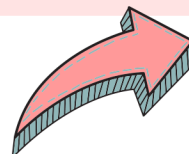


Self-Editing Tips

Conduct a count in your manuscript of these commonly overused words. You may have to rethink a sentence or even a scene, but variety is the spice of life. Entertain us! The lack of variety will catch the keen reader's eye and we don't want them to have a single reason to walk away from your Very Awesome Book.

VERBS	BODY BITS	FILLERS (AND NOT THE GOOD KIND!)
gaze, gazed, gazing	heart, heartbeat	just
turn, turned, turning	eyes	that (if not a pronoun, it can be excessive; try your sentence without it)
look, looked, looking	stomach	there (especially with sentence starts)
smile, smiled, smiling	throat	some
furrowed	lungs	OTHER WORDS & CLICHÉS
whisper, whispered, whispering	chest	awkward
mutter, murmur	pulse	all of a sudden, suddenly
breathe, breathed, breathing	adrenaline	enough
eye rolling	eyebrows, brows	every fiber of my being
hands on hips	lips (and biting of lips)	like a kid on Christmas
arms crossing over chest	breath	



From ProWriting Aid

Glue words

The most common words in English, including, but not limited to:

in	of	think	is
on	to	some	this
the	there	new	from
was	will	make	with
for	be	much	have
that	what	every	an
said	get	should	by
a	go	just	it
if	like	and	asked



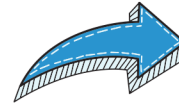
Passive voice:

Always look for the strongest verb choices. Example:

Passive: I **was walking** across the street.

Active: I **walked** across the street.

Industry standard
style guide



Chicago Manual of Style, **Section 5.118: Grammar and Usage / Active and passive voice**

Voice shows whether the **subject acts** (active voice) or **is acted on** (passive voice)—that is, whether the subject performs or receives the action of the verb. Only transitive verbs are said to have voice.

The clause *the judge levied a \$50 fine* is in the **active voice** because the subject *judge* is acting.

But *the tree's branch was broken by the storm* is in the **passive voice** because the subject *branch* does not break itself—it is acted on by the prepositional object *storm*.

The passive voice is always formed by joining an inflected form of *to be* (or, in colloquial usage, *get*) with the verb's past participle.

As a matter of style, passive voice {*the matter will be given careful consideration*} is typically, though not always, inferior to active voice {*we will consider the matter carefully*}.

The choice between active and passive voice may depend on which point of view is desired.

For instance, *the mouse was caught by the cat* describes the mouse's experience, whereas *the cat caught the mouse* describes the cat's. What is important is to be able to identify passive voice reliably.

Remember that the mere presence of a be-verb does not necessarily signal passive voice. For example, *he is thinking about his finances* isn't in the passive voice; it's just a be-verb plus a present participle.

Adverbs:

Adverb check! Have you stitched your sentences together with a million adverbs? Remember, **less is more!** You don't need a lot. Think of adverbs like salt—a little is OK, a sprinkle, a dash. Too much, and you're looking at high blood pressure and swollen fingers. And it's tough to type with swollen fingers.

With dialogue tags: "How dare you!" she screamed angrily.

We already know she's pissed by what she's said. Adding *angrily* onto the end of your dialogue tag is unnecessary. Sometimes, all it takes is a stronger verb. **Let the VERB (and the dialogue) do the heavy lifting.**

"The road to hell is paved with adverbs."
- Stephen King

Characters:

Analyze every character:



- Do they fulfill a **purpose**?
- Do they move the story **forward**?
- Are they only acting as a plot device or convenience to the plot in a manner that **doesn't serve** the story?
- Would it work better to blend two (or more) characters into one to hone and **sharpen their trajectory and purpose** in the story?

Every character, every scene, every action should move the story forward.

If you are stuck in the story, go back to your character and examine what could be missing:

1. What does she **WANT** (external goal/explicit desire)?
2. What does she **NEED** (internal goal/internal desire)? The want and need should be two different things.
3. What is her **OBJECTIVE or GOAL**? What does she hope to accomplish?
4. What are the **STAKES**? What happens if she fails? What happens if she succeeds?
5. Who or what is/are the **OBSTACLES** in her way? (Note: This isn't always the antagonist.)
6. What is your character's **ARC**? How does she change from beginning to end (for better OR for worse)?

