

WRITE LEAN AND MEAN
BY
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NOTE TO TEACHERS:

This editing guide for teenaged fiction writers has been excerpted and adapted by the author from her own high school literacy program, *Literacy Made for All: Story Crafting* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014)

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BEFORE EDITING

1. HAVE YOU REGAINED YOUR OBJECTIVITY ABOUT YOUR WORK?

It is generally wise to put your work away for at least 24 hours before you attempt to revise or edit. You need this cooling-off period to enable you to put some emotional distance between you and the product of your imagination. Otherwise, you won't be able to spot the weaknesses or flaws in your writing, and as a result won't be able to correct them.

2. ARE YOU FEELING WELL-RESTED AND IN A GOOD MOOD?

You should not attempt to revise or edit if you are tired or upset. Don't even continue editing once you've begun to feel tired. Take a break and come back to it later. Why? Because if you are tired, you won't be as sharp as usual. You might miss things or let them go. And if you are upset, you might be overly critical of your work and end up depressing yourself and even throwing out something that could have been saved.

3. ARE YOU ALONE?

You need to be alone because you're going to have to read your manuscript aloud -- the ear often catches what the eye misses -- and if there is anyone else in the room, you'll either disturb or attract the other person. If you're in class, doing a group revision or a group edit, you and your group should be in a corner of the room far enough away from the others that you won't disturb them as you read, or be disturbed by them as *they* read.

4. HAVE YOU BEEN KEEPING UP YOUR READING?

This isn't as irrelevant as it may sound at first. To be a good writer, you must also be a constant reader. Exposing yourself to the published writing of others will help you develop the degree of language sensitivity you need in order to write well, and also to edit well.

5. DO YOU HAVE A THESAURUS AND A GOOD DICTIONARY AT HAND?

The choices presented to you in a thesaurus are not perfect synonyms for one another. Each word will have connotations or associations that may make it unsuitable to convey your meaning to the reader. The way to discover this is by looking the word up in a dictionary before using it.

The checklists and exercises in this package are intended to help you make the draft of your story the best that it can be. Bear in mind that this is a process, and authors often need to make multiple revision and editing passes through a manuscript before it's ready to be submitted anywhere. So, if the answers to the 5 questions above are all YES, let's get started!

EDITING CHECKLIST 1: Trim Away the Fat

Written drafts are always in need of tightening. By eliminating the extra words from your manuscript, you will direct the reader's attention to the important words and ideas in your writing.

1. TAKE OUT UNNECESSARY DUPLICATION OF MEANING. For example:

"a tiny little house" should be "a tiny house";

"a pair of twins" are just "twins".

BUT don't take out duplications that have been put in purposely, for emphasis:

You'll get nothing from me, Harry -- nothing, zero, zip, nada, forget it!

2. TAKE OUT WORDS THAT OCCUPY SPACE BUT ARE NOT NECESSARY TO THE MEANING OF THE SENTENCE. For example:

Come and visit us sometime" should be "Come visit us sometime".

3. GET RID OF WORDS OR PHRASES THAT CROWD OTHERS OUT OF THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE OF EMPHASIS OR IMPORTANCE. For example:

"the field of anthropology" should just be "anthropology";

"It was Gina who created..." should just be "Gina created...".

4. CHANGE AS MANY PASSIVE VERBS TO ACTIVE AS POSSIBLE. For example:

"The book was read by him" should be "He read the book."

5. SHRINK CLAUSES AND PHRASES IF YOU CAN.

A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb. A *sentence*, therefore, is a kind of clause. But there are other clauses, known as *subordinate clauses*, that cannot stand by themselves as sentences. Instead, depending on what kind of questions they answer, these clauses function inside a sentence *as if they were single words*.

Clauses that answer the questions WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY are ADVERB CLAUSES:

You may leave when I tell you to leave.

He is grouchy because he is so hungry.

If you hurry, you can still catch the bus.

Why are you sitting where it is so cold?

Clauses that answer the questions WHICH, WHAT KIND are ADJECTIVE CLAUSES:

He is a man who knows many things.

We ate the lunch that Mom had packed for us.

Clauses that answer the question WHAT are NOUN CLAUSES:

I never noticed that you limped.

