



COPYEDITING FICTION 101

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LESSON #4

We're ready for our final lesson. This is going to be another information-packed week, and at the end of the lesson, you'll get a chance to copyedit part of a manuscript. Before we dive in, let's do the most important thing.

First Things First!

PRAY. Everything you've been learning and absorbing is a result of God's faithfulness and love. He's walked with you this far, and he's not leaving now. So let's quiet our hearts and focus our minds on him, letting go of the wind and the waves that may be whipping our lives into a tempest.

Dear Father, show me your glory today. As I read this lesson, I ask you to help me understand more fully how to help authors bring their stories to life. Share with me your creative genius, and let's walk through this hand in hand. Reveal to me even more just how much you love me so that my love for you and for me and for others will blaze that much more today. In Jesus I ask. Amen.

Thoughts

Direct vs. Indirect Thoughts

Allowing readers to experience what the characters are thinking is a powerful way to establish the character's personality as well as show details versus tell details. But your author may not understand how to execute this effectively. Understanding the difference between direct and indirect thoughts is crucial.

Direct thoughts are thoughts the character thinks word for word and are expressed in present tense. If the story is in third person, a direct thought will be written in first person. These thoughts will be set in italics, not within quotation marks.

She covered her ears with both hands, shutting her eyes. *I must be brave. I'm not really alone.*¹

1. Linda Chaikin, *The Pirate and His Lady* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 64.

Indirect thoughts are still thoughts the character thinks, but they are expressed in the same tense as the surrounding text. If your story is in third person, the thoughts remain in third person and they will be set in Roman typeface along with the surrounding text.

Sir Cecil brushed his sleeve, avoiding Baret's gaze. This wasn't like Cecil. What was he trying to hide?²

Both direct and indirect thoughts rarely require thinker attributes (*he thought, she thought*). These may be useful if you're editing for omniscient POV. But if you are in a single POV, the POV character is the only one doing the thinking, because the reader can't be in more than one head at a time.

Thoughts in Deep POV

If authors are going for deep point of view, they might tend to overuse direct thoughts. After all, if the author wants the readers inside the character's head, wouldn't it be better for them to hear the thoughts exactly as the character is thinking them? The natural assumption is that if you are using a direct thought, you are in a deeper point of view than an indirect thought. This is not, however, the case.

Since direct thoughts are set in italics and written in first person, present tense, they not only cause a visual interruption in the text but also give the subtle impression that the thinker and the narrator are not the same. This has the effect of disturbing the reader's deep point of view.

Rachel sat at the computer, her fingers hammering out the next few sentences. Her cat's insistent meow sounded again. *How many times is he going to want to go outside today? Yeah, it's gorgeous outside.* The fall weather seemed to be moving in right on time, and a cool breeze was taking the edge off the UV heat from the sun. *But I'm never going to get this work done if he doesn't make up his mind to stay in or stay out.* She rose a couple inches out of her chair and reached over to open the back door.³

(Ah! Pretty cool that you know that subtle nuance now, huh?)

In contrast, indirect thoughts blend into the text. The line between experiencing the world through the characters' eyes (what they are seeing) and through the characters' minds (what they are thinking) becomes almost indistinguishable. This allows readers to remain in deep point of view. See the difference indirect thoughts have made to the paragraph below.

Rachel sat at the computer, her fingers hammering out the next few sentences. Her cat's insistent meow sounded again. How many times was he going to want to go outside today? Yeah, it was gorgeous outside. The fall weather seemed to be moving in right on time, and a cool breeze was taking the edge off the UV heat from the sun. But she was never going to get this work done if he didn't make up

2. Linda Chaikin, *The Pirate and His Lady* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 21.

3. Based on a true story.

his mind to stay in or stay out. She rose a couple inches out of her chair and reached over to open the back door.

If you are editing for deep point of view, make sure the author doesn't use direct thoughts often. The seamless integration of indirect thoughts will help the text become transparent and the fictional world come alive.

Dialogue

When editing dialogue, ask if the dialogue is believable, feels natural, and moves the story forward. You want to remove any details that are there for the sole purpose of dumping information on the reader, and you want to be careful the author doesn't sound like they are preaching at the readers.

Dialogue is different from conversation. Conversation is what happens in real life.

