

Advice on Editing Fiction

Joni M. Fisher

Let me save you months of wasted time with this advice--don't start editing until you complete the first draft. If that's all you get from this editing handout, then follow it and you will thank me. I know writers who rewrite their first chapter for years and never **finish the book**. You cannot judge the value of that first chapter until you can look back from the perspective of the end of the book. Your time is valuable, so quit rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Start anywhere in the story. Keep writing until you have about 500 to 600 pages of double-spaced manuscript. Whether you are a pantster or plotter, plan to throw out between a quarter to one half of what you write.

There, there. This may come as a terrible shock, but you will discard much of that first draft, because the first draft helps you find the story, discover the characters and shape the action. That first draft is not the final product, it is fertilizer out of which your beautiful story will grow.

Think about how much time musicians practice scales and rehearse. Nobody picks up a cello for the first time and plays Vivaldi. As you write more stories you will learn how to shorten the process of reaching that finished product, but statistically speaking, you will write five novels before one grabs the attention of an agent or publisher.

Okay, sit down and take deep breaths. You can do this. Keep the first four manuscripts on your computer, you can mine them for characters and stuff one day. Mediocrity comes easy. You are writing because you want to write memorable stories that enrich people's lives, right?

So what strategies can you use to save time in the editing process? After you finish the first draft, begin revisions.

BIG PICTURE FIRST

Start with the big picture, the structure of your story. If that foundation is weak, nothing else matters. Is your story as flimsy as a house of cards or constructed of concrete and reinforced steel? Let's test it for structural integrity.

For expert advice on story structure, read [Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting by Robert McKee](#) or [The Marshall Plan for Novel Writing by Evan Marshall](#).

And no, I am not the brilliant mind who created all the info that follows. I am a collector of brilliant ideas from books, workshops, college courses and other sources. The following pages come from my extensive notes on writing which I title "Joni University."

STRUCTURAL STORY EDIT

SCENE CARDS

For each scene in your manuscript write what happens in that scene on an index card. A scene is not necessarily a chapter. A scene is what takes place at a specific time and place and is told from a specific point of view. Each scene is a story event that creates meaningful change in the life of the character that is experienced through conflict.

There should always be a power shift between the beginning and the end of a scene.

For example, these are scenes:

- Snow White's mother, the queen, dies and is buried.
- The King brings home a beautiful woman and announces they are getting married.
- The fiancée becomes jealous of the King's attention to Snow White.
- The King and the fiancée marry in a grand celebration.
- The jealous Stepmother secretly hires the huntsman to take Snow White into the woods to kill her.
- The huntsman takes Snow White into the woods and tells her to run away because he can't kill an innocent.
- Snow White wanders in the forest until she finds shelter in the house of the seven dwarfs.

After you have completed all the cards for your story, shuffle them. Yes. *Shuffle them.*

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Lay out the cards in chronological order while saying, "This happened which caused this to happen, which caused this to happen."

You are creating a timeline with specific dates using your scene cards. More than a timeline, this is a **cause/effect order of events**. Think dominoes. It is not a story if random bad things happen to your hero, that's just bad luck. Things should happen because they are triggered by previous events. Cause and effect.

What are the major events, turning points and points of no return in your story? The scene cards for these events are critical to the story and should be spaced out so the other events lead up to them and flow from them.

Any scene that is not directly caused by nor causes another

scene in the main plotline is not essential to the central story. Set these scene cards aside for now. Don't fret, they are probably subplot scenes, but for now, set them aside.

WHOSE STORY IS IT?

Take a long look at the scenes that form the story's main plotline, the spine of the story. Which character appears in the most scenes?

Which point of view is most sympathetic and interesting? This could be painful to answer because answering honestly might mean having to rewrite scenes. Better to answer them now than to endure rejections from agents and editors later. The *Snow White* story would be vastly different if told from the point of view of the Stepmother Queen, right?

In romance novels the point of view is expected to be shared between the hero and heroine equally, scene for scene.

STORY QUESTION

Having reviewed your story overall, can you state your story's plot as a question?

- Will the young lovers find happiness despite the feud between their families?
- Will Harry Potter survive the challenges in the inter-school wizardry contest to win the Goblet of Fire?
- Will Thelma and Louise outrun the law?
- Will the feisty librarian find true love?
- Will Dorothy find her way home from Oz?
- Will Indiana Jones find the Ark of the Covenant?