What you see is what you get.

Very often, a SUBORDINATE CLAUSE can be reduced to a PHRASE or even a single word. For example:

"if you're lucky" becomes "with luck";

"a day when it rained" becomes "a rainy day";

"She came inside so that she could get warm" becomes "She came inside to get warm".

Also frequently, a PHRASE, which is a group of words without a subject or verb, can be reduced to a single word. For example:

"He spoke to her in a brusque voice" becomes "He spoke brusquely to her."

EDITING WORKSHEET 1: Trim Away the Fat

On a separate sheet of paper, tighten up each of the following sentences:

1. The decision was unanimous, without a single opposing voice.
2. Fear made him blind and he couldn't see.
3. The people who are located in Thornhill seem to buy more paper products, for some reason.
4. I've decided to do a study of bees.
5. Paulo was told by his English professor about a new novel just coming out which is supposed to be very exciting.
6. Lucie was a child that one could easily love.
7. All the cars that are sold in the month of February will carry a special guarantee.
8. Nellie ran outside so that she could see where Jason was.
9. The level of the river is rising.
10. This product is recommended by my dentist.
11. Let's hurry up and get a move on!
12. All they found was his lifeless corpse.
13. There is nothing that is more refreshing on a hot day than the cool breeze off the lake.
14. He went to Brussels in order to do business.
15. I've always been fascinated by the field of astronomy.
16. We'll set out when the sun rises.
17. Go and see what your brother is up to.
18. It was Eve who chose to move to a farm in the country.
19. She told him in a loud voice what her reason was for leaving.
20. That teddy bear is my sister's single most favourite toy.

EDITING WORKSHEET 1: ANSWER KEY

Here is how an editor would tighten up each of the sentences on page 5:

1. The decision was unanimous.
2. Fear made him blind.
3. The people in Thornhill buy more paper products, for some reason.
4. I've decided to study bees.
5. Paulo's English professor told him about an exciting new novel.
6. Lucie was a lovable child.
7. All cars sold in February will carry a special guarantee.
8. Nellie ran outside to see where Jason was.
9. The river is rising.
10. My dentist recommends this product.
11. Let's hurry up! or Let's get a move on!
12. All they found was his corpse.
13. Nothing is more refreshing on a hot day than the cool breeze off the lake.
14. He went to Brussels on business.
15. Astronomy has always fascinated me.
16. We'll set out at dawn.
17. Go see what your brother is up to.
18. Eve chose to move to a farm.
19. She told him loudly why she was leaving.
20. That teddy bear is my sister's favourite toy.

Use this exercise and answer key to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for ways to tighten up the sentences in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to spot the "fat" that needs trimming.

EDITING CHECKLIST 2: Sharpen the Focus

Now turn your attention to how clearly you are communicating your message. Bring your writing into sharper focus by correcting the following:

1. UNCLEAR PRONOUN REFERENCES.

Be sure that each pronoun is securely connected to a **preceding** noun. For example:

When Jane arrived, she hung her coat in the closet.

(This is clearly Jane hanging her own coat in the closet. But compare it with the following:)

When she arrived, Jane hung her coat in the closet.

(NOW whose coat is it? And who just arrived, Jane or somebody else?)

2. MISPLACED MODIFIERS. (These can result in a great deal of unintentional humour.) For example:

"a handkerchief from a lady soaked in perfume"

(If you stop and think about it, it's obviously the handkerchief that's soaked in perfume. But you don't want to make the reader stop and think—and laugh—you want them to keep reading. So, put the handkerchief side by side with both the lady and the perfume:)

"a lady's handkerchief soaked in perfume"

WATCH OUT for the position in your sentence of the words ONLY, NEARLY, ALMOST. Compare:

Only he came to my house. (nobody else did)

He only came to my house. (that's all he did)

He came only to my house. (not a step farther)

He came to only my house. (nobody else's)

He came to my only house. (I just have one)

He came to my house only. (not to my office)

3. DANGLING CONSTRUCTIONS.

When a word, phrase or clause comes before the rest of a sentence and is separated from it by a comma, then the word(s) involved always try to attach themselves to the **subject** of the sentence. If they can't, then they dangle, creating confusion and frequently humor:

At the age of three, his parents died.

