

LESSON 2

BASICS BOOTCAMP FOR BEGINNERS

Editing Your Work

Lord, we thank you for helping us step out and share our ideas with others in the class. Help each participant to now act on those ideas and step out in faith, using your creativity to write the books you've given us. There is a lot of information being given in these classes, and some may feel a bit overwhelmed. Please give us understanding as we study our writing craft to glorify you. Thank you for each person taking this course. Bless them all with hope for a bright future. In Jesus' name. Amen

This lesson addresses writing mistakes marking you as a beginner to editors who may one day read your book. I realize editing your work takes quite a bit of time, so I suggest printing the following and keeping it handy. These are some basic 'rules' to follow that will enhance your work in progress (I'll refer to your book as a WIP from this point). Every author struggles with these challenges, but they must be overcome to make your WIP professional.

Most of these items are self-explanatory, but you may be surprised to see them on a list of don'ts. You're now being told not to use words that have been in your vocabulary all your life. The main idea of writing a novel is to tighten up your writing by getting rid of every unnecessary word while keeping your sentences from sounding dull and lifeless. Quite a challenge, right? The more you write using these "rules" the easier it will become for you.

Overused words

One mistake beginning writers make is overusing certain words or phrases.

Some of the most common overused words are: that, however, because, of course, and after all. Eliminate them whenever possible. How do you know when the word can be deleted? Try reading the sentence without it. If the meaning doesn't change, then you don't need the word and can get rid of it.

Next, you must discard worn-out clichés and trite phrases. Think of fresh ways of phrasing old sayings. Take the following clichés and see if you can think of an innovative approach to word each of them.

Easy come, easy go.

Bittersweet memories.

Footloose and fancy free.

Also, don't use the same pet descriptive phrases too often. I read a book once where virtually everything was described as 'spectacular.' This became so annoying to me, I almost put the book down before finishing it.

Sometimes a writer will come across a new word that instantly becomes their favorite. Unfortunately, they pass this word on to the reader, and it soon loses its appeal. Be careful to use new, exciting words only once or twice in a book.

As a beginning writer of fiction, it can become confusing as to when to use *he* or *she* and when the character's name is appropriate. If you use the proper name too often, your book will sound like a first grade reader. Mary said this. Mary went here. Mary wants that. So you must intersperse "she" and "he" in your writing. But you don't want to overuse these either. A good rule to remember is to use the character's proper name at least twice per page.

While we're on proper names, another mistake common to beginning writers is the failure to be specific and name people and places rather than say the old man, the old woman, the child, the city, the river, etc. Your readers want to know your characters and settings, even minor ones, so be specific in your descriptions.

Beginning writers often use conjunctions improperly. Avoid using *but*, *and*, *for*, *then*, *well*, etc. to start your sentences.

Other words to look out for are *just* and *very*. These are a couple of the most overused words in our every day language today and often find their way into our writing. I recommend deleting every occasion in which you use these words. Eliminate them from your WIP because they are unnecessary and are considered passive (boring) writing. The only time it would be okay to use them would be in dialogue when a specific character is talking, and it is indicative of how that person would normally speak. This is the only reason to include these words.

Next, I'll address adverbs ending in "ing". Beginning writers often misuse these. This denotes passive writing and is often considered "telling".

Lastly, one of the most notable mistakes used by beginning writers is overusing the words *would* and *was*. These culprits are the kings of passive writing. I've read books in which these were used many times. What ends up happening is the book begins sounding like a first grade reader.

She was tired.

He was angry.

Then she was sorry.

He was glad, etc.

In order to delete the words *would* and *was* you are going to have to completely rewrite the sentence. In doing so, you will spice up your writing and descriptions, bringing it out of the ordinary and passive into descriptive and active.

Using the examples I just gave, getting rid of "was" will cause the sentences to sing.

She was tired. = Her body ached as she climbed the stairs to the house.

He was angry. = His eyes shot fire at her and his face contorted into an angry sneer.

Then she was sorry. = She knew she'd done wrong and her heart convicted her of it.

He was glad, etc. = His huge grin and sparkle in his eyes told of his gladness.

In each of these examples, the reader gets a more vivid picture of the action taking place. We can feel the emotions behind the scene.

Point Of View (POV) changes:

POV is the particular viewpoint the reader hears the story from. When Grandpa tells a story, the children hear it from his point of view. When both Grandma and Grandpa are telling a story together, and one interrupts the other to interject her thoughts and feelings about the story, then there are multiple points of view.

There are three major points of view.

