

# So You Want to Write a Book: 4 Steps to Writing a Book and Getting it Published

Larry Martin

President, WLOV

([drlarry437@gmail.com](mailto:drlarry437@gmail.com))

Amazon Author Page: [amazon.com/author/drlawrencemartin](https://www.amazon.com/author/drlawrencemartin)

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## 1. Get an idea, decide the type of book you want to write, and begin writing

- Everyone has ideas. Ideas are free, plentiful. You can't copyright an idea.
- Your family history is a book idea. Lots of people write memoirs.
- Crime novelist Warren Murphy's advice to would-be novelists: "If you could read Page Six of The New York Post or The New York Daily News every day for a week and not come up with a dozen ideas for a novel, you might consider finding a new hobby."  
([http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/18/books/warren-murphy-writer-and-creator-of-remo-williams-dies-at-82.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/18/books/warren-murphy-writer-and-creator-of-remo-williams-dies-at-82.html?_r=0))
- Checkout writing prompts: ideas to get you going.  
<http://www.writersdigest.com/prompts>  
<http://thinkwritten.com/365-creative-writing-prompts/>  
<http://creativewritingprompts.com/>
- Decide the type of book you want to write:
  - Fiction (novel, collection of short stories, children's picture book) vs Non-fiction (memoir, textbook, how-to book, cookbook, etc.)
  - Your target audience (kids, teens, or adults)
  - If your choice is fiction, choose between 1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person point of view. (2<sup>nd</sup> person is rarely used in fiction.) Basically, who is telling the story? A character in the story (1<sup>st</sup> person: "I saw him kill her...") or a behind-the-scenes narrator (3<sup>rd</sup> person: "John saw the murder take place...")? *To Kill a Mockingbird* is told in 1<sup>st</sup> person by Scout Finch, who is five when the story begins and eight when it ends. Harry Potter books are written in 3<sup>rd</sup> person. See Writing Example #2 (Appendix).
- If you intend to write an illustrated book for kids, there are 3 broad options for the illustrations, depending on whether you plan to self-publish or submit your manuscript to a royalty publisher.
  - Self-publish - do the illustrations yourself
  - Self-publish - Hire an illustrator; there are numerous web sites that feature illustrators for hire, but many authors also learn of available artists by word-of-mouth.
  - Royalty or traditional publisher – as a general rule, the publishers prefer to hire the illustrator for your work, and you should not submit illustrations with your manuscript (unless, like Dr. Seuss, you have a very special talent for both writing *and* drawing).
- Assuming you want to write a novel, there are two broad approaches: written outline of plot/characters vs. free style (write without notes, from your head).
  - Many web sites on 'How to Write a Novel', e.g.  
(<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>).

- I prefer ‘How Not to Write a Novel’ (<http://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/7-things-that-will-doom-your-novel-how-to-avoid-them>) (Do Not: Wait for inspiration; look over your shoulder; ignore the craft; keep a chip on your shoulder; write for the market only; take shortcuts; quit)
- For any book, you can start anywhere: first, middle or last chapter. Again, no one best way. Choose whatever works best for you.
- Opening is key. Don’t start with a dream. Don’t start with dialogue (reader won’t know who is speaking). Don’t start with a cliché.
- Once you have an idea and know the type of book you want to write, vomit your words on the page. Just start writing. You can fix the details later. **Writers write.**
- **WHAT IF YOU DON’T TYPE? TWO OPTIONS**
  - Program that types what you dictate - Dragon Dictation: <http://selfpublishingadvice.org/how-to-train-your-dragon-to-increase-your-daily-word-count/>
  - Write in longhand and hire someone to type it for you.