(Obviously, his parents died when *he* was three years old. But "he" isn't mentioned in the sentence, giving this opening phrase nothing to hang onto. Correct by putting "he" back in:)

At the age of three, he lost his parents.

OR

When he was three years old, his parents died.

4. MISSING COMMAS. Commas tell the reader when to pause. Changing the placement of a comma can radically change the meaning of a sentence, and leaving one out can greatly confuse the reader. For example:

We keep our radio going often without paying any attention to it.

(Where should the comma be placed in this sentence, before or after "often"?)

5. UNEXPLAINED "THEN", "THERE", OR "THAT". For example:

The subject isn't mentioned in the book since there were no heavier-than-air craft at that time.

(When? When the book was published? Or during the historical era being described in the book? The reader is confused -- be specific!)

EDITING WORKSHEET 2: Sharpen the Focus

On a separate sheet of paper, get rid of any confusion or ambiguities in each of the following:

1. Rain spoiled our picnic. It lasted three days.
2. Everyone should know their phone number.
3. Having eaten our lunch, the bus left.
4. As this town's first woman fire chief, I wish to congratulate you.
5. He left that scene out because he couldn't remember where it went.
6. Nana is sad because we don't go there very often anymore.
7. Geordie took his hankie out, blew his nose and put it back in his pocket.
8. If she wins the spelling contest, Glynis will be very happy.
9. Germany's exports of building tools have more than doubled this year. The reason is their insistence on quality workmanship.
10. My father tripped on his way back from the hardware store yesterday and we were nearly picking up nails from the driveway for two hours.
11. Enraged, nothing could stop him.
12. Wang Lo would come home from school, eat dinner, do his homework, and be in bed by 9:00 p.m. Things were much simpler then.
13. In all the robbers took more than \$500.
14. I am looking for bunk beds for two active youngsters with safety rails on them.

EDITING WORKSHEET 2: ANSWER KEY

Here is how an editor would improve each of the sentences on page 9:

1. The picnic was spoiled by rain, which lasted three days.
2. Everyone should know their own phone number.
3. After we had eaten lunch, the bus left.
4. I wish to congratulate you on becoming this town's first woman fire chief.
5. (Depending on meaning:) He left that scene out because he had misplaced it. OR He left that scene out because he couldn't remember where it fit in the story.
6. Nana is sad because we don't visit her very often anymore.
7. Georgie took his hankie out and blew his nose. Then he put the hankie back in his pocket.
8. If Glynis wins the spelling contest, she will be very happy.
9. Germany's exports of building tools have more than doubled this year, because of the Germans' insistence on quality workmanship.
10. My father tripped on his way back from the hardware store yesterday, and we were picking up nails from the driveway for nearly two hours.
11. Enraged, he was unstoppable. OR When he was enraged, nothing could stop him.
12. Wang Lo would come home from school, do his homework, and be in bed by 9:00 p.m. Things were much simpler when he was a child.
13. In all, the robbers took more than \$500.
14. I am looking for bunk beds with safety rails, for two active youngsters.

Use this exercise and answer key to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for ways to sharpen the focus in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to spot the possible source of confusion in each sentence.

EDITING CHECKLIST 3A: Smooth the Read

Readers are looking for a 'smooth read', meaning prose that flows from one sentence to the next. As you edit, remove any bumps or jars from *awkward sentence structures* such as:

1. **FAULTY PARALLELISM.** Logic says that things on a list must all fall into the same category, or else you don't have a list. For example, a list of things to do at the cottage might include: clean the boathouse, fix the front step, paint the eaves, defrost the refrigerator. These are all phrases consisting of a verb plus an object.

In your writing, if you begin a list with nouns, then all the items in the list should be nouns:

Weight training gives a boy strength, confidence, and builds up his muscles.

The correct version of this should be:

Weight training gives a boy strength, confidence, and greater bulk.

2. **SEPARATED SENTENCE.** The subject of a sentence mustn't be so far away from the verb that the reader loses track of what the sentence is saying:

The basement, looking like the aftermath of a tornado, and which was adorned with cobwebs strung across every corner, *was my job that week*.