“Hi, Joe.”
“Hey, Mary.”
“How are you?”
“I'm good. How are you?”
“I'm good too. Whatcha been up to?”
“Oh, you know. Been busy.”

Conversation is boring. Although this may be word for word what these two people would say to each other, it does nothing for the story. Dialogue must serve a purpose. There has to be a reason for every line said, and it needs to be natural and true to the character who would say it.

Good dialogue serves at least one of several functions:

1. It reveals personality traits of the characters.
2. It gives the readers facts necessary to understand the backstory without taking the reader into expository mode.
3. It advances the plot.
4. It contributes to the conflict, motivation, or goals of the characters.

Speaker Attributions

Speaker attributions are the phrases used to identify who is speaking (e.g., he said, she said, Mary shouted, Joan whispered).

Keep them when they are necessary; but when they are unnecessary, edit them out. How do you know if they are needed? Take them out and read the scene again. If you can tell who is talking, they aren't needed. The writing will be tighter and more gripping if you get rid of unnecessary words.

Speaker attributions become more important in scenes with more than two characters. But something to watch out for is the overuse of colorful attributions. There are many creative ways

to express *said*: answered, retorted, chortled, whispered, exclaimed, muttered, queried, replied, agreed, voiced, just to name a few. Many of these turn into author explanations, which we will learn about in a moment. But keep in mind that *said* is somewhat of an invisible word. As long as it is also not overused, it disappears right into the text, whereas more colorful attributions used frequently tend to draw attention to themselves.

Beats

Beats are the bits of information sprinkled throughout the dialogue that describe what's happening: e.g., Sally reached down to stroke Tabby's orange coat. "At least you still love me, don't ya, girl?" She turned her focus to the large oak outside the kitchen window.

Beats slow down the flow of the story and can denote time passing between speakers. If the scene should have a high level of tension, edit the beats so they are used sparingly, if at all. If the pace needs to slow down and relieve the reader after a very intense interplay, make sure the author has included some relevant beats, or suggest some to add.

Author Explanations

Often an author will attempt to explain something about what was just said using explanatory adverbs or other explanatory language.

Explanatory adverbs tell the reader how something was said (e.g., she said brusquely, he said compassionately, etc.). Watch out for these explanatory adverbs and see if the dialogue can be edited so that it is strong enough to convey the way it is said without the need to explain it: "Get out." Or "I can't imagine what you are going through." These sentences carry with them the connotation of brusqueness or compassion.

Other explanatory language may describe what was just said. For example:

"T-t-tomorrow." He stuttered the words.

"Oh, my! I didn't realize. I'm so sorry. I can't believe I waited so long.

You must know how bad I feel!" Cathy apologized all over herself. "I just—"

"It doesn't matter now." He interrupted her apology.

In each of these sentences, the author explains to the reader something that has been clearly shown in dialogue. I often leave my author comments like "You did such a great job of showing this already! The dialogue is strong enough to stand on its own. You don't need the explanatory language for the readers."

Character Voice

When we talk about character voice, we are talking about the things characters would say, the words they would choose (diction), and the order in which they would say them. They may use jargon related to their professions or hobbies or have pet exclamations or topics they gravitate toward. This is where it helps to know a character's history and background because this will influence their dialogue. At the copyediting stage, however, you likely won't be privy to the character's history before the story takes place, so the main things in that regard that you are watching for are consistency within the same character's dialogue and distinction in the dialogue

of the main characters. If all of the characters sound the same, that's a big issue that needs to be brought to the author's attention.

Especially important to copyediting is understanding the time period in which the story takes place and the region in which it takes place. If the setting is historical, the character shouldn't be using modern slang and modern interjections. If the story is speculative fiction, characters shouldn't be using similes and metaphors containing things that only exist in the real world. I recently edited a spec. fic. MS in which the author compared a character's skin color to alabaster. So I queried the author in a comment and asked him to make sure alabaster exists in this world.

Minor characters don't necessarily need much distinction but should at least be consistent with the region and time period where the story takes place.

Profanity

What is profanity? Such a simple yet difficult question. People from different walks, regions, and social groups may have a different answer for this. But when it comes to publishing, the definition of profanity and whether to use it is determined by the publisher. Of course, now that so many authors self-publish, you might find yourself offering advice as to whether certain words should stay or go. So here's a little bit about why an author might want to include or exclude profanity and ways to do that.

