

QUICK TIPS FOR TIGHTENING PROSE

NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of tips for your final stage of revision when you polish your manuscript. Please wait to do these line level edits until you have a complete draft and have revised the entire project for story, character, and plot. Resist the urge to tweak as you write the first draft (if you can)!

TO STREAMLINE LANGUAGE AT THE LINE LEVEL

- Do a search for each word you commonly use (and abuse). Try to cut these words as much as possible from the text. CHALLENGE: Try to use each word less than five times in the manuscript. *Bonus points if you can eliminate it altogether.* Some words to look for: just, really, maybe, only, still, even, ever, never, when, then, ...
- Do a search for adverbs. Ask yourself; is that adverb ~~really~~ enhancing the sentence (and story)? If not, cut. For example, don't use "suddenly." Just make the action sudden.
- Do a search for descriptions that appear frequently in the text. Think of that phrase as a placeholder/opportunity to vary your language as you polish your manuscript. CHALLENGE: Use each specific description only once.
- Do a search for gestures that appear frequently in the text. Even if your character has a tic, try not to use a particular gesture more than once or twice. Or share the character's thoughts via narrative instead. CHALLENGE: Use a gesture that specifically fits the moment in the story, the character's mood, etc.
- Search for phrases like "I saw," "he thought," "she turned," "I glanced," etc. Do not use the character to create a reiterative lens. Such phrases can feel self-conscious in the writing, and it's unnecessary. In most cases, you can simply cut the phrase, and the sentence will be stronger and tighter. For example: I saw the girl carve a letter "G" on her desk. → The girl carved a letter "G" on her desk. (We know the protagonist witnessed the act.) TIP: Use such phrases to help you access the story as you write the first draft, then cut later.
- Look for patterns in your writing like similar sentence structure, paragraph structure, or even chapter ends. Rewrite those places that become repetitive in structure and cadence.
- Review each line of dialogue to make sure it achieves the following (and if not, revise or cut): characterization and conflict. Use dialogue sparingly and make it count. It should be clear from the dialogue which character is speaking. In YA, use the same approach with profanity. Less is more. Use it sparingly for great effect.
- When revising picture books, look for any phrase that could be shown via illustration. Ask yourself: does that detail need to be included in the text? If not, cut. For example, don't use describe the character's appearance. Let the illustration do the work instead.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR REVISION

- Read your work aloud. Read it out loud after every revision. Have someone else read it to you. You will hear what you can't see.
- Save the passages you cut from the main project into an "Extras" file or a "Cut" file. You never know when you might want to use it again.
- When you finish revising for the day, insert [START HERE]. Try not to read from the beginning of the chapter/section/page, so you continue to revise forward and don't end up rewriting the beginning over and over again.

Now seize the day, go forth, and revise! You got this! Good luck!

REVISION: SHARPENING YOUR PROSE: Tip Sheet

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