The correct version of this should be:

The basement was my job that week -- it looked like the aftermath of a tornado, and was adorned with cobwebs strung across every corner.

3. **INCORRECTLY OMITTED WORDS.** Sometimes you can leave words out of a sentence without losing any of the meaning:

When (I was) only two years old, I taught myself to read.

Walls do not a prison make, nor (do) iron bars (make) a cage.

Notice that the words which have been left out appear elsewhere in the sentence and will be automatically filled in, correctly, by the reader. Now compare:

I never have (understand?) and I never will understand chemistry.

(The omitted word ought to be "understand" -- but it isn't. The sentence becomes a little jarring to the reader as they realize that something is not right with it. Here is the corrected version:)

I never did understand chemistry, and I never will. ("understand it" fits in at the end)

4. INCORRECT PLACEMENT OF CORRELATIVES. Correlatives are pairs of words or expressions that offer the reader first one hand and then the other -- EITHER...OR, NEITHER...NOR, BOTH...AND, NOT ONLY...BUT ALSO. If you think of them as the two sides of an old balancing scale, then you realize that whatever follows the first correlative must be balanced or equalled by what follows the second:

Being neither stubborn nor a troublemaker, he followed the others into the building.

(You can say "being stubborn" and you can say "being a troublemaker" and they both balance. But compare this to the incorrect sentence following:)

Being neither stubborn nor wanting to make trouble, he followed the others into the building.

(You can say "being stubborn", but "being wanting to make trouble" does not make sense.)

5. WEAK PASSIVE VOICE. In the ACTIVE VOICE, the subject *performs* the action of the verb:

A mugger assaulted my friend.

In the PASSIVE VOICE, the subject *receives* the action of the verb:

My friend was attacked recently by a guard dog.

There are times when the passive voice should be used. It is often the best way to put an important idea at the end of a sentence, for example (see above). And sometimes it is necessary to use the PASSIVE VOICE because the doer of the action is unknown or cannot be expressed:

When all the votes were counted, the winner was...

However, in most other cases, using the PASSIVE VOICE tends to weaken the sentence. For example:

When we arrived at the farm, a beautiful sunset was seen.

Here is an improved way to say this, putting the important words at the end of the sentence:

When we arrived at the farm, we saw a beautiful sunset.

Now let's punch up the language a little to make the writing even stronger:

We arrived at the farm in time to witness a beautiful sunset.

EDITING WORKSHEET 3A: Smooth the Read

On a separate sheet of paper, get rid of the awkward sentence structures in each of the following:

1. There goes my dream man -- he's got looks, brains, and he's rich.
2. Karl is as short or shorter than Yussuf.
3. As we walked to the corner, an explosion was heard.
4. Mrs. DeLeon -- and I want you to know it took a great deal of persuasion to accomplish this, not to mention all the nights that I lay awake chewing my nails over it -- has finally given her consent.
5. Either you can take the bus or go on the train.
6. Karate teaches strength, quickness, and how to keep your temper.
7. That infernal machine, which gobbles electricity like there's no tomorrow and has already broken down three times this month, has got to go!
8. Not only was the cabin a four-hour drive from the house, but also filthy inside.
9. Varino will make as much or more than Griffin playing for the Blue Jays next year.
10. When we woke up this morning, the growl of a bulldozer could be heard on the street.

EDITING WORKSHEET 3A: ANSWER KEY

Here is how an editor would improve the sentences on page 14:

1. There goes my dream man -- he's got looks, brains, and money. OR There goes my dream man -- he's handsome, intelligent, and rich.
2. Karl is as short as or shorter than Yussuf. OR Karl is at least as short as Yussuf, if not shorter.
3. As we walked to the corner, we heard an explosion.
4. Mrs. DeLeon has finally given her consent. I want you to know it took a great deal of persuasion to win her over, not to mention all the nights that I lay awake chewing my nails.
5. You can either take the bus or go on the train. OR Either you can take the bus, or you can go on the train.
6. Karate teaches strength, quickness, and self-control.
7. That infernal machine has got to go! It gobbles electricity like there's no tomorrow and has already broken down three times this month.
8. Not only was the cabin a four-hour drive from the house, but it was also filthy inside.
9. Varino will make as much as or more than Griffin playing for the Blue Jays this year. OR Varino will make at least as much as Griffin playing for the Blue Jays this year.
10. When we woke up this morning, we could hear the growl of a bulldozer on the street.