Omniscient – Where the writer is like a floating being, describing everything from everyone's view. This is often called "head-hopping" and is the least desirable. In fact, a book written in omniscient POV is rarely seen these days. The following is an example of the omniscient POV.

Joyce stomped her foot. "I demand to know why you are going to town without me." Her anger rose within her.

Mary looked at her daughter, upset because of the way the child was acting. "I already told you why you couldn't go today. Now drop it."

Joyce's father, who had heard everything, walked into the kitchen. "I don't like the way you are talking to your mother, young lady." He'd had enough of the girl's lip for one day.

See how you are told how each person feels as it is happening to them at that particular moment? It is called head hopping because the writer is jumping from inside one head to the other, telling the reader how each character feels.

First person – This is a story told from only one perspective, that of the main character. Below is an example of the same scene above, but from first person POV.

I stomped my foot. "I demand to know why you are going to town without me." I remember being very angry with my mother at that time.

"I already told you why you couldn't go today. Now drop it." My mother wrinkled her forehead. I knew that look. I'd upset her.

Just then, my father walked into the kitchen and looked straight at me. I gulped, hoping he hadn't heard everything I said to Mom. "I don't like the way you are talking to your mother, young lady. I've had enough of your lip for one day."

You get the same story, but as told through the eyes of the girl. Anything she can't actually see or hear cannot be "told" to the reader. Such as the last line about the father having enough of her lip for one day, and the part about her father hearing everything before coming in. She wouldn't know that for sure, so it couldn't be printed here. In the omniscient POV, the writer told the reader what the father's reaction was. However, in first person, Joyce couldn't tell the reader that because she can't get inside his head and know what he is thinking. This is a very difficult POV to work in, but when done well, creates a very nice story.

Third person, past tense – This is the most prevalent POV in the writer's marketplace today. This is told by a third party, but from only one character's POV per scene, but as it happened in the past. Note the difference in the

scene.

Joyce stomped her foot. "I demand to know why you are going to town without me."
Her anger rose within her.

Her mother looked at her in that way that told Joyce she was upset. Her gray eyes looked even stormier than usual, and her brow was furrowed. "I already told you why you couldn't go today. Now drop it."

Her father walked into the kitchen just then. "I don't like the way you are talking to your mother, young lady." Had he heard everything? Joyce hoped not.

Again, as in First Person POV, you get the scene from only one person's perspective – Joyce. But the difference is that it isn't actually Joyce telling the story. There is a "third person" or "narrator" telling the story through Joyce's eyes.

There is one last POV, but is rarely used, and that is second person POV. This is similar to first person, but substitutes *you* instead of *I*. It is always written in present tense.

Joyce stomps her foot. "I demand to know why you are going to town without me."
Her anger registers on her face.

As her mother, you look at her in that way that tells Joyce you are upset. Her gray eyes look even stormier than usual, and her brow becomes furrowed. "I already told you why you couldn't go today. Now drop it."

Her father walks into the kitchen just then. "I don't like the way you are talking to your mother, young lady." Had he heard everything? Joyce hopes not.

A common mistake made by beginners is changing POV too often in novels. This is also called, "head hopping." Figure out which character's POV would work best for the scene you are about to write, and then stick to it. Don't jump from inside one character's head to inside another character. Only write what the POV character can see, think, feel, taste and know.

As a general rule, short stories should be told in one viewpoint only.

Over-explanation that insults the reader:

It is important to remember your readers have brains and can figure things out for themselves.

Example: "I don't understand why you said that to me," Margie said, confused.

First, the reader discovers Margie doesn't understand why someone said something to her, and then the author decides to make sure they understand she is confused. That's not necessary, as it is already demonstrated in her dialogue. Leave out "confused."

Example: Margie stared in disbelief at the gold watch lying on the counter in Brad's kitchen. The second hand ticked across the scratched white face. "Oh my! It's the same watch Emily wore to church on Sunday!" Margie became upset because this meant Emily must have been in Brad's kitchen sometime since Sunday evening.

The last sentence insults the reader's intelligence because this is something they will

have already figured out by themselves, based on the clues already given them. The author is basically hitting the reader over the head saying, "Don't you get it? Emily's watch is in Brad's kitchen, and it wasn't there Sunday afternoon. That means Emily has been there! This is important and you need to get this!"

In this example, delete the last sentence.

Improper Writing of Dialogue:

Unless speech gets too long, keep speaker's actions/words in one paragraph and change paragraphs when speaker/actor changes.