A word qualifies as profane when its value has been reduced by a wrong, unworthy, or uncultivated use. One who uses a word in such a way projects an image that they lack refinement, perception, and taste. The word may be disgusting to the senses. It could also be repulsive because the one using it is disregarding moral or ethical principles. Almost exclusively, profanity is used to express strong emotions.

By this definition, you can see that there are almost an unlimited amount of words that could be considered profane. This makes our job that much easier (can you hear the sarcasm?).

There are two schools of thought regarding a character's use of profanity:

School of Thought #1. Profanity is the result of lazy thinking, which translates into being the result of lazy writing. If an author takes the time to exercise his or her creativity, there is always a much more engaging and intellectual way to express the character's depraved state.

Here is an example written by Jeff Gerke of depicting an offensive character without the use of profanity. I'll warn you, it makes me shudder and cringe to read it, so if Holy Spirit checks your spirit to skip over this next part, do it. But it's an excellent example of creating a despicable character without using any profanity.

****Dwayne****

Little blond Barbie dolls. Cute.

Dwayne moved through the house with the silence of a roach. Must be nice to have a playroom *and* a big room of your own. He bent over the large dollhouse, where a blond plastic bimbo sat askew in her chair having a burger and fries with a redheaded plastic bimbo.

Moonlight cast soft shadows on the toy cabinets and dress-up bin and pink bean bag chairs in the playroom. Typical. Delicious.

Dwayne picked up the blond doll and caressed its molded smile with the tip of his hunting knife. The stiff yellow hair fell across the edge of the blade.

Hmm.

He snatched the locks in his thumb and fingers, slightly less dexterous because of the rubber gloves. He put his left hand over the doll's face, held the knife to the scalp, and pulled the hair across the blade. The strands came away in his hand reluctantly, like pulling a wing off a bird.

He rotated the defiled doll before his eyes and felt the excitement rise in his neck. Pretty little thing.

Dwayne dropped the doll to the carpet and stepped into Camille's room. The kindergartner lay sideways on her PowerPuff Girls sheets, blond hair arrayed over the pillow like a yellow skirt.

Pretty little thing.⁴

You can see how creative and strong the writing can be without resorting to curse words. The other school of thought is this:

School of Thought #2. Profanity is the result of lazy thinking, but if your character is a lazy thinker, it would be dishonest to portray him or her any other way. Stay true to your character and let your reader experience the realism of your writing.

This idea has merit, and your author may insist this is the way to go. If so, advise them to be aware of the targeted readership and the publisher's guidelines. If they already have a publisher, make sure you read the guidelines as well and conform the manuscript to them.

Minced Oaths

A minced oath is a more pleasant way to say a curse word, for example, *heck*, *darn*, *gosh*, *freaking*, and *jeez*. If you've been in Christian circles for any length of time, you know how

4. Jeff Gerke, "Fiction Writing Tips: Tip #56: Manage Profanity, Part 2," Where the Map Ends, www.wherethemapends.com.

varied the offensiveness of words like these are. There are no hard and fast rules except to comply with what the publisher allows and what the readers would be comfortable with.

Grawlix/Profanotype

A *grawlix*, also called *profanotype*, is a series of symbols that represents swearing: @%*#&! The effect is always considered comic, and in books, it draws attention to itself and distracts from the narrative. Advise your clients against using it.

Invented Languages

If you are editing speculative fiction, your author may have invented words they use for cursing. These are generally unoffensive since they are meaningless in our language. Whether the reader understands it or not, if your author is concerned with whether writing a string of curse words in *any* language is offensive to God, encourage him or her to seek the guidance of Holy Spirit and to be “fully persuaded in his own mind” (Romans 14:5 KJV).

The Bottom Line

Regardless of which school of thought you agree with, consider that some publishers are shying away from publishing material that contains profanity, even some secular publishers. The bottom line is that they will inherently lose some readers because of it. But if you are editing a work of Christian fiction, and the intended readership is Christian, the author needs to know that the majority of Christian readers will be disappointed and upset if they encounter profanity in a Christian novel.

Unless it is essential to the story, ask your author to consider leaving it out. They need to decide if the potential negative effects on book sales outweigh any colorfulness it might add.⁵

Breaks

Breaks are used throughout a manuscript for several different reasons. Chapter breaks divide the book into manageable portions. Hard breaks indicate a major change in the narrative. And soft breaks indicate a minor change in the narrative.

