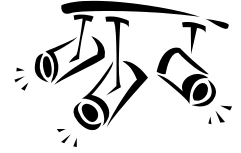




NOW PLAYING: The Revision Show!



Starring YOU.

Produced & directed by author Julie Berry.
www.julieberrybooks.com



How do authors revise?

Writing a story is like staging a play. First, a playwright writes a script. Is the play ready to perform yet? No way! The director must find actors to bring the show alive. Then, the actors must rehearse over and over again to turn that boring paper script into performance magic.

Your rough draft is your script. Rehearsal, or revision, is where the magic comes in.

I. We look first for **STYLE**. (~~Not GRAMMAR RULES or SPELLING.~~)



Grammar and spelling are important, but they're the final step of the revision process. They fix small, local blunders. Revision looks at the big picture – the entire draft, not just small parts of it. The revising writer asks, what parts are working? Make them better! What parts aren't working? Fix or cut them.

Once all the right parts are in place, then it makes sense to check grammar and spelling. That's why writers save those steps for last.

What can you do to buff up your manuscript's style?

A. Eliminate obvious problems.

1. **Confusing parts.** Stories can be mysterious, but they should not confuse the reader. One way to spot confusing bits you might have missed is to **READ YOUR DRAFT OUT LOUD.**

Try this example. Can you spot the confusion?

Purple monkeys lounged in the orange trees. Fur covered and sleepy, I waited for one to fall.



Were the trees orange? Or did they grow oranges? _____

Who is covered with fur? The monkeys, or the writer? _____

What does the writer hope will fall? An orange, or a monkey? _____

Sometimes our ears zap messages to our brains better than our eyes do. Always read aloud slowly.



2. **Fluffy words.** First drafts are usually full of words and phrases that don't say much. By cutting them out we tighten the writing.

Four FLUFF FINDING guidelines:

- a. **WORDY:** Does the sentence use too many words? Could we say the same thing with fewer words?
- b. **REPETITIVE:** Does it repeat information we already know? Does it reuse the same words a lot?
- c. **THROAT-CLEARING:** Are there phrases in the writing that add nothing? Think of phrases we use while talking when we don't know what else to say, such as: "Ummm," "Yeah," "I mean," and "Ya know." Empty, fluffy words and phrases often creep into our sentences. Cut them!
- d. **MEANINGLESS:** Does it include details that just don't matter at all -- things that are true but irrelevant?

A fluffy example:

Cassie wanted a puppy more than anything else in the whole wide world. She wanted a puppy so badly that she went to bed every single night dreaming about puppies. She would wake up in the morning, lying on her soft blue sheets with the poofy cloud pattern on them that she had picked out herself at Target, and think about the puppy in her dream. In her dream, she petted the puppy's silky spotted fur. She gazed into her puppy's big brown eyes and watched him gaze back into her eyes, which were also brown. Next she would get out of bed and write her dream into her pink journal with the green and purple hearts. She would draw a picture of her spotted puppy, also in her pink journal, but on a different page. She would label her drawing, "Cassie's Puppy." Then she would go downstairs and pour a bowl of Honeycomb cereal for breakfast.

PRACTICE: Go through the example, above, and draw lines through parts you think could be cut. Write "W" for WORDY, "R" for REPETITIVE, "TC" for THROAT-CLEARING, and "M" for MEANINGLESS.

Draw boxes around parts you think could be condensed and edited to be less fluffy. If you can think of ways to trim the fluff, write them above the boxes.

See sample, below:

W, TC

Cassie wanted a puppy more than anything else ~~in the whole wide world~~. She wanted
one (R) ~~dreamed every night~~
a puppy so badly that she went to bed every single night dreaming about puppies.

3. Lazy, weak, clunky verbs.

Verbs are the most important words in our language. They can be sentences all by themselves. (Stop! Eat! Celebrate!) Verbs power sentences the way engines power cars. So we want our verb engines to be strong, powerful engines in tip-top shape, not weak, lazy, bored engines that don't feel like starting up.