## 2. While you are writing, study elements of good writing (“Rules of the Craft”)

- Study elements of good writing as you go along, or after the first draft (and then once learned, you can break them; see references.) *But get something down.* “She cant sea the stars because of the brite mune” is better than *nothing*.
- There are numerous books, articles and blogs about rules of good writing (see References). Even so, you may also come across comments like “there are no rules” and that you should “write from the heart” or “do what is good for you.” This type of advice generally comes from already-published, experienced writers who know the well-established rules and how to break them. For beginning writers, especially of fiction, you should be aware of some general rules or ‘elements of the craft’. (Writing Examples are provided in the Appendix. Following each of the rules below are listed two of many relevant web sites.)
  - ‘Show don’t tell’. See Writing Example #1  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Show,\\_don%27t\\_tell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Show,_don%27t_tell)  
<http://www.sfwriter.com/ow04.htm>
  - Use single point of view per scene or chapter. See Writing Example #2  
<http://thewritepractice.com/point-of-view-guide/>  
<http://www.sfwriter.com/ow07.htm>
  - Avoid excessive prepositions and pronouns. See Writing Example #3  
[https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CCS\\_prepphrases.html](https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CCS_prepphrases.html)  
<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/5-ways-to-reduce-use-of-prepositions/>
  - Avoid excessive adjectives and adverbs. See Writing Example #4  
<https://christopheraltman.wordpress.com/tag/excessive-adverbs/>  
<http://www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/write-first-chapter-get-started/nobles-writing-blunders-excerpt>
  - Avoid excessive use of passive voice. See Writing Example #5  
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/539/>  
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/passive-voice/>

- Avoid clichés. See Writing Example #6  
<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/avoiding-cliches/>  
<http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/cliche.html>
- Don't ignore grammar and punctuation. See Writing Example #7  
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>  
<http://www.copyblogger.com/5-common-mistakes-that-make-you-look-dumb/>
- All too often writers ignore grammar and punctuation, either because they think it's not that important (wrong!) or someone else will correct mistakes down the publishing path. Nothing will sink a book faster than poor grammar and punctuation, especially when it alters the writer's meaning or intention. A favorite teaching point is to have a student punctuate this phrase (see Writing Example #7):

### A woman without her man is nothing

- Rewrite as needed to fix fatal flaws. (Note: An alternative path is to study creative writing first, then start your book. I don't recommend this path; it's more important to write than to study about writing. You can always revise what you write. You can't revise what you haven't written.)
- Read published work(s) in the same genre as your book. If you're writing a cookbook you should be familiar with other cookbooks. Ditto crime novels, historical fiction, children's books, etc.
- As you learn more, rewrite as needed. Except for a few writing geniuses, rewriting is the essence of good writing. **Good writers rewrite.**

## 3. Review and edit – over and over

- No matter how many times you review your work, you will miss things. The following sentence was reviewed by numerous people and almost got published in my book *Consenting Adults Only*.  
<http://www.amazon.com/Consenting-Adults-Only-medicine-modern-day/dp/1879653052/lakesidepress>  
What's wrong with it?
  - “Barbara laughed, a totally disaffected laugh that made me feel I had conquered her soul.”
- Consider using an on-line writing analysis program. They *do not* show you how to write, but instead point out problems such as excessive use of “was” or adverbs, or just plain grammatical gaffes. Some authors like them, others do not. I recommend trying one of their free trial offers before you pay to subscribe.
  - Grammarly at <http://www.grammarly.com>
  - Autocrit at <http://www.autocrit.com>
  - ProWriting Aid at <https://prowritingaid.com/>

These and a few other writing analysis programs are discussed in the following two web sites:  
<http://selfpublishingadvice.org/dy-writing-and-editing-tools-for-indie-authors/>  
<http://thewritelife.com/automatic-editing-tools/>

- Enlist beta-readers. They are non-professionals who will read a manuscript and make suggestions, on anything from grammar and spelling to plot development and character description. Basically they are people willing to read your manuscript and offer suggestions of any nature; they are not explicitly proof readers or editors. Start with friends and family, but consider enlisting others. Sign up for the goodreads.com beta-reading group to search for beta-readers. Some will read your manuscript for free, but even if they charge the cost is modest (compared to professional editing).

- Join a writing critique club. There are several listed in The Villages Rec News (The Villages, Florida); they include:
  - Wannabe Writers
  - Writers of the Villages
  - Creative Writers
  - Writers 4 Kids
  - Memoir Writers
  - Short Story Writers

See my blog post on the general value of critique groups:

<http://www.bookdaily.com/authorresource/blog/post/1858335>

- The #2 problem with self-published books is poor editing. (The #1 problem is poor writing.) Like a Broadway play, a book project should involve others in the publication, mainly to assure you are *communicating*. If the objective is to have your book read, then you should make sure it is readable. This means:
  - the story makes sense;
  - there are no glaring mistakes in grammar, spelling or punctuation (VERY common in all early and many late drafts);
  - the same character isn't called Harry on page 50 and Mike on page 60;
  - if a character is driving from Atlanta to Miami, you don't write that her route is due north on I-75.

These types of mistakes are common and often difficult for the author to catch. Authors tend to miss such errors because we know what we mean, and sometimes just don't see what we actually write. So prevention means reviewing your book in myriad ways before publication. This can be done for free or at considerable expense.

