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How to Tighten Your Fiction Writing

1) **Be deliberate with your words- longer isn't always better or more descriptive**

Instead of: The lovely sunset was orange and red. It reflected off the clouds and lit up the sky.

Try: Streaks of orange and red illuminated the sky.

2) **Limit adverb/verb combinations**

Instead of: Shelby angrily shut the door with a loud bang.

Try: Shelby slammed the door.



Be careful when using adverbs after the word "said"- show the reader the action instead of telling in this instance (ie. he said *knowingly*, she said *longingly*)



Hint: Highlight all instances of "ly" in your story (if using Microsoft Word, use Find and check "Highlight all items found in", then **highlight** your choice of color on Toolbar)



3) Check for "weedy" words/phrases such as **but, that, just, felt like, thought I might, seemed to, well, then, very, so, really, was, were, had**. Weedy words "grow" in your writing and need to be weeded out during revisions (or as you refine your writing style).

4) **Pay attention to your revision style:** Two different revision styles: Get your story out- then go back and revise **OR** revise as you go, but don't forget to give it a fresh pair of eyes (yours or an encouraging editor or critique partner) after you're finished and have given yourself a break. Look for: spelling errors, typos, grammar (<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>), and word flow. **Be simple, be clear.**



Hint: Focus on specific details during the passes through your novel. You're more likely to miss something if you try to do too much at a time.



5) **Read your writing out loud.** You can catch a lot of mistakes, typos, and overall style problems by doing this. You can also find things spell-check may not, such as words that are words but that you didn't mean to put there (ie. "there" instead of "their", "off" instead of "of", etc.

6) **Check dialogue tags.** Pay attention to what verbs behave as tags- say, remark, declare- but not laugh or sigh.

Example: "I'll get the water hose," he laughed. (Not OK. The laughter is a character movement from the dialogue tag.) "I'll get the water hose," he said, laughing. OR "I'll get the water hose." He laughed. (from Stephanie Bond's Amazon Shorts- Self-Editing, Article Series 1)

7) **Print out your pages and read from an actual paper copy.**



- 8) **Cut out anything that does not advance your story.** This is where a detailed outline may come in handy. Ask yourself: Is it background written because that part of the story is necessary, but not revealed within the action? How often do you have to give background? If it happens often, you may be padding your writing with details that could otherwise be left out or woven into the actual story.



A note about Prologues: use for key information that doesn't follow the time flow of the rest of your book

(from <http://blog.writersdigest.com/qq/When+To+Use+A+Prologue.aspx>)

Ditch your prologue if...

1. ...it seems boring even to you and you can hardly wait to get to Chapter One.
2. ...it's a lengthy narrative of back story that could more effectively be doled out in small bits as the story progresses.
3. ...all it does is create atmosphere without having much to do with the story.

(from <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/3-reasons-to-ditch-your-novels-prologue/>)

- 9) **Set yourself up for success:** Proof and revise when you are at your best- not when you're tired or in a hurry. Make your "proofing" environment as enjoyable as possible.



- 10) **Practice makes perfect.** ☺ The more you practice "writing tight" the less you'll have to think about it. Tight writing is essential for selling your popular fiction as it'll be evident to editors from the first page of your novel if it is done well (or not).

Resources:

<http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>

<http://www.fictionaddiction.net/articles/contributed/rumpfwriting.html>

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Tips-for-Aspiring-Writers---Tighten-Your-Writing&id=1157431>

<http://www.googobits.com/articles/2468-five-simple-steps-to-tighten-writing-skills.html>

<http://www.writing-world.com/fiction/popek.shtml>

<http://marilynnbyerly.com/blurb.html>