Stating the plot as a question makes it easy to explore all the reasons the answer could be NO. The possible obstacles and disasters are the turning points of the story. The main character or protagonist **cannot** reach his goal until the end of the story.

Every scene must restate or reinforce the story question until the end. Create suspense by reminding the reader of the story question and by showing how the odds of success are dwindling.

ORDER OF TELLING

Now using only the scene cards that meet the cause and effect criteria (these are the spine of the story), imagine presenting the scenes in a different order. This is the order of telling and might not match the chronological order.

At the 2013 RWA conference in Atlanta, two separate

workshop presenters (a multi-published author and an agent) advised writers to throw out their prologue and first chapter. We as writers need to write them to understand the back story, but the readers often will not read beyond these back story-laden pages because they want SOMETHING TO HAPPEN with the characters early in the story. Start with action whenever humanly possible.

How close to the climax can you begin the story?

What if you began the story of *Snow White* at the wedding and revealed bits and pieces of the past scenes during the wedding? Could you tell the story entirely from the point of view of the main character like a memoir? No? Then how few points of view would it take to achieve the story?

In the first Harry Potter book, the reader isn't told anything about Harry's past until Harry is at Hogwarts. The reader discovers Harry's back story as Harry discovers it from others. Remember that he didn't even know he was a wizard until he was invited to come to Hogwarts. In each successive book, he learns more about his dead parents and these revelations help him choose who he will be. Can you ditch your prologue and first scene and sprinkle this information in to entice the reader to keep reading?

PLOT

Now that you have laid out the order of the telling of your story, let's examine the plot points and where they fall in the story.

Roughly, you will want the first 25% of your book to be the setup. This introduces the main characters and raises the story question. How many scene cards do you have that setup the story?

What happens at the end of the setup that compels the reader to keep going to the rest of the story?

The middle of your story will take up half of the book. In the middle the problems for the hero get worse and worse and reach a climax.

Example: In a western, the middle scenes show the bad guys terrorizing the town and getting away with it. The townspeople appeal to the sheriff to do something and the story builds to the ultimate showdown.

The last 25% of the story includes the showdown and the

aftermath of the showdown.

Who dies in the shootout? Who helps the sheriff? How do the townspeople respond to the sheriff's actions?

SUBPLOT

Thread the subplot scenes in between the main plot scenes to expand the world of the story. Since you have crafted each scene to end with a cliffhanger—something to drive the reader to find out what happens next—then you can delay the revelation of what happens next by shifting to the subplot story. The subplot should also be compelling.

The subplot will begin after the main plot and end before the main plot ends. The subplot is nested within the overall plot. The longer the story, the more subplots can be sustained.

SETTING

Setting is the time and place that the story takes place. Setting should have meaning. If the story could take place on the moon in 2077 as well as at the corner grocery in 1950, then the interaction between the setting and the characters doesn't exist. Consider many options when choosing a time and place for each scene.

Avoid the predictable. A vampire in daylight shatters predictability and grabs the reader's attention. (And if he twinkles in daylight tweens will adore him.)

Be aware of the conventions [or set-in-stone reader's expectations] of setting for your genre. For example thrillers always take place in major cities, cozies in small towns. Break these conventions at your own risk.

Find the most interesting place for your scenes to take place. In the movie *True Lies*, a husband and wife are taken hostage by terrorists. As they are being abducted they argue about who the terrorists are after and each tries to minimize the hostage-value of the other. Their marital spat annoys and confuses the terrorists. Terrific comic timing!

TIME PERIOD

Time is measured in the mind. Once humans identified the passage of time as light or dark, and seasons, now we measure time in nanoseconds.

- How is time measured in this story?
- Which century? Which era? Which political era? What was happening in other parts of the world at this same

time? What is the cultural setting? Does church or government have more power over population's attitudes?

- What is the language of this period? (Read newspapers or other documents from this place and time).
- How did people travel?
- How did people communicate in this era?

LOCATION

For verisimilitude, the choice of details is critical.

