

10 TIPS FOR REVISING YOUR WRITING

1. Never get discouraged.

Everything you have written is either good or not-yet-good.

Every draft has a seed of good within.

Find the good.

Only the good has the potential to grow better. Improve or cut out the not-yet-good.

If you can't improve the not-yet-good, you haven't earned the right to criticize.

Memorize:

"All first drafts are terrible," -- Ernest Hemingway.

Bad breath is better than no breath.

Anything that is worth doing is worth doing badly – at first.

2. Tell a story: Is the chronological order in your story clear?

A story flows through time.

Check your verb sequences and tenses for their chronology. Do they follow in proper order in time?

Does the story have a proper beginning, middle and end ?

Nothing needs to happen before the beginning, but something must happen after it.

Something must have happened before the middle, and something must follow it.

Something happened before the end. Nothing needs to follow it.

3. Is the logical flow of your story clear?

Check your transition words. Do they connect ideas correctly?

Look for gaps between sentences and paragraphs in the flow of events, the flow of thinking, the flow of feeling.

4. Can the reader "see and feel" your story in sensory images and scenes?

Words that carry feeling most strongly are pictures and smells and touches and tastes and noises. The more sensual words are, the more they reach us and move us. (Donald Hall, *Writing Well*.)

When you read great descriptive writing, the words disappear, and a clear picture emerges in your imagination.

Write in clear, specific images, incidents and examples.

Create a movie for the imagination. Can a reader see visually what you are describing?

Change fuzzy words into specifics. "Show, don't tell."

Describe particulars that actually exist, not abstractions that only exist in our minds.

It was terribly cold and nearly dark on the last evening of the old year, and the snow was falling fast. In the cold and the darkness, a poor little girl, with bare head and naked feet, roamed through the streets.

5. Use sensory words so the reader can also hear, taste, touch, smell what you describe.

- a) sight verbs: it looks, appears, is – we observe, notice
 - nouns of colors, shapes, sizes
- b). hearing verbs -- it sounds, I hear, I listen
 - listen for sounds
- c). touch verbs -- it feels ...
 - nouns and adjectives of touch and texture: the rub, the smooth surface, hot or cold, wet or dry...
- d). taste verbs and adjectives
 - it tastes ... rotten, ripe sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, cool, etc.
- e). smell verbs and adjectives
 - it smells, has an odor, I smell the fragrance of the rose.

Sight, taste, smell, touch, hearing carry feeling from writer to reader – not concepts.

Use metaphors to describe what the feeling of what something is like:

6. Replace generalities and abstractions with particular examples.

Circle your general, category or summary words and “search out the particulars that embody the feeling,” as Donald Hall says.

All words fall on the range of general to specific to particular.

abstract → general → specific → one particular physical thing, person or event

emotion – love – marriage – George married Sue with an "I do" on March 1, 1989.

animal – dog – cocker spaniel – my dog Flojo sleeping on my bed right now

food – fruit – bananas – the banana that I ate with cereal this morning...

7. Build your vocabulary as you revise.

Do word clouds around one sensory word to expand your word choice and meaning.

Save your notes in a Vocabulary Notebook or on Model Sentence Cards.

Look in the dictionary or thesaurus for more exact words, associations and synonyms for nouns in verbs in a dictionary or thesaurus, but **only use words you already recognize.**

We prefer as a rule the specific, the sensual, the strong, the simple and the colorful over the abstract, the general, the polysyllabic and the fancy. ... The more particular the noun, the clearer the pictures we make, and the more accurate we can be in representing feelings. (Donald Hall)

Use strong nouns and verbs and don't overuse adverbial and adjectival modifiers: Often a weak combination can be replaced by a single clearer word

She moved gracefully through the room → *She glided through the room.*

Adjectives often weaken nouns: *White snow* → *snow*. *Green grass* → *grass*

8. Is the S-V core of your sentence properly centered on the main idea?

Check the S- V combinations in your Primary Patterns.

Use clear specific subjects and verbs and avoid general or abstract words..

9. Are you going deeper into your characters and their meaning as you revise?

Ask yourself: Then what? Why? How did that feel? What was this character really thinking? What do I think about that?

Don't just add more of the same words and ideas.

10. Keep revising until you can hear your voice in your writing.

Revising will bring out your voice, and your writing will sound clear and strong. Your voice is not what you feel about something, or your opinion about something. It speaks when you've lived through what you are saying. You just know the reality of what you are describing from the center of your being.

Your voice is pregnant with the meaning of the story. Your voice is your story.

Remember: Writing is 90% Revising.

Go vertical for meaning, not just horizontal in information.

Look deeper. There is always more!

Final Rule: Break these rules.