Here are some techniques for powering up your verbs. We can sum them up in three words:

 **strong, short, active** 

- a. Use more **strong** verbs, and fewer “be” and “have” verbs. We need the verbs “to be” and “to have,” but in writing, they're wimpy. Writers try to use them as little as possible. We try instead to choose strong verbs that do more. Here, to refresh your memory, is a peek at some common forms of “to be” and “to have.”

<i>The verb “To be” (present)</i>	<i>The verb “To be” (past)</i>		<i>The verb “To have” (present)</i>	
I am	I was	we were	I have	we have
you are	you were	you were	you have	you have
he/she/it is	he/she/it was	they were	he/she/it has	they have

Okay, now you know the verbs “to be” and “to have.” As verbs go, they're pretty boring. Total vanilla. I'll prove it.

Circle the verbs that sound stronger: 1. To be, or to smash? 2. To have, or to explode?

The answers are obvious. But don't we sometimes need to describe *being* and *having* in our stories? Yes, we do. But we can do it with stronger verbs. We sneak around “to be” and “to have” using more interesting, descriptive sentence structures. See below.

Weak verbs (to be, to have)	Strong verbs energize your sentences.
I <u>m</u> blonde.	My blonde hair <u>grows</u> thick and frizzy.
Marylou <u>is</u> smart about dinosaurs.	Marylou <u>knows</u> everything there is to know about dinosaurs, and then some.
Ralph <u>was</u> a big mean bully.	Ralph's rotten stunts <u>forced</u> us pathetic kids at the playground to fall to our knees and beg him for mercy. <i>(Fall and beg aren't the main verbs, but they're active, too.)</i>
I <u>have</u> grapes for a snack.	I <u>eat</u> grapes. I <u>snack</u> on grapes. I <u>pop</u> grapes into my mouth one by one and <u>crush</u> them against the roof of my mouth.

- b. Choose **short** verbs that use fewer words. A one-word verb is short. A two-word verb: not short. A three-word verb: really not short.

CHALLENGE: How short are the verbs in this passage?

They were now sitting on a park bench, and Josh had his arm around her while Amber was leaning on his shoulder.

First, find the verbs. Draw boxes around them.

They were sitting now on a park bench, and Josh had his arm around her while Amber was leaning on his shoulder.

Look at these verbs. Are they **short**? One of them is. Is the short one **strong**? Not really. Can you rewrite the sentence using shorter, stronger verbs? Note: it's okay to change other words if it helps you use the best verbs.

Weak verbs and long verb phrases make the writing feel less confident. Strong, short verbs sound sure of themselves. Here are a few more examples.

Passive, wimpy, clunky verbs	vs.	Strong, shorter, decisive verbs
I was eating a sandwich.	vs.	I ate a sandwich.
Blake is wishing he could be flying instead of walking .	vs.	Blake wishes he could fly instead of walk .

- c. Pick **active** verbs, where the **subject of the sentence** does the doing. The **subject** is the person or thing *at the beginning* of the sentence. Writers want sentence subjects to perform the action of the verb, instead of allowing subject to be acted upon.

Passive subject sentence	vs.	Active subject sentence
A sandwich was eaten by me.	vs.	I ate a sandwich.
Rufus will never be forgotten.	vs.	We will never forget Rufus.

What's the trick to help you recognize active verbs?

1. Find the main verb in the sentence. ("Ate" in our first active example above.)
2. Ask yourself, who or what is doing the action in this verb? ("I" in our example. "I ate a sandwich.")
3. Does the who-or-what that did the action come before the first verb? If YES, it's active. ("I ate a sandwich.") If it comes after, it's passive. ("The sandwich was eaten by me.")

4. Wandering verb tenses: The tense of a verb tells us whether action happens in the past, the present, or the future. *Keep your verb tenses consistent.* For each phrase and each sentence in your draft, ask yourself, is this present, past, or something else? Use the one tense that fits your story best. Most stories are told in present or past tense. It's hard to tell a future story that hasn't happened yet!