- What is common and uncommon about this place? What is expected and unexpected for this particular place?
- What are the flora and fauna of this area?
- How do you feel about this place? Does the place have a cultural, or emotional history? For example an acre of land which once held a civil war battle isn't just a field.
- What are the physical dimensions of the story? Where does the story take place? A solar system or a rural village?
- What are the boundaries of this place and how do the characters or events interact with these boundaries?
- What sensory details set this place apart from others?
- Do people here have a common trait?
- What landmarks are evident? Get the details correct. Breathing in mosquitoes in the Everglades tells much. The place can itself be a character in the story.
- What is the golden place, the sacred place of your protagonist? (Like home to Dorothy while she is stuck in Oz)
- What weather or geologic dangers menace this location: hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, floods, ice storms, tsunami, droughts, landslides?

DURATION

We can stretch and compress time in the story to suit our needs. Establish the boundaries of time in your story by creating a timeline. Examples: The television show "24" played out a single day in real time through 24 episodes. The movie *Pearl Harbor* lasts longer than the attack it depicts.

- How much time does the story span within the lives of

- the characters? Four generations? A weekend?
- Is there a ticking clock deadline looming over the characters?
 - Backstory happens before the story begins and though it is pulled into the story, the events in the backstory are not included the story's timeline.
 - How often do you remind the readers of a deadline or coming event to ramp up suspense?

LEVELS OF CONFLICT

On the hierarchy of human struggle, which of the levels of conflict are fought in this story? Only one level makes a dull story. The levels are:

- Internal conflict (Example: guilt versus sexual gratification during an affair).
- Interpersonal conflict (man versus man, expectations of family and friends versus personal goals, boxing matches, warfare)
- Extra-personal conflict (man versus nature, man versus institutions, limits of time and space).

For more on setting, read [*Setting: How to create and sustain a sharp sense of time and place in your fiction* by Jack M. Bickham, Writer's Digest Books.](#)

RATIO OF DIALOG TO NARRATIVE

Examine your favorite author's works and see how much of each page is dialog and how much is narrative or description.

Generally, literary novels have little dialog and genre novels have half dialog, half description. Compare your manuscript's dialog/description ratio to the ratio of the bestsellers in your genre. The bestsellers satisfy reader expectations. Be aware of what readers of your genre like. A *Hamlet* ending to a romance novel flat out won't sell. Even your momma won't buy it.

DIALOG

For more on the dialog read [*Dialog: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting Effective Dialogue* by Gloria Klempton.](#)

Or consider taking my online workshop: "[Crafting Memorable Dialogue](#)" which combines screenwriting techniques and fiction techniques to energize your dialog. See her website for workshop listings at www.jonimfisher.com.

Here are published articles by Joni on dialog:

[“Conflict in Dialogue”](#)

[“Dialogue: Abused and Misused”](#)

[“Dialogue: When Characters Talk the Talk”](#)

DESCRIPTION

For more on description, study [Word Painting: Writing More Descriptively](#) by Rebecca McClanahan.

SCENE AND SEQUEL EDIT

Having examined and firmed up the overall structure of the story, let’s focus on the structure of the smaller segments: scenes and the reaction scenes known as sequels. The following elements are the minimum needed in every scene and sequel.

SCENE There are segments of story known as scene and sequel. Let’s say for simplicity both are told from a single point of view. From the heroine’s point of view, there will be her goal, her reason for that goal (motivation) and a conflict.

Goal	<p>Girl goes to a party to have fun with her friends.</p> <p><u>What does the character want?</u> The goal must be clearly stated, tangible and believable. If the goal is not clear to the reader, then it’s like watching basketball with the baskets removed. Help the reader keep score by detailing what the point-of-view character wants.</p>
Motivation	<p>The girl is lonely and her friends all have boyfriends.</p> <p><u>Why does she want it?</u> Even if her reason is only revealed in her thoughts, it helps the reader understand and follow along if you present why she wants her goal. People do things for reasons. Let the reader in on the why so the reader will care.</p>
Conflict	<p>Creepy drunk guy stalks her at the party. She evades him, but her friends are too busy to help her. Creep gropes her in front of the whole party crowd. Some people laugh.</p> <p><u>What prevents her from reaching her goal?</u> What prevents her from having fun at the party with her friends?</p> <p>End every scene so that the reader says, “Oh, no! What happens next?” Drive the reader to ignore a full bladder, to delay going to sleep, to forgo eating, to turn the page to find out.</p>

SEQUEL This can be a separate scene or it can be a continuation of an earlier scene. It

will be separate if there is a change in time, place or point of view. You can place two action scenes back to back if you alternate between the main plot and the subplot, but eventually, you will need to get to the sequel. The reader wants to experience the main character's reactions.