- You should always self-edit whether or not you plan to use outside editors; see Recommended Reading for books on self-editing. Also review Rules of the Craft in Step 2, and Writing Examples #1-7. When you self-edit be sure to:
  - Go through your manuscript to catch glaring errors: spelling, grammar, typos, consistency in characters' names
  - Eliminate wordiness. Do you really need "he fell down"? Is there any other way to fall? How many times do you use "was" or "that", both a sign of weak writing when used excessively.
  - Eliminate clichés UNLESS they are in dialogue and necessary to the character.
  - "Kill your darlings," to quote Stephen King, in his book *On Writing*. No matter how cute the writing, or how proud you are of it, if it's not necessary to the book, get rid of it.
- Consider professional editing. Get as much outside review and editing as you can afford, until you feel confident that the manuscript is error-free and where you want it. There are several types of editors, e.g., developmental editor; line editor; proofreader. If you google "book editors" you will find lots of resources. Unfortunately, the expense typically prevents most self-published authors from using professional editors.
- Whatever method you, choose, **review and edit:** over and over and over.

## 4. Publish your manuscript

- If you intend to self-publish, you will need a good book cover. Unless you are an artist or graphics designer, I highly recommend you hire a professional for this task. Covers are not expensive

(typically \$100-\$200 for front and back) and good cover designers can also be found on the internet. The one I use is <http://www.custombookcovers.com>.

- What does it mean to ‘publish’ your book? Answer: To make it available to anyone interested in reading or listening to it. There are three basic formats for publishing books.
  - Print (paperback and/or hard cover)
  - E-book
  - Audiobook

Audio is almost always an add-on to print and/or e-book format. (I am not aware of any “audio-only” books.) If you don’t plan to share your book with the outside world, then you are really only printing it. This is not uncommon. Lots of people print books for their family only, with no intention of selling the work or listing it on Amazon. Other people print books that they intend to sell only at crafts fairs and festivals, or through their own advertising.

- A book intended for listing on Amazon or ordering by book stores must have a unique identifier number, either an ISBN (International Standard Book Number) or ASIN (Amazon Standard Identification Number). See <http://www.amazon.com/gp/seller/asin-upc-isbn-info.html>. If you just want to give the book away or sell and distribute it yourself (e.g., by your own advertising, or in a booth set up at a festival or book fair), you can do without such a number. The rest of Step 4 assumes you want to publish your work, i.e., make it available on Amazon or for ordering by book stores.
- Traditional publishing (aka royalty publishing) vs. self-publishing. Any new author is unlikely to find an agent or royalty publisher. It’s a simple fact that today most authors self-publish. There are advantages and disadvantages of each route.

**Traditional publishing advantages:** 1) No financial outlay; publisher pays for editing, cover, artwork, etc.; 2) You might get an advance against future sales; 3) Much better chance to have your book reviewed by newspapers and magazines; 4) Much better chance for your book to be sold in bookstores and carried by libraries.

**Traditional publishing disadvantages:** 1) Very difficult for unknown authors to find an agent or traditional publisher; as result, time spent pursuing agents and/or publishers is often wasted; 2) If you are able to find an agent to represent you, the contract is typically for one year and there is no guarantee the agent will find a publisher for your book during that time. And if your book is accepted by a publisher, there is a long delay in getting the book out, typically 1-2 years; 3) Author typically loses all control over book, such as pricing and deciding on revisions; 4) You get only a small percentage of any book sales (typically 10-15%); 5) Marketing is seldom included in the publishing contract; you still have to do it on your own.

**Self-publishing advantages:** 1) Very quick route to publishing; once your manuscript is finished, book can be print-published in a month or less; a finished e-book can be published in one day or less. 2) You retain full control over your work, including copyright and pricing; 3) You can edit or change the work at will, and upload or reprint a revised edition easily; 4) You keep a much larger percentage of any sales.

**Self-publishing disadvantages:** 1) You pay for everything: editing, cover, art, etc. 2) Very little chance of getting your book reviewed by mainstream media, sold in bookstores or carried by libraries; 3) The glut of self-published books means that most likely your book will not find a market or make any profit.

