

Basic “Pre-Edits” Worksheet (for authors)

Search for the following terms

That

Read the sentence aloud. If the sentence makes sense without the word “that”, please delete this word.

It

If at all possible, replace the word “it” with a more concrete noun or phrase. Example: It didn’t matter. = The crappy weather didn’t matter.

Was

In instances where you’re using it in a sentence such as: He was tall. He was sad. She was pretty. She was tired. – please attempt to re-write to *show* the reader rather than tell.

Example:

He was tall. = *When Jake walked into a room, his head nearly brushed the top of the doorframe.*

She was tired. = *She struggled to keep her eyes open and bit back a yawn.*

** Telling is usually a sign of lazy writing. Put some effort into these sentences and try to draw the reader a picture with your words. ☺

Action Tags

If you use an **action tag** (He laughed. She chuckled. Bobby rolled his eyes.), make sure you separate the dialogue with a period (or question mark or exclamation point, if applicable), not a comma, and capitalize the first word in the **action tag**.

Use action tags a lot. These create a more vivid picture for the reader. They help show the character’s personality, and also, bring a setting to life.

If you use something other than an action tag, please try to stick with the word *said*. Anything else draws the reader’s attention and reminds them they are reading a story ... rather than living the fictional dream.

Examples of exceptions would be if something was whispered or yelled.

Overused Words and Phrases

Read through your manuscript and look for overused words or phrases (“Just” is a very commonly overused word). If your character is rolling his eyes three times on one page, change two of them to something else. If you use the word “hand” six times in 2 paragraphs, find another way to describe what’s happening using other words.

Redundancy

Read through your manuscript and look for redundancy –

He shrugged his shoulders. He nodded his head. He squinted his eyes.

** A person ONLY shrugs their shoulders, nods their head, or squints their eyes, so “his shoulders”, “his head”, and “his eyes” are not needed.

He shrugged. He nodded.

Floating or Autonomous Body Parts

Read through your manuscript and look for floating body parts. Connect them to the person, or rewrite for clarity.

Examples:

His hand touched her face. = *He touched her face.*

Her head lifted. = *She lifted her head.*

Hanging Modifiers

Read through your manuscript and look for hanging modifiers. Fix these sentences so they make sense.

Examples:

Looking over his shoulder, the man followed closely on his heels. = Looking over his shoulder, Jake caught sight of the man following closely on his heels.

The way it’s written in the first sentence, it means “the man” who is following too closely looked over his shoulder and the entire sentence doesn’t make sense.

ALSO, remember, in sentences like this, the actions expressed have to be able to be done simultaneously.

Here’s an example:

Tying his shoes, he walked out the door. The way this sentence is constructed, it means the man tied his shoes and walked out the door at the same time – a physical impossibility.

Be careful, and make sure your sentences make sense.

Knew & Felt

Read through your manuscript and look for the words “he/she knew” and “he/she felt”. Delete them and rewrite the sentences for clarity. You’re in a character’s POV (point of view), so it’s understood that they “knew” or “felt”.

Examples:

He knew she hated him with a passion. = She hated him with a passion.

She felt her face grow hot. = Her face grew hot.