Generally a sequel covers the physical and emotional reaction, then the mental reaction of the point-of-view character after an event. Actions and reactions are driven by emotions. For simplicity, let's combine the sequel with the previous event and continue in the point of view of our heroine.

Reaction	<p>Emotional and physical reaction</p> <p>The girl is shocked, horrified and embarrassed. Her pulse races and she wants to cry and scream. She undergoes a flight or fight impulse as adrenaline hits her bloodstream. She blushes and places her arm across her chest protectively.</p>
Dilemma	<p>Thought, reason, analysis</p> <p>She wants to flee, but she doesn't move at first. As people stare at her, she fears this creep will try to get away with it because he's drunk. She isn't the kind of girl who wants to be groped in public by anyone! Maybe this is how he always treats women and he uses alcohol as an excuse. If she lets him get away with this, isn't it like granting him permission to do it again?</p>
Decision	<p>Decision</p> <p>In the example, the action will come immediately after the decision, but it could be a separate scene if the action requires more planning and set up.</p> <p>No, and oh, hell no. She will put this drunk bully in his place. He has assaulted her and she has a right to defend herself with force. Let people call the police. (decision) She balls her anger into a fist and slugs him hard in the jaw, knocking him to the floor. (action)</p>

In a scene if only one thing is going on at a time, then the story will seem flat and artificial to the reader. Remember that every character in a scene has a personal agenda or goal. Even the walk-on character, the cabbie or the barista, has a goal, a reason for being in the scene that should not be just because you wanted another placeholder. Allow your minor characters to have attitudes, personalities and goals of their own and these will naturally conflict with the goal of the point-of-view character.

The cabbie your heroine hails is trying to shut down work and go home, or the barista is busy flirting with another customer when your point-of-view

character NEEDS a latte. Organic conflicts arise from characters acting like real people instead of cardboard cutouts.

As you edit each scene, read the scene once from each character's point of view. The results will add depth to your scenes.

BACKSTORY, FLASHBACKS, AND TRANSITIONS

Within your scenes and sequels, you will use other elements of storytelling, such as backstory, flashbacks, and transitions. Let's examine what they are and how to use them.

FLASHBACKS A flashback is a question answered by memory.

For example, the protagonist is at an impasse with his girlfriend who says she's fed up with his chronic lateness. The protagonist asks himself a question—What does she mean I'm always late? From there the protagonist scans his memories for times when he might have been late. He remembers being late to dinner with his girlfriend's family and how her parents felt slighted. He recognizes that his lateness has bad consequences on others, so he decides his girlfriend is right so he changes his ways.

When going into flashback set up a transition that will signal the beginning and end of the flashback. Relate it to the present and the past. If writing in the present tense, signal the flashback by switching to past tense.

First, dramatize flashbacks. Play them out so the reader can experience them.

Second, do not bring in a flashback until you have created in the reader the desire to know.

When a character has to make a decision or know something, he will think about things from his past for clues and answers. Think of a flashback as a question—How the hell did I end up like this? When the character reaches the point of understanding, the flashback is over and he can apply this insight in the present.

Third, keep it brief.

Example: two men, 1 wounded, jump into a car and race away. Alarms sound behind them. The reader understands they just robbed a bank without witnessing the whole robbery, so now comes the flashback of the robber got shot. You can do this through dialog or memory. Who messed up? Who shot him? Let the robbers argue

about who messed up to propel the flashback along.

BACKSTORY Work backward from the end of the novel and find the LAST place to give the reader this important item of backstory to use it as a revelation.

Place the revelation of backstory to explain moments of decision or crisis that the protagonist faces.

TRANSITIONS Transitions link one scene to another and also serve to shift from present to flashback and back again. Smooth transitions create a seamless flow for the reader, keeping the reader grounded in changes of time and place.

For flashbacks, avoid the use of the word “**had**” in the transition, use the straight past tense instead. For example, instead of saying “I had been remembering...” say, “I remembered.”