- Any “publisher” that asks for an up-front fee along with a signed contract is NOT a “traditional publisher.” These companies often go by the name “hybrid publishers.” (An old term was “vanity press.”). Examples are iUniverse, Author House, Xlibris, Archway, Tate Publishing and Hay House. Once you submit a manuscript, these companies will do all the work for a large fee, typically thousands of dollars. They have many customers, but be wary. Most, if not all, “hybrid publishers” that advertise to publish your book are nothing more than marketers for expensive author services. *They make money by selling to the author, not to the public.* Their business model is: 1) charge high fees to produce your book, typically thousands of dollars; 2) put a high list price

on the print book, then offer the author a “discount” to the inflated price for volume purchases; 3) sell the author expensive marketing and publicity services. If any books do sell to the public, they will also take a percentage of the sale price.

**Hybrid-publishing advantage:** They will do all the legwork once you submit your manuscript and your book will be published. The publishing part is (or should be) hassle-free, one-stop shopping.

**Hybrid-publishing disadvantages:** 1) It will cost you a bundle, for services that you could contract out for at a much lower cost; 2) While you will “retain the copyright,” you will lose control over your work (e.g., pricing of paperback and hardcover editions). 3) The publisher will own the ISBN, cover art, any editing they may have done, and formatting, so if you get out of the contract all you’ll really have is the original manuscript that you sent them; 4) It is not always hassle free; horror stories abound about bad experiences with some hybrid publishers (<http://www.indiesunlimited.com/2015/07/14/clearing-up-the-hybrid-in-publishing/>); 5) You will be frequently solicited to buy more services, including expensive marketing and promotion of quite dubious value; 6) There is very little chance you will recoup your investment.

- While the above is a general outline of advantages and disadvantages, not all hybrid publishers offer the same contract terms. See <http://publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/pw-select/article/66658-not-all-hybrid-publishers-are-created-equal.html>. Bottom line: You should thoroughly investigate the details before making any upfront payment or signing a contract to publish your book. Be both skeptical and wary.
- In true self-publishing, the author retains full control of the work (including pricing), pays only for specific services he or she needs (e.g., cover design, editing), can hire anyone from anywhere for these services, does not have to sign over any rights, and can revise the book at will. Many great and/or successful authors initially self-published after being turned down by traditional publishers (e.g., John Grisham, Agatha Christie, Dr. Seuss, and, yes, J.K. Rowling. See <http://www.literaryrejections.com/best-sellers-initially-rejected/>).
- Considering how often editors and publishers turn down ultimately-successful books, a rejection from traditional publishers does not mean your book is no good. In the 1960s, after a lengthy back and forth with Simon & Schuster’s top editor, John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces* was turned down for publication. Depressed over inability to get his book published, and perhaps for other reasons, Toole killed himself in 1969, at age 32. His mother (with the help of novelist Walker Percy) got the book published by Louisiana State Press, in 1980. In 1981 it won the Pulitzer Prize. Since then *Dunces* has never been out of print. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Confederacy\\_of\\_Dunces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Confederacy_of_Dunces)
- The odds of making money with a self-published book are very low. One reason is the competition: a huge number of self-published books come out every year and gaining attention for a single book by a new author is difficult (if not impossible) without spending a lot of money. Another reason is that most self-published books are poorly written and/or poorly edited. See <http://www.cnet.com/news/self-publishing-a-book-25-things-you-need-to-know/>. Author of this web site estimates only about 5% of self-published books are decent and only 1% are very good.
- Self-published books are typically ‘print-on-demand’ – nothing printed until someone wants a copy. This is a marked improvement over the pre-internet era of self-publishing, when the author had to take physical delivery of hundreds or even a thousand or more books.
  - Many books are published only as e-books (e.g., *The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial*, <http://www.amazon.com/Wall-Chronicle-Scuba-Trial-ebook/dp/B013RHYSNW/lakesidepress>)
- If just beginning, I recommend you go with go with CreateSpace, Amazon’s self-publishing arm (<https://www.createspace.com/>); it’s probably the cheapest and most transparent platform for self-publishers. The Villages Lifelong Learning College has a course called Publish Your Book Free with CreateSpace. <http://www.thevillageslifelongcollege.com/>
- You’re not done yet.

## Is there a Step 5?

Congratulations. You've authored a book and seen it through to publication. It's listed on Amazon and you can't wait to have people read it. Are you done? Unfortunately, no. We come to Step 5, whose scope is beyond this course. It is perhaps the most difficult step of all, especially for self-published authors. **Step 5 is marketing your book.**

You may have written a masterpiece, but unless people learn about it, and read or review it, the book will languish. Unfortunately, with the glut of books published yearly, even great ones have a hard time being found. Publicizing your book can be frustrating, expensive, and ultimately, unrewarding. There is no magic formula, but I can tell you that many self-published authors spend far more time *and money* publicizing their work than they did in writing it.