Chapter Breaks

If a reader picked up a book with no chapter breaks, it would be daunting and overwhelming. Chapter breaks give the reader a visual pause and indicate a new direction for the story.

Each chapter should begin with a hook and end with a cliffhanger, as you already know. The hook should engage the emotions and curiosity of readers and propel them forward. The cliffhanger should leave the readers with a sense of expectancy and a desire to dive into the next chapter.

To begin a new chapter, insert a page break (Ctrl+Enter). This will enable you to insert or remove text without affecting where the chapter breaks start.

5. For further reading, check out the section on “Profanity” in your *CWMS* on page 301.

Chapter headings should be centered one-third of the way down the page. It should be in upper and lowercase letters instead of all caps, and it should have a numeral for the chapter number (e.g., Chapter 1). If the chapter has a title, position it on the next line, centered. Start the chapter two double-spaced lines down.

Hard Breaks

Hard breaks indicate a major change in the narrative. The change could be the timing of the scene. (Usually, more than a few hours must have passed to warrant a hard break.) It could be the setting has changed and a new scene is beginning. Or perhaps the point of view from which the story is told has changed in addition to the change in setting.

Indicate a hard break by centering three or four dingbats (typographical characters) on the next line. You do not need any extra line spaces between the paragraphs and the dingbats. The dingbats can be as simple as stars:

* * *

or they could go with a theme of the book:

♣ ♣ ♣

Keep in mind they should not be obtrusive.

Soft Breaks

Soft breaks indicate a minor change in the narrative. If the setting does not change and there is no time lapse but the point of view from which the story is told changes, a soft break is appropriate. A soft break is also needed if there is a small amount of time that has elapsed between the paragraphs.

In a finished manuscript, a soft break is indicated by a space between paragraphs. To indicate a soft break to the publisher, center “(space)” on the next line between paragraphs:

(space)

There is no need for additional line spaces above or below this indication on the MS.

Showing vs. Telling

One thing that separates merely good storytellers from accomplished authors is the ability to show instead of tell. Showing happens when an author describes exactly what is said and done by the characters (this includes what the character sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches) in a way that causes readers to experience these sensory perceptions along with the character. In contrast, when an author tells, the author interprets for the reader what these sensory details mean.

For example, the author might describe a scene in which a person brings home a spider:

The spider was huge and hideous.

You can take this and edit it to show readers what the spider looks like. That is what Thomas Williams does in his novel *The Crown of Eden*:

The creature was covered with brownish gray hair and had a leg span well over half that of Llewnthane's hand.

Readers are then able to draw their own conclusion that the spider is huge and hideous because the author has shown them what the spider looks like. This enables readers to experience the story as if they are the character instead of experiencing it as if they are merely being told a story about the character.

There are particular words to watch for that indicate telling instead of showing. The most common culprits are adverbs that end in “ly” (e.g., joyously, happily, sadly, angrily, longingly, tiredly).

Here are examples of telling using *ly*-adverbs:

Jane tiredly walked up the stairs.
Ralph let out a shout and angrily drove his fist through the wall.
He watched the bird curiously.

Here are these sentences copyedited to show instead of tell:

- Jane's feet scraped the edge of each stair as she struggled to lift one foot, then the other.
- Ralph let out a shout and drove his fist through the wall. (The anger has already been revealed by the context—no need to tell what you've already shown.)
- A brilliant cardinal landed just three feet away from where he sat. It bobbed its head and took a ginger step forward. (Since the story is in his point of view, you can't describe anything without his “watching” it, so no need to say he watched. Including the details he sees shows his curiosity.)

Other words that clue you to a possible tell-vs.-show issue include:

- *feel* (She felt tired. They felt left out.)
- *was* (He was mad.)
- *cause* (His look caused her hair to rise.)
- *made* (The alarm made Andy jump out of bed.)

Instead of telling readers the state of your character, show them. Instead of telling them the cause and effect, show the cause and show the effect. If the author tells readers something made or caused a certain outcome, they are depriving readers of a more engaging description.

Here is one of the above sentences after copyediting:

The alarm blared into Andy’s ears, shattering the peaceful, ocean scene of his dreams. Gah! Five a.m. already? He threw the covers on the floor and propelled himself across the room.