Like shifting gears, transitions should be smooth. They need to feel natural and not draw attention to themselves. Call it passing the baton or creating a bridge, transitions relate one thing to another in a logical path that readers can follow.

EMOTIONAL Move the POV character from one setting to another through his consciousness by an emotion (expectation, anxiety, fear). Make the transition quick like a movie cut.

For example: end one scene with—*I knew I would be the first to arrive at the hotel.* Begin the next scene with: *I was not simply the first to arrive, but I showed the caterer which ballroom was reserved for the wedding.*

If the emotion that bridges the transition includes a reversal, or irony, all the better to surprise the reader.

TIME SHIFT Moving forward in time is smoother than dropping backward, but these words are used to indicate a time shift: *later, earlier, now, then, after, before, in a few days, some years ago, the following spring.*

Example: “*My fondness for swimming goes back to my childhood. Every summer, we would...*” We know we are about to flashback from this wording.

PLACE SHIFT To take the reader to a different place, we cue the reader with phrases such as “*meanwhile back at the ranch*” or “*a few miles down the road.*” Skip the travel between.

NUMBER SHIFT	<p>This deals with quantity rather than chronology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to stack specifics of fact or narrative: <i>and, besides, and then, again, in addition, furthermore, likewise, first, second, third, last.</i> • Some show cause and effect: <i>because, consequently, therefore.</i> • Some emphasize: <i>indeed, clearly.</i> • Some summarize: <i>finally, in short, in conclusion, in summary.</i>
VIEWPOINT SHIFT	<p>Very useful when presenting the pro/con approach to a topic.</p> <p>Examples: <i>opponents say, yet, but, it may not be, indeed, another consideration, and on the other hand.</i></p>
INFO SHIFT	<p>Repetition. Using a parallel structure in repeated phrases or words. Starting each paragraph in a section with the same phrase or name and then portraying the information or character of the person in the paragraph to build a complex, unified image. Can also pass the baton from scene to scene with a phrase used in one and repeated in the next.</p> <p><i>“Gee, I wonder what Andrea is doing now?”</i> Cut to next scene with Andrea saying, <i>“What am I doing?”</i></p>
SLIDE SHIFT	<p>Order the information in a paragraph so the item you mention last can be at the start of the next paragraph, even though the next paragraph heads in a different direction.</p> <p>Example: <i>Legislators voted to raise taxes on middle-income families.</i> (Next paragraph) <i>Factory workers Jim and Jan Wilson who make \$80,000 a year will have their taxes increase by \$5,000....</i></p>
RADICAL SHIFT	<p>Usually separated by an empty space between paragraphs, this is a stop-and-turn change of direction. This is used in a montage of images that by placing two dissimilar images together the viewer or reader will make a connection.</p> <p>For example <i>Twenty-three states, such as North Carolina, employ the felony murder rule.</i> (Next paragraph) <i>Billy Johns’ 2013 conviction for robbery earned him a death sentence even though he never handled the gun used to kill store owner Peter</i></p>

Williams.

**IMAGERY
SHIFT** Employ the language of your POV character or the topic so the figure of speech suits the text.

Example: *The geologist watched his wife’s reaction as if observing a live volcano—his instincts told him to run. (Next scene.) The geologist escaped his wife’s molten fury and he didn’t stop running until he reached the safety of the neighborhood bar.*

FINE TUNE EDITING

This is the last stage before the line-by-line proofreading edit.

**SENSORY
DETAILS** Emotion is a physical response to sensory information. Get the reader to feel the place and he will care what happens in it and to the characters.

Read Robert Olen Butler’s *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*.

SIGHT color, shape, size, lightness or darkness, texture, patterns, and motion, perspective of distance

SOUND volume, tone, rhythm, echoes, Doppler Effect, harmony, discord, undertones. State the sound precisely—the church bell rang B flat. State the sound—the car door slammed. Make up new words to imitate the sound precisely. Sound is used to ground the setting in reality and remind the reader of the familiar—seagulls at the beach.

SMELL intensity, spicy, pungent, musky, minty, acrid, buttery, floral, salty, nutty, fruity, smoky. Smells affect the sense of taste, smells evoke memories, smells attract or repel. This sense has a long memory. Don’t describe the smell by a person’s reaction, describe the smell itself. Mixing two or more smells creates layers, making the subject more complex and real. Beach: coconut oil, beer, salty waves.