Use this exercise and answer key to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for ways to smooth out the bumps and jars in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to spot the awkwardness that needs correcting in each sentence.

EDITING CHECKLIST 3B: Smooth the Read

Readers are looking for a 'smooth read', meaning prose that flows from one sentence to the next. As you edit, remove any bumps or jars from *awkward sentence structures* such as:

1. RAMBLING, OVERLONG SENTENCES. Sentences can ramble in two ways -- they can go off-topic and forget the point they were supposed to be making, or they can just be too long and contain too many thoughts for the reader to digest. For example:

Andre took the shopping list and went to the store, thinking that he would add a few items once he got there, but on the way he did some counting in his head and realized he hadn't brought enough money, so he had to go home and dig out his wallet again.

Correct this by breaking it up into smaller sentences:

Andre took the shopping list and went to the store, thinking that he would add a few items once he got there. On the way, however, he did some counting in his head and realized he hadn't brought enough money. With a sigh, he returned home and dug out his wallet again.

2. SENTENCE FRAGMENTS. This does not refer to fragments used deliberately for effect, or found between quotation marks in dialogue:

The tree had fallen over. Again. Janette moaned in disgust.

The fragments that weaken your writing are the ones you insert mistakenly, thinking they are complete sentences:

Mrs. O'Dell, an accomplished pastry chef, who in 1983 won an award for her apple-raspberry cobbler.

Correct this by removing the subordinating word "who" and rearranging the second part of the sentence to read more smoothly:

Mrs. O'Dell, an accomplished pastry chef, won an award in 1983 for her apple-raspberry cobbler.

An entire category of SENTENCE FRAGMENTS is created by a punctuation error called the PERIOD FAULT, in which a period slips in where there ought to be a comma:

I shall always remember my cousin Harvey. Because he was such an eccentric character.

Correct this by changing the period to a comma:

I shall always remember my cousin Harvey, because he was such an eccentric character.

3. COMMA SPLICE. This is the opposite of the PERIOD FAULT. Instead of a period replacing a comma, a comma incorrectly replaces a period (or colon, or dash, or semi-colon). The result is sometimes known as a RUN-ON SENTENCE:

I am not going back to that hairdresser, I don't like her attitude.

Correct this by replacing the comma with some sort of full-stop punctuation:

I am not going back to that hairdresser. I don't like her attitude.

4. CIRCUMLOCUTIONS. These are tortured, roundabout ways of saying simple, everyday things. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation used to have a broadcast style regulation that forbade newswriters from using a noun twice in a row in a story. The second time, the writer had to use a descriptive phrase instead.

For example, in a story about Sophia Loren visiting the country, the reporter might say, "Sophia Loren" in the first sentence, and switch to "the famous Italian actress" in the second. The rule was changed immediately after a broadcast in which there was a story about the banana, and the announcer, following the regulations, referred to it the second time as "the elongated yellow fruit". *That* is CIRCUMLOCUTION.

EDITING WORKSHEET 3B: Smooth the Read

On a separate sheet of paper, get rid of all the awkward sentence structures in the following:

1. Emily did all her homework at school that day. To free up her evening in case Dexter called.
2. Mrs. Esterhaus was entertaining her sister, an Arctic explorer who, on her last expedition, had discovered an Inuit house dating back to 1894 and had spent the entire three weeks taking it apart stone by stone and doing autopsies and then putting everything back together again.
3. He doesn't like catching fish, I don't like cleaning and cooking them, so we're even.
4. Now is the time to honour our comrades who have shucked off their mortal shells and set out on that great trek to eternity.
5. Roger Bannister, the greatest runner I had ever actually seen in action.
6. Don't you talk to that man, he doesn't know anything.
7. Sukie felt a chill as she read the story in the magazine. Because it was exactly what she had written in her diary the week before.
8. I knew I had to get my homework done fast and change my clothes in time for the party, so I rushed home from school only to find that my little brother had been home sick all day and if my mother didn't get the night out herself she was going to kill someone slowly, and there was no clean laundry, and guess whose turn it was to make dinner and wash up afterwards, so guess who couldn't make it to the party.
9. A little girl with brand new shoes, happily skipping down the street.
10. Duncan ingested a great amount of nourishment without properly masticating it.