Some people are teaching not to use the word *said* at all. The result is an annoying book filled with 'clever' verbs like "retorted", "screamed", "joked" etc. Your writing should be strong enough so the mood of the speaker doesn't have to be explained. It is best to intersperse "said" with other tags and "beats."

Beats are sentences that break up a dialogue, usually showing action or emotion rather than telling them to the reader.

Here is an example of poorly written dialogue:

"This can't be right. My son is a good boy," Mattie insisted. "You don't believe this, do you, Mister?"

"Name's Braydon, Ma'am. Cyrus Braydon. It's not for me to judge whether it's true or not," he spat out.

"Then why are you looking for him?" She asked, warily. Then the man's purpose for standing on her doorstep came to her. "You're a bounty hunter, aren't you?"

Silence.

"Answer me!" she shouted angrily.

"Yes, I'm a bounty hunter," he said.

She began to cry. "It's not true! Not one word of it! It's all lies!" she shouted at him.

Below is the same dialogue the way it appears in my WIP, *The Plight of Mattie Gordon*. Notice how the emotions are more intense, and the reader gets a clearer picture of how Mattie reacts to this news about her son. I deleted all tags and didn't use "said," but used beats instead.

"This..." Her voice became barely more than a whisper. She put her hand to her forehead to rub away the ache forming there. "This can't be right. My son is a good boy."

She looked into the stranger's eyes and saw something that hadn't been there before. Was it compassion? "You don't believe this, do you, Mister?"

"Name's Braydon, Ma'am." The man tipped his hat. "Cyrus Braydon. It's not for me to judge whether it's true or not."

Mattie helped herself to the rocking chair. "Then why are you looking for him?" With all the force of a locomotive, the realization of the man's purpose slammed her.

"You're a bounty hunter, aren't you?"

Silence.

Mattie's anger rose within her, and her breathing became shallow and rapid. She wanted to kick him and his calm resolve.

"Answer me!" She jumped to her feet and faced him squarely.

"Yes, I'm a bounty hunter."

Hot tears now stung her eyes and began rolling down her cheeks. "It's not true! Not one word of it! It's all lies!" She plopped backward into the rocking chair.

This is easier to do when there are only two people speaking, but when you have three or more characters talking together, you will need to help the reader keep straight who's saying which line. You can do this with tags and beats. "Said" is not a bad word, and sometimes is the best way of communicating who is speaking.

Once in a while, you don't even need tags. Consider the following example:

"Thanks. How much longer is it going to take?"

Cyrus plopped down beside her on the grass and she sat up. He looked everywhere but at her.

"Cyrus, did you hear me?"

"Yes. I heard."

"Is something wrong?"

"No. I'm thinking."

"About what?"

"About how I'm going to tell you what I need to tell you."

Mattie looked at him and frowned. "I've trusted you with the whereabouts of my son. Now it's your turn to trust me."

You knew exactly who was speaking, and to put "he said" and "she quipped" would have slowed down the scene and made it cumbersome to read. Whenever you can write dialogue without tags and beats, do it. The pace of your novel will flow better.

Unless one particular character's speech gets too long, keep the speaker's actions and words in a separate paragraph and change paragraphs when the speaker or actor changes.

Another quandary beginners find themselves in is whether or not to put thoughts in quotation marks. The answer is no. If the thought is a direct deliberation, use italics to set it apart from the rest of the story.

Tammy ran to her room and slammed the door behind her. *How dare he say that to me! I've never lied to him in my life!* She plopped onto her bed, allowing the hot tears to sting her eyes.

Another way to write thoughts is to place them into interior monologue. Switch from the action happening now to the character's thoughts without sudden changes.

Tammy ran to her room and slammed the door behind her. How dare he say that to her! She'd never lied to him before in her life. She plopped onto her bed, allowing the hot tears to sting her eyes.

Comma Usage:

Here are eight basic Comma Rules addressing the most common mistakes beginning writers make:

1. Use a comma between two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Independent Clauses are (basically) sentences. They express a complete idea.

Coordinating Conjunctions are: and, but, or, for, nor, yet, so

Example: I wanted to go to the ballet, but the others wanted to go to the movies.

2. Use commas after each item in a series except the last. There will always be one less comma than there are items in the list.

- This is the MLA (Modern Language Association) rule. MLA rules traditionally govern all writing styles except for journalistic. Journalistic writing is governed by the AP style which omits the comma before the "and" or other conjunction.

Example: When I went to the store, I bought milk, bread, and cheese.

