



# Dawn Lesley Stewart



## **REWRITING: MAKE IT EASIER**

by Dawn Lesley Stewart

The first draft is done. Now comes the hard part — reworking the words into a tight, riveting manuscript. Sometimes rewrites are like constructing a jigsaw puzzle only to find a few pieces missing. Here are some ideas to make your editing easier.

### **SHOUT IT OUT**

Read the manuscript aloud. Awkward dialogue and phrasing, missing words and wordiness become obvious when the words are spoken. Make notes on the manuscript as you read so that you can revisit the rough areas.

### **BEGINNING, MIDDLE, END**

Does the first page grab the reader? Is the middle of the story interesting without losing momentum? Is the ending satisfying, answering all the reader's questions? Are the characters well-developed and "real"?

### **RAINBOW**

Now silently read the manuscript. Use colored highlighters and assign each color a task. For instance, to check grammar, highlight weak verbs in pink; adverbs in yellow; wordy phrases in green; clichés in orange; questionable words in blue. Or review the story constructs by highlighting dialogue in pink; narrative in yellow; use of the five senses in green; descriptions in orange; flashbacks in blue. This will help determine if the writing is balanced, shows where weak words and wordy phrases are located, if narrative outweighs dialogue, or if more sensory detail is needed.

### **ACTIVE VOICE**

Substitute weak verbs (is, was, are) and "to be" constructs with active verbs. An active verb will replace several words and increase story action. Weak: The dog was running after the car. Strong: The dog ran after the car.

**BE SPECIFIC**

Add detail to the manuscript by replacing general words with specific nouns. Weak: The dog jumped into the truck. Strong: The Dalmatian jumped into the fire engine. Also delete filler words (really, very, quite) to tighten sentences.

**DON'T SAY IT AGAIN**

Avoid repeating the same thing twice. Weak: In the event that the baby puppy wets the floor at 12 midnight, clean up the mess. Strong: If the puppy wets the floor at midnight, clean the mess.

**MANAGE ADVERBS**

Adverbs drag the action rather than add to it. Prune unnecessary adverbs. Weak: He crept quietly down the stairs. Strong: He crept down the stairs.

**CATCH THOSE CLICHÉS**

Overworked phrases make writing sound trite. Strive for original descriptions and wording. Weak: Sam is sick as a dog. Strong: Sam thought the thermometer would incinerate before he could read the temperature.

**DETAILS AND MORE DETAILS**

Double check the manuscript for consistency. Did you change a character's hair color midway through the novel or rename someone in the story? Make sure character descriptions, traits and names are consistent throughout the manuscript. Verify any fact you are unsure about. Readers will catch errors.

**KNOT LOOSE ENDS**

Make sure all subplots and foreshadowing lead to conclusions. During the writing process, new subplots are introduced, characters either dropped or replaced, sometimes the location changes. Create a list of all the subplots and their resolutions and verify that the resolutions are apparent to the reader. Does a character removed from Chapter 2 suddenly reappear in Chapter 8? Don't leave logic holes in your manuscript.

When the corrections are finished, set aside the manuscript for a week. Then read the material again with fresh insight. Eventually all the puzzle pieces fit together and the writing flows. When finished, congratulate yourself, send the material to an editor or agent, and begin the next story.

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