**“Remember the holy grail of storytelling:
Every single scene,
every single line,
everything in your manuscript
should move the story
forward.”**

Tiffany Yates Martin

intuitive
EDITING
A Creative & Practical
Guide to Revising
Your Writing
TIFFANY YATES MARTIN

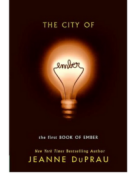
foxprint
WORKING WRITER COURSES

SEVEN BOOKS

The graphic features a background of a road stretching into the distance under a blue sky. It includes a portrait of Tiffany Yates Martin, the cover of her book 'Intuitive Editing', and a logo for 'foxprint WORKING WRITER COURSES' featuring a fox in a space helmet. The 'SEVEN BOOKS' logo is also present.

Showing vs. telling:

Jim Thomas, editor, former head of Random House Children's Publishing, NYC:



Showing is dramatizing character interaction.

Showing is illustrating character and setting. That is context, simply showing what's happening. It functions to draw readers into the narrative. It helps with suspension of disbelief. It engages readers and leaves room for readers to get involved in deciding what the meaning or relevance or significance of a passage or character or a moment might be. Showing is designing narrative that welcomes readers in, embraces them, and engages them.

On the other side: Telling is when the narrative shortcuts that process and delivers conclusions into readers' laps.

Consider these examples. Which is more evocative?

She was mad.

vs.

She picked up the vase and threw it across the room, narrowly missing his head.

Dialogue:

- Does your dialogue sound stilted or “on the nose”?
- Does each character have a unique voice/style, or do they sound too much alike when they speak?
- Did you include nonverbal communication? Inferences, omissions, glances, body language?
- With that said, are you relying too heavily on crossed arms, eye rolls, and hands on hips?

From Les Edgerton, multipublished novelist and author of *HOOKED*, a craft book:

“

*The worst form that a dialogue exchange can take is in the form of a Q&A. On-the-nose dialogue. Dialogue becomes even worse when it becomes an **info dump**. Try always to avoid direct question and answer responses. It's one of the biggest killers of effective dialogue.*

*The very best dialogue consists of the **subtext**.*

One of the requirements of good dialogue is that it gives the appearance of real speech, not that it imitates it. Real speech is full of ers and ums and hesitations and going off on tangents and dozens of other elements that, if included would destroy its effectiveness.

”

More about adverb-free dialogue tags:

Keep it simple, sweetheart. Use **says/said/asked** as much as possible—it's not fancy, but it does the job without any fanfare and without calling attention to itself.



SAID is ENOUGH:

From  ProWritingAid

Dialogue tags are words like “**said**” and “**asked**” that show the reader who is doing the talking. The problem is that **dialogue tags also distract from the dialogue itself**, especially if they are nonstandard dialogue tags like “**shouted,**” “**whispered,**” “**repeated,**” “**ventured,**” and more.

Instead of using dialogue tags to tell the emotions of the character, you should **show their emotions through their actions and dialogue.**



On sex scenes:



Sex without progression is erotica. You can still craft a proper beginning-middle-end-type narrative with erotic elements, but if it's all sex, it's not technically a romance novel. Sometimes sex scenes change things between characters, or maybe it's just sex and nothing more—simply a release for the character that has no bearing on the overarching plot.

However, romance novels are about the connection between the characters. Does the sex move their relationship forward or backward?

It's perfectly acceptable (and rather profitable) to write romance stories with a lot of sex, but not just for gratuitous purposes. Sex scenes need to show growth or be a catalyst for taking the relationship to the next level. Typically, romance readers expect that **HEA** (happily ever after), whether that's at the end of your standalone novel or the last book in a series, so sex should serve the story, not be included on the page without context. Otherwise, it cheapens the narrative and doesn't reveal character or arc.

Write whatever steam level YOU are comfortable with, and your readers will find you!



On describing clothing for your characters:

When describing your character's choice in clothing, **less is more**. Sure, readers like to know that your main character is wearing a pink gauzy top with a purple sash and blue jeans with black knee-high boots paired with a Prada bag, the one with the little tassels along the straps. **But is all that description slowing the pace?**

Describe your character's wardrobe choices once or twice to give the reader an idea of their style.