Sometimes strong verbs can create an illusion of powerful sentences. For example:

Thoughts of jealousy battered her mind.

Although this sounds like a powerful sentence, it doesn’t show the reader how jealous she is or what the thoughts are. It is the same as telling the reader, “She was jealous.” It could be edited to show her jealous thoughts instead of just telling the reader about them:

What was that woman doing here? Her skirt was at least twelve inches above her knees, and her legs weren’t that long. Floozy. Maybe she would catch her stiletto on the rug when she crossed the room.

Now, showing is not always preferable to telling. Telling is a strategic tool that, when used properly, can be very effective. It is useful in conveying plot developments that are not important enough to warrant a scene and events that contain only minor characters.

The following excerpt from Kathy Tyers’s novel *Firebird* demonstrates a valid use of telling.

Already he’d examined the former marshals and several electors. Unanimously, they longed to throw off Federate rule.

The marshals and electors are minor characters in this story, and it would be an inefficient use of book space to go into the details of each of his conversations with them.

When considering whether the author should show or tell, ask yourself if the reader needs to experience what the character is experiencing or if the reader simply needs backstory for what is to come.

Descriptions

Descriptions are vital to a story. Since reading doesn’t incorporate sight or sound the way a movie does, the only way to engage readers’ senses is through words. But some authors get a little carried away with it. For instance, in one manuscript I edited, a character had walked into a laboratory. The author took time to meticulously describe all of the lab instruments, cabinets, and equipment in the room. Now the problem with this is that, unlike a movie where the scene gives you a view of everything in the camera but focuses on what’s important, a written story focuses *only* on what’s important. Every detail is a promise to the reader that it means something; and when the author fails to keep promises, they lose the trust of their readers, which means the reader won’t read another book by this author even if the author is lucky enough to have the reader finish this one. Back to the lab scene, the only purpose the details served was to establish

they were in a lab. So during the copyedit, most of those details were cut, and only the ones left for understanding the current scene and laying a foundation for future events were left.

Characters

Readers need to form images of the characters as soon as possible. But you want to be cautious of areas where the author has “information dumped.” You don’t need every single detail regarding a character’s description in one big chunk. It’s going to interrupt the story and bore the reader. Instead, edit the text so that the descriptions are woven into the narrative and the action when the point-of-view character sees another character. Also important is the choice of words that are used to make the description. Make sure they are consistent with the POV character’s voice. You can also use word choice to effect the proper emotion. Look at the examples below of two different descriptions of the same character.

At about 6’1”, he was tall enough to tower over me in heels. His dark, short hair accentuated his strong jaw and distinguished nose. The wayward lock falling across his forehead hinted at wild fun.

He was a bit taller than daddy, with kind eyes and dark hair with a messy piece falling over his eyebrows. He smiled at me. This was a man I could trust.

You can see how characters perceive the same traits in very different ways.

Where it gets a little trickier is when readers need to “see” what the POV character looks like. Having the character look into a mirror is an old trick and generally considered amateurish. So I don’t recommend your authors use this approach. However, what the character looks like can be revealed through her thoughts and reflections about herself. Sneak these in organically so they are triggered by the present actions.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the amount of description given should be in proportion to the importance of that character. A minor character who has a small role in the story doesn’t need a lot of detailed description—just enough for the readers to have an impression of what this person looks like. But if a character plays a major part in the plot development, and if a character holds a great deal of significance to one of the main characters, readers should have a very clear image of what that character looks like.

Settings

Like I mentioned a bit earlier, readers can’t see what the author doesn’t write about. And it’s very important readers know where they are when a scene is taking place; otherwise, it can be very disorienting. The environment in which the scene takes place is called setting. Not giving proper description of the setting can render an effect where the POV character is in focus but is set in a white background or a fuzzy background that slowly comes into focus as readers figure out where they are (or perhaps never figure out where they are).

Besides the physical descriptions of the setting, you also want to make sure details like time of day, location, and the other characters that are present are established. There is a fine line between underwriting and overwriting the setting. But the important thing to keep in mind, as I

mentioned earlier, is that every detail needs to have a purpose. Examine each detail individually and decide if the reader needs to know that.