3. Use commas between two or more coordinating adjectives. These are adjectives that equally modify a noun.

Example: The thin, shapely, beautiful woman walked across the street and into the yellow house.

4. Use a comma after an introductory word, phrase, or dependent clause.

Example 1: After I finish my internship, I plan to move to Kansas City to pursue my dream job. (Intro. Clause – clause because there is a subject [I] and a verb [finish], dependent clause because it cannot stand alone.)

Example 2: After the movie, we went out to eat. (Intro. Phrase – not a clause because it does not have a subject and a verb.)

Example 3: However, not everyone enjoys sushi. (Intro. Word)

5. Use a comma to set off an interrupter: a parenthetical word/phrase/clause, something non-essential to the sentence.

Example: John, who worked hard in the mailroom, has been promoted to a sales job. (Clause)

Example: Angelina, my sister, is on vacation this week. (Phrase)

Example: She still wished, however, to see an ocean before she died. (Word)

6. Use commas with Quotations. Use the comma after the quotation and before the closing quotation mark if the quote begins a sentence, before the opening quotation mark if the quotation ends the sentence, or before the opening quotation mark and before the closing quotation mark if the quotation comes in the middle of the sentence.

Example: "It's time to go to work," she said.

Example: Gail remarked, "You'll have a great time at the theater."

Example: She replied, "I'm late for work," and walked out the door.

7. Use a comma before a tag-on or contrasting thought at the end of a sentence.

Example: Bob is going to show up, I hope.

Example: I will do my laundry tomorrow, not today.

8. Use commas in conventional settings such as:

Addresses: She works in Denver, Colorado.

Dates: We will never forget the events of September 11, 2001, for as long as we live.

Abbreviations: i.e., e.g., etc., and so on.

The next few errors commonly made by beginners need little explanation, so I won't place them under separate headings.

1. Remember which tense in which you decided to write and don't change it as you write. For example, if you began your book in first person past (I looked back) don't change it to present tense (She looks at me).

2. Keep your sentences and paragraphs at moderate lengths.

3. Don't write sentences that require too many phrases set off by commas. If you find yourself with this kind of sentence, rewrite it. Example: My mother, who had always explained things to me well, suddenly ran to the cupboard, took out a serving spoon, and flung it at me, apparently in an attempt to get me to use the correct spoon. Each comma causes the reader to pause a moment. Too many sentence like this can break up the natural flow of the book.

4. Repetition. There are many ways repetition can find its way into your book. One is by using the same noun repeatedly in the same sentence or paragraph.

George jumped into his red sports car and turned on the engine. He backed the car out of the driveway and then sped down the street in the car. He enjoyed the many stares he got from guys who envied him for his car, and from the chicks, who dug guys with cool cars.

Another form of repetition is when the writer wants to drive home a certain point and says the same thing, only using different words. In the following example, only one of the sentences is necessary and the other can be eliminated.

Jane had never in her life met a man she admired as much as Tim. For the first time ever, she'd found a man whom she could look up to in Tim.

5. Always check the dictionary for correct spelling and word usages. Also keep a Thesaurus handy. When proofreading your work, make sure you use the correct spelling of words that have different meanings.

Examples: See, sea

Bow, bough

To, too, two

Run your spell check often and particularly when you have finished your book. Remember, the spell check doesn't understand what you are trying to say, and some of the above mistakes won't be caught. Make sure to read each and every word before you submit your work to an editor.

6. Steer clear of actions that are uncertain. "It seemed he was upset with her." Either he was upset or he wasn't. Make your writing clear to your readers.

Is there anything on this list that surprises you? Some of it will seem foreign to you at first, but as you practice them, it will become evident to you why these "rules" exist. When I first began writing and discovered these guidelines, they didn't always make sense to me until I began noticing them in books I read. Then it became clear why I needed to steer clear of these common mistakes. They annoyed me and still do to this day.

Remember, whenever possible, don't settle for easy, sloppy, or passive writing. With just a little effort you can make your characters, actions and emotions leap off the page and into the reader's hearts. This is what makes a novel memorable.

Assignment #2: Begin writing and/or editing your WIP using the above guidelines. For those of you who've already begun or completed a book, identify which of the above brands of a beginner you find most in your writing and correct them. Tell us which of the above brands of a beginner will be the most challenging for you. Is there anything on the list that surprises you? For those of you who are published writers "lurking" on the sidelines, please feel free to jump in with suggestions from your expertise.

If you have any questions about this list or need further clarification, please ask.

Lesson 3 will involve formatting your novel.