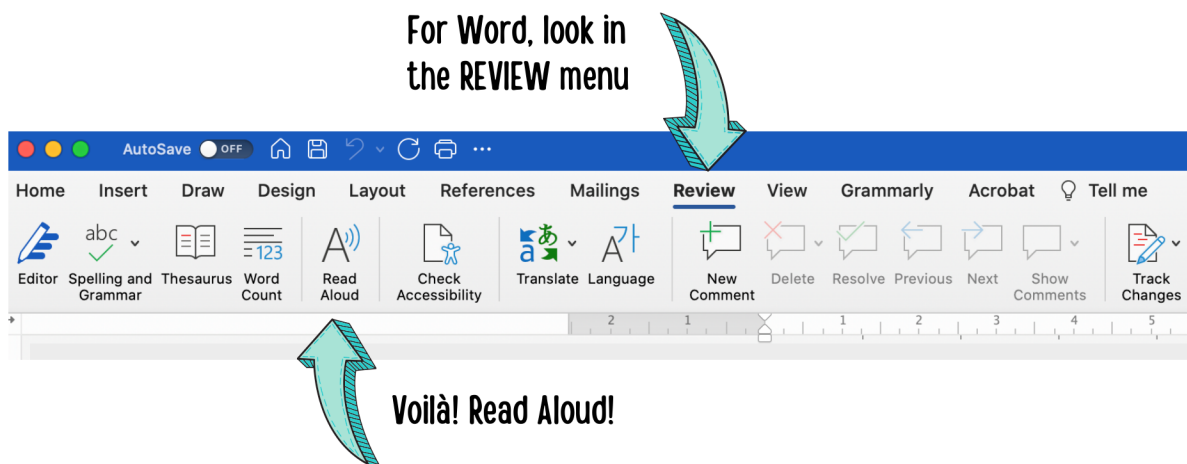
From then on, keep it short and sweet. If you're writing a fashion-centric novel, by all means, the style choices make a HUGE difference to the story. If a character's wardrobe adds to the scene or to the characterization, then have at it.

In romance and/or erotica, the clothing will often be important to the scene—her red dress, his very tight pants, her lacy, crotchless undies. The clothing means something—it's not just fluff or filler. (I always think of the scene in *The Incredibles* where Edna Mode is absolutely dead set against CAPES. “No capes!” When they're talking about clothes in this scene, it's because the capes can lead to the character's demise, which would steer the story in a very different direction.)

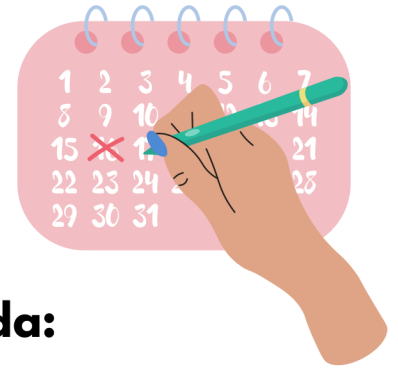
It's OK to describe your character's wardrobe if it enlivens the scene, but take your foot off the gas if you think it is slowing the pace. And trust your readers—let their imaginations do some of the work!

Practical tips:

- When you're all done, read your book **out loud** to yourself (or your friend, writing partner, spouse, cat, dog, or the cover model you have tied up in your basement). Some people prefer to use the text-to-speech function in Word so they can hear the sentences aloud. It's crazy how much this helps.

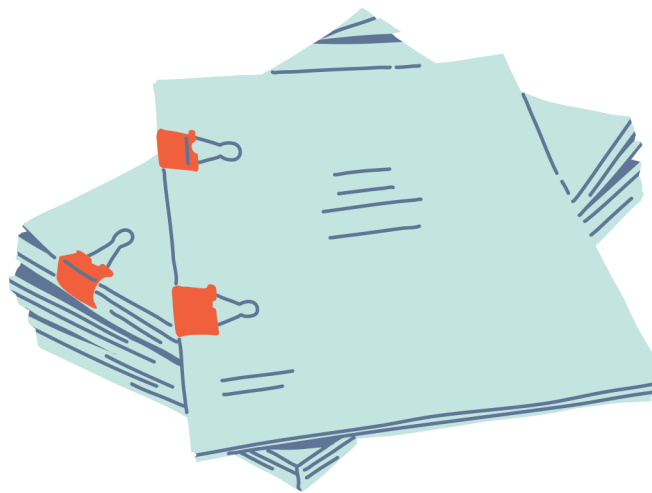


- After the book is finished, put it aside for a week or two or a month. Distance brings objectivity.
- Best to dive into your edits after you've finished a whole draft. Sure, you can edit as you go along, but for an actual editorial round, having a completed first draft is recommended.



Pointers from my editor at HarperCollins Canada:

- You have to hack your way through the jungle of possibilities. When in doubt, **take the shortest, simplest route.**
- **The story's focus needs to be on your protagonist and their current dilemma.** Nailing down the backstory is all about being clear in your own mind about the events that brought all of these characters to the place they are now so that you can weave their history into the present action with confidence, whether doling it out through exposition or by planting little clues for your protagonist to discover.
- **Be absolutely merciless with taking out words and lines that aren't necessary.** If it doesn't further the story, omit.



For more great resources, visit the Learning Library at SGA Books:
<https://www.sgabooks.com/learning-library>