CHALLENGE: FIX THIS

Here's an excerpt for you to fix. Underline the past-tense sentences. Squiggle-underline the present tense sentences. Do you have both kinds? Which tense would fit best? In the box, rewrite the paragraph so the tenses all match.

Example:

So it was time for us to leave Alabama. Oh! Let me introduce myself first. My name is Marlene Wilkins, and I'm going to Paris, France with my friends Brianne, Marie, and Veronica, my dog Froufrou, and my cousin Jacqueline. Little did we know about the adventure ahead of us.

Here's an example for you to try:

He didn't even know his own name. Did he have a family? Did he have parents who loved him? He doesn't know. He wished he had a picture, a clue, anything to help him remember his former life. One day he wakes up and he thinks, "Jeffrey." But what does it mean? Is Jeffrey his name or someone else's? He huddled under the blankets and wondered.

Rewrite the example above using one consistent verb tense – past or present, whatever you prefer.

said

screamed

whispered

~~quipped~~

asked

SHOUTED

exclaimed

5. **Superfluous speech tags.** Speech tags are used in dialogue to tell us what someone has said, and how they say it. They're useful, but easy to overdo. Sometimes you don't need them at all. When you use them, keep them simple. "Said" and "asked" are just about all you'll ever need. It's great to find juicy synonyms for describing words, but for speech tags, let's keep it simple.

We want speech tags to be almost invisible. We don't want them to draw attention to themselves. (P.S.: True confession: I loathe "quipped." I can't help it.)

CHALLENGE: Find the speech tags in both excerpts, and circle them.

EXAMPLE ONE:

"Where are you going?" I asked.

Josie glared at me. "None of your beeswax."

That girl. She drove me bonkers. "Is this about the sweater still? Get over it."

Her dark eyes flashed. "Easy for you to say," she said. "You've got all your memories of Gramma.

All those summers you spent with her at the lake. All I had was a sweater."

"Look, I'm sorry," I said. "It was rude of me to borrow it without asking."

"More than rude," Josie said, "and you know it."

EXAMPLE TWO:

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

Josie glared at me. "None of your beeswax," she declared.

That girl. She drove me bonkers. "Is this about the sweater still? Get over it," I yelled.

Her dark eyes flashed. "Easy for you to say," she hissed. "You've got all your memories of Gramma.

All those summers you spent with her at the lake. All I had was a sweater."

"Look, I'm sorry," I pleaded. "It was rude of me to borrow it without asking."

"More than rude," Josie snapped, "and you know it."

One of these excerpts uses simple speech tags, and not many of them. The other uses fussier tags, and lots of them.

Place a check in the box next to the example you think feels more like part of a real book.



II. Good job, Stylish Revisers! Now what?

We've gotten rid of big problems. We've given our manuscript a bath and washed off the grime.

It's time to dress up your manuscript in style! LOOK FOR:

1. Word choice. Writers play Goldilocks when choosing words. Remember her? The chairs were too big, too tall, or just right? The porridge was too hot, too cold, or just right? The beds too soft, too cold ... you see where I'm going.



Words can be too boring, too fancy, or just right; too loud, too quiet, or just right. What's "right" will be different for each poem, essay, or story. But choosing the right word still matters. The great American novelist Mark Twain famously said:



"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."

(Nice mustache, Mr. Twain!)

We don't want our words to draw attention to themselves as words. We want our readers to say, "That was a great story!" Not, "Those were some fancy-pants words you used!" But we still hope to make our writing clever and interesting by using lightning words.

Guidelines for choosing ~~LIGHTNING WORDS~~ and not lightning bug words:

1. Are you absolutely sure you know what each word means and you're using it correctly? Check the dictionary! Read the definition. Is it definitely the right word?
2. Look at your sentences, and find their important words. Do any of them feel a little flat, dull, or boring? Look those words up in a thesaurus and see if any of the synonyms has more zing.
3. Have you used any super-elaborate, complex, or frilly words that you should tone down and simplify?

CHALLENGE: **FIX THIS!** Underline lightning bug words, and brainstorm lightning substitutions.