A whole industry has developed to help market your book. There are many useful tips available on the web. See:

<https://www.writersstore.com/15-do-it-yourself-tools-to-promote-your-book/>

<http://authorunlimited.com/50-ways-to-promote-your-book/>

<http://www.thebookdesigner.com/marketing-your-book/>

The latest craze is using social media – Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, et. al. – to help publicize your work. Some people blog, some people create web sites, some people do everything – or hire someone to do it for them. Workshops and seminars and websites abound to teach the author about marketing.

Marketing is not something most writers feel comfortable doing, yet without some effort there is very little chance your self-published work will find readers. The best advice I can give is:

- Talk to other authors, ask what they've done, what works for them and what doesn't.
- Review web sites such as the ones listed above for ideas.
- Learn how to use social media to get your message out.
- Establish an Amazon Author Page, and send the link to all your friends and associates.
- Think long and hard before you spend money on advertising or marketing; as a general rule, you won't recoup the expense.
- And lastly, don't expect to get rich from your writing efforts. Some people obviously do, but they are very rare. Write because you have something to say. Write because it gives you pleasure. Write because it's what you want to do. Who knows? You may make a profit or strike it rich. But that should not be why you choose to write a book.

## Recommended Reading

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of books on writing. Some are very good. Many others are a waste of time for the beginning writer. Below are several books I recommend if you want to *read about writing*. The best overall, for its general and sensible advice, is King's *On Writing*. The others are more about the nuts and bolts of the craft.

*On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, by Stephen King

<http://www.amazon.com/Writing-10th-Anniversary-Memoir-Craft/dp/1439156816/>

*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself Into Print*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, by Renni Browne and Dave King

<http://www.amazon.com/Self-Editing-Fiction-Writers-Second-Yourself/dp/0060545690/>

*Revision and Self Editing for Publication: Techniques for Transforming Your First Draft into a Novel that Sells*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, by James Scott Bell

<http://www.amazon.com/Revision-Self-Editing-Publication-Transforming/dp/1599637065/>

*Writer to Writer*. Cecil Murphey. TKA Distribution, 2015

<http://www.amazon.com/Writer-Lessons-Lifetime-Writing-Murpheys/dp/1942356250/>

*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. Lynn Truss. Gotham Books, 2003.

<http://www.amazon.com/Eats-Shoots-Leaves-Tolerance-Punctuation/dp/1592402038/>

*The First 50 Pages*. Jeff Gerke. Writer's Digest Books, 2011.

<http://www.amazon.com/First-50-Pages-Editors-Readers/dp/1599632837/>

In addition to *The First 50 Pages*, Writers' Digest publishes books on all aspects of writing, including getting published. <http://www.writersdigestshop.com/>

### Blogs

The internet has dozens of blogs on writing and self-publishing. Most tend to be erratic. Here are two run by organizations that appear daily; you can sign up to receive them in your email. They often provide useful information.

<http://selfpublishingadvice.org/alli-blog/>

<https://www.bookdaily.com/authorresource/blog>

# APPENDIX – Writing Examples

## Writing Example #1: Show don't tell.

### “Telling” a scene: weak and uninteresting

Jessica did not hold back. She told Dexter his behavior at the party was simply inexcusable, the final straw. She had made up her mind and was going to leave him. On hearing this he grew angry and made nasty comments about her own extramarital affair. Their marriage was over. Dexter ran to the bedroom and slammed the door. A few minutes later he emerged, suitcase in hand, and announced he was leaving first. She was surprised, but there was nothing she could do.

### “Showing” a scene: much better

Dexter sat in his chair, the folded newspaper hiding his face. Jessica walked up to him, pulled down the paper and glared.

“I’m leaving you. I suppose you know that.”

He threw down the paper and jumped up. “I’ve heard that before.”

“No, this is for real. I’ve had enough.”

“You? You’ve had enough? What about your own affair, with Greg. You think I don’t know what’s going on?”

“That was because of you, with Melinda. Or was it Melissa? Or both? You seem to prefer the M’s in your women. I guess Jessica doesn’t cut it.”

“Bitch. That’s what you are, a real bitch.” She stepped back, afraid he might hit her.

“Call me names, doesn’t matter. I’m going.”

“Not before me. I won’t give you the satisfaction.” Dexter turned, walked quickly into their bedroom and slammed the door. Jessica sat down, not really knowing what to expect. Before leaving she would need to get into the same bedroom.