One thing to watch out for that I see issues with often is the concept of time as scenes change. Is there enough time for them to get from point A to point B? Did they have to miss a meal? Are we now dealing with a hangry character? What time of day is it? Would it be normal for them to be doing this at this time of day? Would the place they are traveling to be open today? Little details like that. Just envision yourself as the character, and try to think of all those things as the story goes along. Those things don't need to be included necessarily, but if the character is heading into town, a three-hour walk, and he's leaving just before noon, he might need to grab some lunch first. And that just might work into a plot point.

Author Voice and Tone

One of the most important things you can do as a copyeditor is to preserve the author's voice and tone. There are so many ways someone could say the same thing—so many *correct* ways. So if you are changing something the author has written to make it clearer or more concise, don't lose the flavor of their voice. It makes them who they are.

This is one of the advantages of reading the entire manuscript before beginning your copyedit. By reading the whole thing, you'll get a feel for the way the author uses words and the tone that is set by those words. Does the book have a light and fanciful feel? Is it somber and pensive? Does the author write in a way that is comical yet addresses serious issues? You don't want to lose these important attributes when you copyedit. The way *you* would say it is not necessarily the *right* way to say it, so if what the author has written is clear, and if the details have a purpose, leave what the author has written, even if you think it would sound better the way you would write it.

One issue I want to point out here is author intrusion. Many authors don't even realize that pausing to explain something to readers interrupts the illusion that the reader has become the POV character. So if you have an author who is trying to address readers (sometimes this happens in a parenthetical phrase), eliminate the author intrusion and explain to them how it affects the reader experience.

Here are some examples. The text in bold is author intrusion, where the author is directly addressing the reader.

Example 1

[In this excerpt, the POV character just left her place of employment, a coffee house called Sacred Grounds.] The Bug was parked in the back lot across the alley and I'd be able to throw the trash in the dumpster on my way. Grabbing my purse, I slid the strap over my head and across my body and threw my sweatshirt on over it. All I had to do was walk out the door, lock it behind myself, and walk fifty or so feet to the Bug and get in, at almost half-past ten—in the dark.

Sacred Grounds is located in a building that is part of the original town built in the early 1900s. The outside of the two-story strip is brick, and for whatever reason, our space isn't as deep as the rest. It's odd, because it's all one building, but when you go out our back door you enter a little parking area with brick walls on three sides, as deep as is wide—about two car lengths.

Example 2

He could have a million Maggie Haynes if he wanted to, he could have anyone he wanted for that matter. Why me?

Then it hit me, **to be cliché**, like a ton of bricks. It wasn't just that he wanted me; it was that he wanted me — and couldn't have me.⁶

Sometimes authors like the informal feel of addressing readers, and that works well if they are writing nonfiction, but it doesn't work for fiction . . . unless it does. It all depends on the experience authors want readers to have. If they are going for a traditional story feeling, where the reader gets lost in the book and forgets none of this is real, then get rid of author intrusion. If they want readers to feel like they are being told the story by the author and they are becoming good friends over coffee, well . . . make sure that's the effect they end up with.

Sometimes the intrusion is very subtle, like in the second example. So when you're on the lookout for it, just pay attention anytime it feels like the author just talked to you as the reader.

Editing for Strong Writing

Here are some ways to copyedit so the writing is strong.

Repeated Ideas

Watch out for repeated ideas. When it comes to repetition, a good rule of thumb is $1 + 1 = \frac{1}{2}$. Sometimes an author will want to hit a point home so much that he repeats it, but it weakens the scene instead of adding strength. Instead of saying the same thing twice (sometimes in different ways), keep the stronger version and say it only once.

“You heard,” my voice trembled. “The things I’ve done,” I looked down. I didn’t want to remind him. I wished I could just wipe the slate clean, erase it all, my past, my sin, my mistakes. All of it. I wanted it gone. I wished my life had been a blank sheet before I’d met him. No guys, no drinking, no abortion, no Marcus.
Gone, I wanted all of it gone.

In the example, the sentence in bold should be eliminated. The idea is presented more strongly without it. Adding the repetition weakens the delivery.

Consecutive Sentences Beginning with the Same Word

Another thing to look out for is consecutive sentences that all start with the same word.