EDITING WORKSHEET 3B: ANSWER KEY

Here is how an editor would improve the sentences on page 18:

1. Emily did all her homework at school that day, to free up her evening in case Dexter called. OR Emily did all her homework at school that day. She wanted to free up her evening in case Dexter called.
2. Mrs. Esterhaus was entertaining her sister, an Arctic explorer. On her last expedition, she had discovered an Inuit house dating back to 1894. She had spent three weeks taking the house apart stone by stone, doing autopsies on the bodies found inside, and then putting everything back together again.
3. He doesn't like catching fish, and I don't like cleaning and cooking them. So, we're even.
4. Now is the time to honour our dead comrades.
5. Roger Bannister was the greatest runner I had ever actually seen in action.
6. Don't you talk to that man! He doesn't know anything.
7. Sukie felt a chill as she read the story in the magazine, because it was exactly what she had written in her diary the week before.
8. I knew I would have to get my homework done fast and change my clothes in time for the party, so I rushed home from school...only to find that my little brother had been home sick all day, and my mother was ready to kill someone slowly if she didn't get the night out herself. On top of that, there was no clean laundry, and guess whose turn it was to make dinner and wash up afterwards. So, guess who couldn't make it to the party.
9. A little girl with brand-new shoes skipped happily down the street.
10. Duncan wolfed down a huge meal.

Use this exercise and answer key to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for ways to smooth the read in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to spot the awkward structures in your sentences.

EDITING CHECKLIST 4: Choose Positions of Strength

If you want your writing to have an impact on the reader, then the message must have muscle. And if you've ever had to prepare arguments for a formal debate, then you already know that the end of your speech is the position of greatest strength, and the opening is the position of second-greatest strength.

The same rule holds true for sentences, paragraphs, and chapters: *Put your most important word, thought, or idea at the end, and your second most important word, thought or idea at the beginning* to give them the proper emphasis in your writing. Compare the emphasis in the following sentences:

The book was what I really *wanted*.

The book was what mattered to *me*.

To me, what mattered most was *the book*.

Therefore, when you are EDITING, be sure that the words/ideas you want to stress are in that strong final position. *Rearrange sentences or paragraphs if necessary to put them there.*

1. MAKE STRATEGIC USE OF THE PASSIVE VOICE.

That order may have been given by a general, but it was countermanded by a much higher authority, namely, one of the civilians who paid his salary.

2. PERIODIC SENTENCES WITHHOLD THEIR MEANING UNTIL THE END.

Gaunt with hunger, covered with burrs, filth and scratches, and smelling like three-week-old garbage, the stubborn hound finally reappeared at my back door.

3. PUT A SHORT, POWERFUL STATEMENT AT THE END OF A PARAGRAPH OF LONGER SENTENCES.

The lake glowed like molten gold as the fiery disk of the sun sank wearily behind a thick stand of spruce and red maple. In the air hung the warm tang of spring and the last nip of winter, and all around me was the healing silence of the mountains.
I was home.

EDITING WORKSHEET 4: Choose Positions of Strength

On a separate sheet of paper, rearrange each of the following to put the most important idea at the end:

1. Astronomy has always fascinated me.
2. Married couples tend to buy more paper toweling, for some reason.
3. It was your idea to invest in those stocks.
4. No, silly, *ponds* are where ducks live.
5. That antique car is David's favourite toy.
6. Family pets have attacked more than fourteen children this year.
7. The horse came in last, in spite of all that the owner and trainer had done, and in spite of its natural talent and desire to win.
8. The cottage looked as though it had sat empty for ten winters, at least, with its dilapidated roof, its rotting plank floor, and its cracked, grime-encrusted windows.