- Name the smell (disinfectant, mildew)
- Use adjectives that evoke smells
- Employ similes and metaphors involving smells
- Use verbs that put the smells in motion (waft, seep, exude)

- TASTE** This is a child's key test for things, intensity, flavor, bitterness, sweetness, acidity, sour, salty, spicy, fruity. Tastes are acquired.
- TOUCH** Temperature, shape, substance, texture, softness or hardness, dampness, pleasure or pain. Blind people rely on this. Touch is a deep physical connection that can denote levels of intimacy.
- EMOTIONS** Emotions affect all the other senses: value judgments, memories, imagination, cultural biases, subconscious desires, connotations, interpretations, point of view, intuition, instinct, and superstition. Perception is reality. Emotions add meaning to other sensory input.

TROPES OR FIGURES OF SPEECH

Develop skillful prose. Use a variety of sentence structures to vary the rhythm and sound of the work.

Circle all figures of speech in your work. Examine them individually. Is there a fresher way to say this? Is there a way to express this that better suits this mood, genre, point of view, narrative voice? If the POV is a carpenter's, then become familiar with the vocabulary and perspective of a carpenter and use his POV in the figures of speech.

Go easy on metaphors and similes. Keep the best. Tie them to POV and theme.

Go on a cliché hunt. Rewrite the cliché to your original way to express the idea.

Raise the level of prose from general to specific, from dull to memorable with imagery and thoughtful word choice. Example:

I'm so lonely I could cry.

Big deal. Is this character just a crybaby? How lonely does lonely get? How empty does lonely feel? What would be worse than crying?)

Loneliness howls like the wind through my soul.

THAT describes the big emptiness so the reader feels it.

Just as musicians practice scales, writers can practice creating imagery with figures of speech.

- ALLITERATION** Repeating a consonant sound. Usually at the beginning of words.
Fields ever fresh, groves ever green.
Sally sells seashells by the sea.

- ANALOGY** An analogy clarifies by comparison. Unlike simile and metaphor, the analogy provides more explanation, often describing the

comparison without naming it, implied rather than stated. In this example, the writer compares fire to anger.

When this happened, they fought. Stinging flames of words blistered their tongues. Silence was worse. Beneath its slow-burning weight their black looks singed. After a few days, their minds shriveled into dead coals. Some speechless nights, they lay together like logs turned completely to ash.

ASSONANCE

Repeating vowel sounds.

Round and round the hound ran.

ANTITHESIS

Contrasting 2 elements in parallel form.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

At times Essex thought that Sir Francis Bacon lacked enthusiasm as a friend; Queen Elizabeth thought he lacked loyalty as a subject.

HYPERBOLE

Exaggeration for emphasis or effect.

He's a dumb as a box of rocks.

He's as old as dirt.

IRONY

A reversal of expectations that increases intensity because it increases our emotions.

Though she said she wanted to talk with me, I knew that the last thing she wanted was my opinion.

MEIOSIS

To minimize or understate something for an effect.

He named his elephant Tiny.

METAPHOR

One thing is likened to another different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other. A is B.

Use one when:

- You have a lot of ideas that don't easily fit together
- You want to evoke emotional associations
- You want a strong image to sum up your message
- You want this description to be remembered. Make it clear. Spell out what it stands for. Understand the emotions it arouses. Choose words that refer to the both the idea and the image.

The ship plowed the sea.

METONYMY Use of the name of one thing for that of another associated with it or suggested by it.

“The White House issued a statement today.”

The house didn't say a thing, the president or his staff did.

ONOMATOPOEIA Creating words to match sounds.

Thunk, plink, whoosh, cachunk, clickety. Tick tock tick.

OXYMORON When opposite or contradictory ideas or terms are combined.

Senate Intelligence Committee.

Negative income.

PARADOX A seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true.

Craft must have clothes, but truth goes naked.

--Thomas Fuller

PARALLELISM Create a repeating pattern of words or phrases for emphasis.

We shall fight on the seas. We shall fight in the air. We shall fight on the ground. We shall not surrender. --Winston Churchill

If nominated, I will not accept; if elected, I will not serve.

--William Tecumseh Sherman

Use to show unlike things are equal by grouping them.

No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown. --William Penn

Use to show how things usually lumped together are different.