6. Pamela Black, *Held*, work in progress, used by permission.

He touched my chin and lifted it until I was gazing into his eyes, those eyes like a million stars shining brilliantly. He searched mine, a worried and confused expression on his brow. He sighed deeply and looked away for a second. He closed his eyes and shook his head side to side. He opened them again and focused them directly on mine.

All five sentences in this paragraph begin with the same word. This is repetitive and lacks creativity in the writing. It also brings attention to the text, which distracts from experiencing the story, while at the same time boring (and probably annoying) the reader. You might edit a paragraph like this to read this way:

He touched my chin and lifted it until I was gazing into his eyes, those eyes like a million stars shining brilliantly. A worried and confused expression flitted on his brow. He sighed deeply and looked away for a second, closing his eyes. Slowly, he shook his head side to side and then again focused his gaze directly on mine.

Using Two Words instead of One

Watch out for areas you can make more concise and more powerful by using one word instead of two.

yelled loudly—shouted
walked slowly—ambled
clenched my hand closed—clenched my hand
we made it across the last heap—we crossed the last heap.

Word Repetition

If you notice the same word being used multiple times in the same vicinity, consult your thesaurus and find some words to change it up with. Repeated words, unless used intentionally for emphasis, become tiresome and show a lack of creativity.

Unnecessary That

Sometimes authors get *that*-happy. Anytime you encounter *that*, reread the sentence without it. If it makes sense, eliminate *that*. As I briefly mentioned in Lesson 3, *CMOS* 6.27 says it is not necessary to omit *that*. It does, however, make the writing tighter and stronger. Keep in mind that the most important goal is clarity for your readers. (See how I slipped a *that* in there? Read the previous sentence again without *that* and note how it may cause brief confusion and interrupt the flow of reading.)

Here's a little more about *that* that you may or may not want to know. As you learned in Lesson 3, *that* is a relative pronoun used with a restrictive phrase. When it can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence, it's also considered an expletive. No, I'm not talking about a curse word. In grammar, an expletive is a word that serves a function but doesn't mean anything. When an expletive is removed, you could diagram it into the sentence as an elliptical (something implied). You can read more about expletives in general in *CMOS* 5.239.

So in summary, remove *that* for stronger, tighter writing. But if an author wants to leave it in, it's not technically wrong.

Adjectives and Adverbs

If you find your author uses a plethora of adjectives and adverbs, think about how you can eliminate some of those and use strong nouns and strong verbs instead.

Not so good:

Since the day Sally met Timothy, she felt very scared and frightened of him.

Better:

Timothy haunted Sally's thoughts since the day they'd met.

Reason/Because

Often authors will use these two together:

The reason Joseph got mad at Sophia is because she told Mr. Gulich he was lying.

Using these two together is repetitive and weakens the writing. Use one or the other:

The reason Joseph got mad at Sophia is she told Mr. Gulich he was lying.

or

Joseph got mad at Sophia because she told Mr. Gulich he was lying.

* * *

Lesson #4 Assignments

To receive a Certificate of Completion, you must complete at least two of the following assignments, one of them being either assignment 2 or assignment 4. But if you want to complete all of them, you'll get that much more out of this class.

Well, you've made it through to the final lesson! I'm so proud of each of you for making it this far. Now you get to try your hand at a nice little chunk of a MS.

Attached is my current work in progress, which I have adapted to contain plenty of editing issues for you to discover and fix. It's a Christian fantasy, so it takes place in another world. I hope you enjoy using your new skills to polish it.

Assignment #1

Create a style sheet for the project: *Wisdom Cries Out* by Rachel Newman. Correct spelling of words to note are Nedrill, Havron, bonjo nuts, Florinvale, Praelindia, Teebel, Jymli, Ehrro, and Indo.

Assignment #2

Decide which level of copyediting you want to do on the attached chapter 1. Perform the copyedit and include any queries to the author in comment balloons. Time yourself. Let me know what level of copyediting you performed and how much time it took you. (Do either assignment #2 or #4.)

Assignment #3

Add comment balloons with the *CMOS* number for the rule that governs each grammatical change made.

Assignment #4

Split the manuscript into thirds and perform a heavy copyedit on the first three pages, a medium copyedit on the second three pages, and a light copyedit on the last three pages. Tell us about your experience. Was it difficult to restrain yourself from doing a deeper edit on the medium or light copyedit? What were some of the discretionary calls you made to keep the edit light?