EDITING WORKSHEET 4: ANSWER KEY

Here is how an editor would improve the sentences on page 21:

1. I have always been fascinated by astronomy.
2. For some reason, married couples tend to buy more paper toweling. OR For some reason, more paper toweling is bought by married couples.
3. Investing in those stocks was your idea.
4. No, silly, ducks live around ponds.
5. David's favourite toy is that antique car.
6. This year, more than fourteen children have been attacked by family pets.
7. In spite of all that the owner and trainer had done, and in spite of its natural talent and desire to win, the horse came in last.
8. With its dilapidated roof, its rotting plank floor, and its cracked, grime-encrusted windows, the cottage looked as though it had sat empty for at least ten winters.

Use this exercise and answer key to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for important words or ideas that need to be in positions of emphasis in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to choose the most effective word order for your sentences (and sentence order for your paragraphs).

EDITING CHECKLIST 5: Use Calculated Repetition

Deliberate repetition is an effective way to stress your main ideas. By repeating key words or phrases, you bring them into much clearer focus for the reader. As you read the following examples, remember the number 3:

...government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

(Abraham Lincoln)

Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.

*(Winston Churchill, in a speech
to the House of Commons, 13 May 1940)*

...wet roads, wet fields, wet housetops; not a beautiful, scarcely a picturesque object met my eyes along the whole route; yet to me, all was beautiful, all was more than picturesque.

(Charlotte Bronte)

Did you notice that in each case, the repetitions occurred three times? There is something especially effective about three things together -- the same adjective to describe three different nouns in a row, three rhythmic phrases with the same last word, coming one after the other....Nobody knows exactly why, or how it works, but it's something that every writer can and should take advantage of in order to add power to their writing.

EDITING WORKSHEET 5: Use Calculated Repetition

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite each of the following to make it more effective by using repetition:

1. The rain was dripping off the eaves outside my bedroom window, falling on the edge of the porch and the porch railing. The plopping sound was keeping me awake.
2. Giggling, the children raced all over the house, looking for Easter eggs to fill their little straw baskets. And they found them, in every room.
3. Dinah sat on her father's shoulder, staring wide-eyed at the parade passing by. Every float was based on the theme of Santa's workshop.
4. My grandmother's attic was a treasure cave when I was small -- a place where I could curl up with the many things she had saved over the years, and let them transport me, on the magic carpet of my imagination, to other times and places.
5. The tailor took down a large cardboard box and opened it carefully. Sarina gasped softly in disbelief. She had never seen so many buttons in one place.

EDITING WORKSHEET 5: ANSWER KEY

No, we're not going to do them all for you, but we will show you how the first one might be done, just to get you started:

1. Rain dripped off the eaves outside my bedroom window. Plop-plop, onto the carved porch railing...plop-plop, onto the protruding edge of the verandah...plop-plop, right into my head, it seemed...plop-plop, plop-plop, keeping me awake all night.

Now you try the rest. When you're satisfied with what you've done, why not share it with someone?

Use this exercise to warm up your brain and program it to be on the lookout for ways to use repetition to strengthen the description in your writing. You don't need to do the whole exercise at once. You'll know you're ready to make your editing pass by the ease with which you're able to identify the word or phrase that will be most effective.

EDITING CHECKLIST 6: Paint Vivid Word Pictures

Your purpose in writing is to communicate thought-images from your head to the reader's, and that means painting pictures with words. Strong images are painted with bold verbal brushstrokes. Therefore, as you edit your work, look for weak, colourless words and phrases that you can exchange for more vivid and energetic ones.

1. USE 'FLAVOURFUL' WORDS. Don't settle for vanilla when you can have your pick of 31 different flavours out of a Thesaurus. Don't settle for WALKED when you can use STROLLED, AMBLED, STRUTTED, STALKED. Don't settle for RED when there's CRIMSON, SCARLET, RUBY, VERMILION.

Jacques stood on the street corner for an hour.

(How vanilla of him! Use a different flavour that will also tell us something more about his reason for being there:)

Jacques waited on the street corner for an hour.

(But his friend never showed up.)

Jacques lingered on the street corner for an hour.

(He decided to kill some time.)

Jacques tarried on the street corner for an hour.

(He became distracted and lost track of the time.)

Jacques remained on the street corner for an hour.

(His friends went home, but he decided to stay behind.)

2. USE SPECIFIC, CONCRETE WORDS. Writing is more powerful -- and much easier for the reader to visualize -- when it avoids the general, vague and abstract.