What you see is news, what you know is background and what you feel is opinion. --Lester Markel, NY Times

PERSONIFICATION Giving human characteristics or traits to objects or machines.

The sun smiled.

The sky wept.

The tree reached for the clouds.

My father's garden thrived in the heat like an unleashed temper.

REPETITION

Whether a theme, mood, use of a prop or sounds, the cumulative effect can be dramatic. When repeating the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or sentences, this is called Anaphora.

Repetition builds meaning. Examine a murder from the POV of the killer, a member of the victim's family, and an investigator. Each POV builds on the horror from different emotional origins and intensities. The repetition of details heightens the horror.

Robert paced the floor, going over exactly what he would say. He walked himself through all of her possible reactions. He walked through his own inevitable stammerings. He walked and walked and walked straight through his nervousness.

RHYTHM

Cadence or pattern of stressed and unstressed sounds strung together. Also called meter.

Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream.

RHYME

A regular recurrence of corresponding sounds, especially at the ends of lines.

I love you a bushel and a peck, a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck.

SYNECDOCHE

When the whole of a thing is substituted for a part or a part for the whole.

'Here comes the Army,' she said when the soldier walked in.

SYNETHESIA

Use the sensory adjectives, adverbs and nouns associated with one sense for another.

The bread tasted like smoke.

Her hair looked like nails dragged over a chalkboard.

He had a smooth, dark chocolate voice.

ZEUGMA

Planting a dissimilar or shocking thing in a list, such as a list of adjectives or objects.

Her refrigerator wasn't totally empty. We found a carton of milk, two eggs, a jar of blood, and a loaf of wheat bread.

PACING

Pacing determines whether or not the reader feels propelled through the story or dragged through it. To accelerate the pacing of the story, try these techniques.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Dialogue>description | Dialog moves faster than description. It uses frequent paragraph changes and white space. |
| Short sentences | Short sentence punch the pace along whereas longer sentences are best for description and to build tension. In moments of extremely fast action, use fragments instead of sentences. Show the emotions in play along with the physical actions. |
| Skip steps | In this technique, the normal pace is sped up by skipping the moment-by-moment description of the action.

For example, in John Cheever's story "The Country Husband": <i>'He washed his body, shaved his jaws, drank his coffee, and missed the seven-thirty-one.'</i> No reader will complain about leaving out the preparation of the coffee, getting dressed, locking the door and all the steps that were skipped. The reader gets the basics of a man preparing for work and missing his bus. |
| Skip scenes | Writers often skip the scene of lovemaking by starting the scene with the couple climbing into bed and then jumping to the morning after. The reader will fill in the blanks with imagination. |
| Scene changes | When one chapter ends with a cliffhanger, skip to another place and time for the following scene, one that does not involve the same characters left hanging on the cliff. This creates tension and suspense by driving the reader through the scene to read the continuation-of-the-cliffhanger scene. This device slows the reader down but makes it feel as if the story is moving quickly by jumping to simultaneous action elsewhere. |
| Jump-cutting | The hero leaves his office and arrives at a restaurant. Rather than show the whole cab ride in which nothing happens, show the hero exiting the office door, skip a line, show the hero opening the restaurant door. Illustrate only the scenes and beats that matter. |
| Cut Flab | Adjectives can almost always be cut (very, quite), especially if there are two in a row used for the same noun. Choose the stronger and make it concrete, specific and visual. Adverbs signal a weak or vague |

verb. Keep an adverb only if it supplies necessary information or if it creates a precise image. Replace clichés with original, fresh expression. Remove redundancy and repetition. For example It was a dreadful situation, a time of purest humiliation. Edited becomes: It was a time of purest humiliation.

Create Anticipation

Set up future events near and far, such as the showdown scene. Express it clearly so the reader will anticipate it—George set the timer for ten minutes and ran from the crowded stadium. Or If only she could convince Bill that they were meant to be together. Show the goal so the reader knows how to keep score and who is in play in the game.

Questions? Comments? Visit my website at <http://www.jonimfisher.com> and contact me. [Yes, I am shamelessly trying to drive more traffic to my website, so read my blogs while you're there and comment at will.]

I hope these pages will guide you through the arduous process of editing your manuscript from the big stuff to the smaller stuff to bring out the best in your story.



Best wishes!

Joni M. Fisher