A kind, beautiful princess named Ropencil lived in a tower in a far-away corner of the kingdom. A mean witch kept her prisoner there. Ropencil felt very lonely and sad. Every morning she looked out the window and wished she could do something exhilarating.

Rewrite the excerpt in this box.

2. The speed of time, a.k.a. description flow.



Time marches at a steady pace. A second is a second, no matter what's going on. Right?

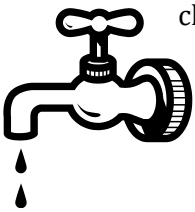
Actually, physicists will tell you that's not quite right. Time slows down the faster something travels, though the effect is so small that we don't notice it until objects move at speeds near the speed of light. From our Earth perspective, time seems to keep one steady pace.



We measure time in hours, minutes, and seconds. Stories measure time in *moments*.

In stories and movies, years can pass in seconds, and seconds can take minutes. Video cameras do this using slow-motion filming. Writers slow down or speed up time by *controlling the flow of description*.

Imagine a faucet. Instead of water, description flows through this faucet. You, the writer, must decide when to close the faucet so that only a few drips of description fall into a moment in your story, or whether to turn the faucet all the way open so that description comes gushing out. Drips of description will make time move faster. Gushing description will slow time down.



Example 1: They lived happily ever after. The end.

How long is ever after? A long time! How long did it take in story moments? No time at all. This faucet barely drips.

Example 2: The judges turned to Daria. She felt the gaze of a thousand eyes upon her as she reached to pull an arrow from her quiver. Noonday sun glared upon the target. She notched the arrow on the string, but her sweating fingers fumbled. She heard an intake of breath as the expectant crowd behind sensed her fear. A lone hawk wheeled overhead. Its scream carried on the breeze. *Breeze*. She must factor the wind into her shot. The arrow was straight, the feathers aligned. Yards away, Rago leaned against a tree, sure of himself after his near bullseye. *Calm yourself*, she told her pounding heart. *One shot is just like any other*. Slowly Daria pulled back on the string and took a bead on the target. She held her breath, waited for a heartbeat, then let the arrow fly.

How long does it take to release an arrow? Not long. I opened my description faucet so I could slow down time and show every tense detail. We don't know why this shot matters so much, but we know it does because of the details.

CHALLENGE: Manipulate time by controlling description flow.

Rewrite Example 2, above, with very limited description flow, so it takes almost no story moments. Cut most of it.

Retell someone's happy ever after (see Example 1) with lots of description, sensory details, and feelings.

III. What's next? We've fixed obvious problems and polished our style. Now what?

Have we covered everything authors do to revise? Not quite.

A. Authors revise over and over and over again.



1. **Give it time.** Authors are patient about the time it takes to revise, and about the number of times we have to do it. Most people think first drafting is writing. Authors know *writing is revising*. Revision transforms mediocre writing into great writing.
2. **Forget about it.** When authors have done all the revising they can, they set their piece aside, work on something else, and try to forget about the first piece – for now. Forgetting helps us spot confusing spots and weak spots we didn't notice before when we first wrote the piece.

B. We ask someone else to critique our work.

Authors know even the very best writer's perspective is limited, especially when it comes to their own writing. So when we think we're done, we find someone else to read our work and give us their opinion. We look for a teacher, a strong reader, or a serious writer to read our work and give us their input. That input is called a *critique*. A critique is when someone reads your manuscript and tells you what's working well and what needs improvement.



Even when it's hard to hear that some parts of our pieces aren't perfect, we **listen** to the input we get from critique readers because we understand that sometimes we can't see our writing as clearly as others can.

We need critiques so often that we tend to form writer communities to obtain critiques. Writing communities include writing clubs, writing classes, and critique groups.

Writing a story can be lonely. Every writer needs the encouragement and support of other writer friends. Writer communities help writers exchange the three important things every writer needs:

1. Encouragement to keep on writing because their work is good,
2. Helpful pointers on what might not be working, and
3. Friendship to enjoy along the writing journey.

Thanks for joining
the Revision Show!