So don't say "head covering" if the lady wears a red felt beret.

Don't say "transportation" if she drives a Cadillac sedan.

Don't say "she looked surprised" if what she did was raise one finely-drawn eyebrow.

3. MAKE COMPARISONS. Similes and metaphors paint the most vivid pictures of all.

A SIMILE is a single-point comparison that includes the word *like* or *as*:

She pranced *like* a nervous deer.

As stealthy *as* a stalking panther...

In each case above, only one characteristic is being compared. The SIMILE is a more restricted form of comparison than the METAPHOR, which can compare several points at once, without using *like* or *as*, and which can also plant suggestions for further points of comparison later on in the text:

Arms outstretched, Mrs. Vanderhooven swooped down upon her hapless guest.

(Later on, you might describe her long, sharp fingernails or her screeching voice, and this will add more and finer detail to the image in the reader's mind of Mrs. Vanderhooven as a bird of prey.)

Enjoy putting simile and metaphor into your writing, but beware of mixing metaphors:

He mowed down the enemy like a field of sitting ducks.

EDITING WORKSHEET 6: Paint Vivid Word Pictures

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite each of the following so that it paints a picture inside the reader's head:

1. Watching for signs of a trap, Luis walked into the alley.
2. Monique fell overboard.
3. Jill always moves very carefully and quietly through a room.
4. She wore a very attractive dress that showed off all her charms.
5. They drew everyone's attention when they arrived at the party, arguing.
6. Even though she detested Nadia, Zofia acted very friendly toward her.
7. Marcel could tell by looking at him that the old man was drunk.

No, there is no Key to this Worksheet -- this is a writing exercise that depends on your own imagination, so there are no 'right answers', just thousands of possibilities.

Pick a sentence that calls up an image in your mind's eye. Then, use the three techniques on the Checklist to paint that image, as clearly and colourfully as possible, onto the page for the reader.

When you're satisfied with what you've done, you may decide to share it with someone.

Use this exercise to keep your descriptive writing skills limber, and to program your brain to spot opportunities to use them in your writing.

POLISHING CHECKLIST

Polishing is concerned with the *sound* and *surface* of your writing, rather than with its meaning. Therefore, as you go over your manuscript this last time, be on the lookout for:

1. **TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS.** Correct all the spelling or keyboarding mistakes you can find. If in doubt, consult a good dictionary.

2. **AGREEMENT OF SUBJECT TO VERB AND PRONOUN TO ANTECEDENT.** While you were making all those editorial changes earlier on, you may have changed a subject from singular to plural but forgotten to change the verb. Or, you may have changed a noun but forgotten to make the same change to the pronoun that followed it.

3. **PARENTHESES AND QUOTATION MARKS.** Have you remembered to close them all? If you used "smart quotes", are all the tails pointing in the right direction?

4. **LINE SPACING AND PARAGRAPHING.** Look at the way your writing *looks* on the page. Have you double line-spaced where necessary? Are all your paragraphs properly indented? Have you started a new paragraph for each new speaker in a dialogue?

5. **EMPTY SPACES.** Did you remember to hand-draw that weird symbol that you had to leave a space for because it doesn't appear on your keyboard? Are there still any spaces or space-holding strings of letters in your text where you meant to insert information once you'd looked it up?

6. **CHANGES OF VOCABULARY.** As you read the text aloud, you may encounter words or groups of words that don't look or sound right, or suddenly strike you as being unintentionally comical. Change them.

7. **EXTRA OR MISSING WORDS, OR UNINTENTIONAL WORD REPETITION.** Are there three forms of the verb "walk" in the same paragraph, for example? Change or omit two of them. Does a word appear in two consecutive sentences? Reword one of them to avoid the repetition. Do you have "go-to" words that you tend to overuse? Use the Word Find function to find and replace them with more diverse and descriptive vocabulary.

8. **INCONSISTENCIES.** If you revised your heroine from blond to brunette, be sure that there aren't any forgotten references to blond hair buried in the text. Also look for people who suddenly switch from right-handed to left-handed, eyes that change colour from one chapter to the next, rings that move from one finger to another all by themselves, and so on.