective voice/dialogue, poor choice of name (too close to another character's name, not right for the time period), and so on.
* **Pacing:** Use a red Post-It to note any area of manuscript that seems slow. A novel will naturally have highs and lows when it comes to pacing, but too many red notes too close together in the manuscript will literally serve as a visual "red flag" that your pacing needs work.
* **Formatting:** Note lack of chapter headings or paragraph indention, missing punctuation, blank pages, etc. Basically, note anything that looks off about the formatting. Because this is a first draft, this step must be done each time you finalize a new draft, as changes have the potential to create new formatting issues.

5. **Rearrange.** After Post-It editing, rearrange any chapters/scenes to improve plot, pacing, or character introduction. This can be tinkered with harmlessly by shuffling hard copy pages until you like the changes.  
  
6. **Revise.** Before starting digital revisions, save the first draft under a new file name, keeping the original first draft file in case something goes horribly wrong. Using the new version, take care of plot and research edits first, including moving chapters/scenes as determined during the rearrange phase of this process. Work your way through the Post-It notes, by color, allowing you to focus on very specific issues one at a time.