

Five Fast Fixes To Improve Your Book

1. THAT is a word which can creep into writing without adding value. If a sentence sounds natural and understandable without its presence, go ahead and remove THAT from the sentence.

2. A variety of sentence structures adds interest. Limit the number of sentences starting with names and pronouns.

Original: They went to the store to buy milk and picked up ice-cream.

Revised: Needing milk, they went to the store, picking up ice-cream as well.

3. Your story may be past tense, but every verb does not need to be. Changing the tense, especially in a sentence with a list of actions, improves the flow.

Original: They sawed the wood, pounded in the nails and finished the deck before the rains came.

Revised: Sawing the wood and pounding in the nails, they finished the deck before the rains came.

4. Draw the reader into the scene by replacing dialog tags with body language tags.

Original:

"That's the movie you want to watch?" Shane asked.

"What's wrong with *Die Hard*?" Ted replied

"Nothing's wrong with it. We've just seen it a bazillion times."

"That's because it's a classic," Ted declared.

"Whatever," Shane mumbled.

Revised:

Shane peered over the top of his reading glasses. "That's the movie you want to watch?"

"What's wrong with *Die Hard*?" Ted's muffled voice came from the depths of the fridge.

"Nothing's wrong with it." Shane slumped back against the cushions of the couch. "We've just seen it a bazillion times."

Sauntering into the room with two beers, Ted grinned broadly as he handed one to Shane. "That's because it's a classic."

"Whatever." Rolling his eyes, Shane shifted over to make room for his husband.

5. Give your beta readers homework. Ask them to look for specific issues to report back to you: overuse of a word or phrase; all characters sounding the same; story threads not tied up by the end of the book.

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