

Writing Revision: A checklist

- ❑ there are no run-on sentences
- ❑ sentence length and structure are varied, not monotonous
- ❑ strong verbs are used; passive voice is avoided (see what I did there?)
- ❑ adjectives and adverbs are kept to a minimum
- ❑ the language is strong, not overly “latinate” or ornate (e.g. no “endeavoured” when “tried” would do just as well); an exception can be made when the language fits the narrator or speaker’s character
- ❑ clichés (e.g. “she avoided x like the plague”) are absent, except in dialogue when they are illustrative of character (even then, use caution!)
- ❑ prepositions are used properly and judiciously (e.g. take out excess uses of “of,” “in,” etc.--no “get off of my back!”)
- ❑ words are not carelessly repeated (e.g. two or three uses of “love” or “responded”) on the same page
- ❑ no words are missing (or, conversely, doubled). These seemingly innocuous errors demonstrate that you haven’t reread your draft carefully
- ❑ overly specific speech “tags” such as “he replied” and “she exclaimed” are kept to a minimum (the word “said” is your friend!); adverbs in speech tags (“she said *ruefully*”) are avoided or used sparingly and deliberately
- ❑ there are no mixed metaphors
- ❑ similes are used judiciously
- ❑ there are few abstractions (e.g. “sorrow,”); the writing is concrete and uses the five senses
- ❑ the punctuation is correct or consistent, and always a tool to clearer understanding, not an impediment to it
- ❑ you haven’t used three sentences to say something you could have said in one
- ❑ text is properly and professionally formatted (double spaced; no “typos”; no fancy fonts; no staples or covers (unless requested); pages are numbered and the piece’s name is identified with a header or footer; your name is on it somewhere; there’s no “The End”)
- ❑ you’ve been ruthless!
 - PRINT IT OUT and re-read!
 - Read it aloud.
 - Have a peer read it; have her tell you the story back.
 - Be brave; cut your pets.
 - Limit your word length. If the assignment has called for ten pages, don’t simply widen margins or use 1.5 spacing rather than double. This fools no one!
 - Put it aside until the words are no longer in your head and then go back and read it with a fresh pair of eyes.
 - Do a search for the kinds of errors that make editors and instructors see (and write) red. Search your instances of “its” and “it’s” and make sure you’ve got them right. Avoid apostrophizing a simple plural at all costs (e.g. Let’s go out and meet some cute guy’s at the Harvey’s”)!)

The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. – Ernest Hemingway

There is a difference between a book of two hundred pages from the very beginning, and a book of two hundred pages which is the result of an original of eight hundred pages. The six hundred pages are there. Only you don’t see them. – Elie Wiesel

I try to leave out the parts that people skip. – Elmore Leonard