John's Guide to Editing Music

Part I - Double Check the Basics (Correct Notes & Rhythms)

This first step to editing may seem a bit monotonous to the composing/arranging process, but it is ever so important. By "Basics" I mean make sure that you have correct notes and rhythms (the absolute basics). There's nothing more frustrating for a conductor or musician to have to figure out an incorrect pitch or rhythm in the score.

Suggestions for Part I:
I. *Listen to the music* (assuming you're using notation software). Be very discerning with your ears. If it sounds wrong, it probably is…double check it! Have musician friends listen as well!
II. *Go bar by bar*. I know, I know…tedious. You can be double checking this later in the editing process if necessary.
III. *Check your doublings*. In the days of cut and paste, this usually won't be a problem. Make sure parts haven't changed AFTER it was cut and pasted (I'm often very guilty of this). If the woodwind line is supposed to be the same, make sure its the same.

Again, wrong notes and rhythms can kill a composition/arrangement. This MUST be correct!

Part II - Rehearsal Marks and Readability

Here is when you should make sure the performers can easily decipher the music. Nobody wants to play music that is difficult to read. The music should also be easy to rehearse. Whether its a brass quintet, or a 100 piece orchestra with a conductor, the engraving should NOT get in the way of the rehearsal.

Suggestions for Part II:
I. *Rehearsal Marks*. Make sure they are placed logically at the beginning of phrases. Bar numbers help…you can certainly number all the bars with the click of a button. This also helps educators when they go to festivals.
II. *Make sure the "Road Map" is clear*. If there are repeats, endings, coda, etc., make sure they are easy to read.
III. *Look at the layout* of the score and parts (you should double check this again at the end to make sure dynamics, articulations, etc. didn't mess with the layout). However, don't send out music that looks bad…another huge frustration.

Part III - Expression Markings (articulations, dynamics, etc)

This phase is my last phase of editing music. I always save the markings for notes and phrases for last because an arrangement *can* work without these markings. You can also decide how specific to be. Look at a Frank Ticheli score for example, he tends to be *very* specific with dynamics and articulations.

Suggestions for Part III:
I. *Major Markings*: Now is the time to check markings for style, expression, tempo, tempo changes, etc. Make sure these are laid out neatly and are easy to read for the conductor and musicians.
II. *Check your articulations*: First check the style marking. Then decide where articulations are needed. If this isn't your own score, make sure you put exactly what the composer/arranger intends. If all the notes need accents, write the accents. Pour over the score and make sure articulations line up vertically (from instrument to instrument)
III. *Check Dynamics*: These can be easy to forget in places. If you don't want to leave a section open to interpretation by the conductor, make sure it is marked. Be as specific as you need.

Lastly, I suggest printing the score and going over it with a pen to mark anything you may have missed. Scores tend to look very different on paper than on a computer. Hopefully this guide helps a little! Good luck editing!