

START

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**MANUSCRIPT REPAIR
& REWRITE SESSIONS**

*Terms to Print Out and Keep Handy
as You Watch These Editing Videos*

JERRY B. JENKINS™

Note: This material is covered in depth in my 90-minute Live Online Workshop #1, [How to Become a Ferocious Self-Editor](#).

At some point in one of the videos you'll hear me say:

Use **active voice vs. passive voice**.

Not: The book was read to the children by the teacher.

Rather: The teacher read the book to the children.

Avoid **asides**. Stay with the story, the action.

Avoid mannerisms of **attribution**. Have people say things, not wheeze, gasp, laugh, grunt, snort, reply, retort, exclaim, or declare them. Sometimes they can sigh, whisper, manage, or breathe them, but go easy on such descriptions. And avoid attribution altogether by describing action first, if you can.

Avoid **began...** to laugh, to cry, to shout, to run. Just say it: laughed, cried, shouted, ran...

Tell your story **chronologically**; avoid flashbacks; be sparing with back story; let it come naturally.

Avoid **clichés**—and not just words and phrases, but also **situational clichés** like:

- Starting your story with the main character waking to an alarm clock; describing himself while standing before a mirror
- Having future love interests literally bump into each other at first meeting
- Having a shot ring out during an armed standoff, only to have the shooter be a surprise third party who kills the one who had the drop on the hero
- Having the seemingly dead or unconscious or incapacitated villain spring back to life just when we thought the hero had finally saved the day...

Just hint at **dialect**.

Cut dialogue to the bone.

Avoid the **dream cliché**; it's been used to death and takes all the air from the balloon of your story.

Avoid **echoes**, using the same word in consecutive sentences.

Give the reader credit. Trust her to get it. You don't need to tell her a character knocked on the closed door. Or that he came in through the door.

Avoid the **heart and breath clichés**: *pounded, raced, thudded, hammered; gasped, sucked wind, came short*...let the reader have those experiences; get your character into a rough enough situation, and the reader will share his distress and know what he's experiencing without your having to describe it.

Avoid **hedging verbs** like *smiled slightly, almost laughed, frowned a bit*, etc. The character either does it or doesn't.

Just say it; avoid the language of *written-ese*.

Less is more. Tighten, tighten, tighten. You'll find it always adds power to your prose.

Avoid the term **literally**—when you mean **figuratively**. *Literally* means something actually happened.

- “I literally died when I heard that.”
- “My eyes literally fell out of my head.”
- “I was literally climbing the walls.”

Avoid similar character **names**. In fact, avoid even the same first initials.

Omit **needless words**—the rule that follows its own advice.

Choose the **normal word** over the fancy one. Showing off your vocabulary or flowery turn of phrase is **author intrusion** and gets in the way of your content and message.

One plus one equals one-half (1+1=1/2). Good writing is a thing of strong nouns and verbs, not adjectives. Use them sparingly. Novelist and editor Sol Stein says the power of your words is diminished by not picking just the better of two adjectives.

Avoid **on-the-nose writing**—a Hollywood term for writing that exactly mirrors real life without adding to the story.

Limit yourself to a single **Point of View (POV)** character for every scene. Failing to do so is one of the most common errors beginning writers make.

Be **precise**: it's worth mulling over just the right word in every instance. It's what writers do.

Avoid mannerisms of **punctuation, timesteps, and sizes**. "He...was...**DEAD!**" doesn't make a character any more dramatically expired than "He was dead."

Avoid **quotation marks around words used in another context**, as if the reader wouldn't "get it" otherwise. (Notice how subtly insulting that is.)

Realization (change of mind or course) must always be motivated by action, not thought or coming to one's senses.

Resist the urge to explain (RUE). Marian was mad. She pounded the table.

"George, you're going to drive me crazy," she said, angrily. [delete 'angrily']

"You can do it!" Bill encouraged. [change 'encouraged' to 'said']

"I disagree," Madison argued. [change 'argued' to 'said']

If Marian pounds the table and chooses those words, we don't need to be told she's mad.

If George says she can do it, we know he was encouraging.

If Madison disagrees, we know she's arguing.

Show, don't tell.

Showing: Sue turned up her collar and turned her face against the icy wind.

Telling: Sue was cold.

John dropped onto the couch. "I'm beat."

Not: John was exhausted. He dropped onto the couch and exclaimed tiredly, "I'm beat."

"I hate you," Jill said, narrowing her eyes.

Not: "I hate you," Jill retorted ferociously.

Let your choice of words imply whether characters are grumbling, etc. If it's important that they sigh or laugh, separate the action from the dialogue: Jim sighed. "I just can't take any more."

Specifics add the ring of truth.

The 4:06 train was two minutes late, Marge thought as she stood drying dishes before the west-facing window that looked out on the Burlington-Northern tracks. She wondered if there had been a problem at the depot at Main and Walnut that would keep Jim from getting home on time.

Avoid too much **stage direction**, describing every action of every character in each scene, what they're doing with each hand, etc. Or describing what a character is doing with every limb, digit, and appendage.

Avoid **state-of-being verbs**: *is, am, are, was, etc.*

Not: There was a man standing on the train platform.

Rather: A man stood on the train platform.

Avoid **subtle redundancies**, like:

"She nodded her head in agreement." The last four words could be deleted.

"He clapped his hands." What else would he clap?

"She shrugged her shoulders." What else?

"He blinked his eyes." Same question.

"They heard the sound of a train whistle." The sound of could be deleted.

Don't use dialogue to **"tell."**

"You're just saying that because Tom dumped you when the new girl showed up and he wanted to be the first to take her out..." Dialogue must first sound natural.

Let information emerge normally.

Avoid **telling what's not happening**.

“He didn't respond.”

“She didn't say anything.”

“The room never got quiet.”

Remain consistent in **tense**.

Usually delete the word *that*.

Develop a **thick skin**. Every piece of published writing is a duet between editor and writer, not a solo.

Avoid **throat-clearing**, an editor's term for a story or chapter that finally begins after a page or two of scene setting and background. Get on with it.

Avoid introducing **too many characters** too early.

Avoid the words **up** and **down**—unless they're really needed. He rigged [up] the device. She sat [down] on the couch.

Avoid **unnecessary surprises** (age, gender, location, period). Unless the surprise is intended, a reader shouldn't be puzzled to discover such things.

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