A few minutes later the door opened. Dexter had a suitcase in one hand, his coat in the other. “I’m out of here first. The rest is yours. Goodbye.”

## Writing Example #2: Use single point of view per scene or chapter.

### Pronouns determine point of view:

First person: I, me, my

Second person: You, your (rarely used in fiction)

Third person: She/he, Her/his

### First person point of view

Believe me, I was not looking for a career change when Jack Strawn came to my Emergency Department. It just happened that way. You could say I was primed for it, by an unconscious desire to do something different than medicine, but that would be untrue. If Strawn had not shown up, I would have stayed happy in my job as a sin-city ED physician. After all, I was saving lives and making a good living. Not even a malpractice lawsuit hanging over my head marred my contentment. I even envisioned retiring in my early 50's.

—*Consenting Adults Only*, by Lawrence Martin, M.D.

### Second person point of view

Eventually you ascend the stairs to the street. You think of Plato's pilgrims climbing out of the cave, from the shadow world of appearances toward things as they really are, and you wonder if it is possible to change in this life.

— *Bright Lights, Big City*, by Jay McInerney

### Third person point of view

A breeze ruffled the neat hedges of Privet Drive, which lay silent and tidy under the inky sky, the very last place you would expect astonishing things to happen. Harry Potter rolled over inside his blankets without waking up. One small hand closed on the letter beside him and he slept on, not knowing he was special, not knowing he was famous.... He couldn't know that at this very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices: "To Harry Potter—the boy who lived!"

—*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, by J.K. Rowling

### Avoid mixing points of view in a single scene

Billy put his foot to the pedal, pushing the car above 75 mph. That ought to impress Tricia, he thought. There was a gentle curve ahead, but Billy saw no need to slow down. *I'll take that curve, hug close to the guard rail.*

"Billy, what are you trying to do? Get us both killed?"

"Trust me baby, I know what I'm doing. I've been on this road many times." Her nervousness excited him. This is great, he thought. She'll come around and be impressed.

Less than a minute after Billy's turbo-charged Ford rounded the curve he heard a police siren. The cop had been hiding, waiting for speeders.

I am so relieved, thought Tricia. I should tell him 'I told you so' but will keep my mouth shut. He's got himself in enough trouble. I won't make it worse.

NOTE: The scene is told from Billy's point of view until the last paragraph, when it switches to Tricia's POV. This is jarring to the reader, and should be avoided. If you want to present her point of view, do so in a new scene or Chapter.

## Writing Example #3: Avoid excessive pronouns and prepositions.

### Excessive Pronouns

**Bad:** He loved to sail, and whenever he had the chance he would slip away, even if it meant he had to lie about his plans.

**Better:** Harold loved to sail and would slip away whenever the chance came, even if

it meant lying about **his** plans.

**Bad:** If **you** had any idea about the odds against **you**, **you** wouldn't be so cavalier in thinking **you** could win.

**Better:** If **you** had any idea about the odds, **you** would be less cavalier about the chances of winning.

**Bad:** **She** entered the job interview with every expectation **she** would succeed, not for a moment thinking **she** wasn't qualified, even if **her** resume was a bit thin.

**Better:** Betty entered the job interview confident of success, and did not think **her** thin resume made **her** unqualified.

### Excessive Prepositions

**Bad:** When Marsha and I returned home **from** meeting **with** the minister, we noted Sparky lying down **on** the lawn in front **of** the fountain.

**Better:** Our meeting **with** the minister went well and we drove straight home. There was Sparky, lying **on** the lawn **beside** the fountain.

[https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CCS\\_prep phrases.html](https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CCS_prep phrases.html)

**Bad:** It is a matter **of** the gravest possible importance **to** the health **of** anyone **with** a history **of** a problem **with** disease **of** the heart that he or she should avoid the sort **of** foods **with** a high percentage **of** saturated fats.

**Better:** Anyone with a history of heart disease should avoid saturated fats.

NOTE: Sometimes using several prepositions in one sentence works well. It is up to the writer to decide. The following last sentence of a famous speech includes several prepositions. It has stood the test of time.

...It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln  
Gettysburg Address  
November 19, 1863

## WRITING EXAMPLE #4: Avoid excessive adverbs and adjectives.

"The road to hell is paved with adverbs." Stephen King

"Adverbs are the tool of the lazy writer." Mark Twain

"What constitutes good writing? Strong nouns and verbs. Why? Because they can survive on their own. Adjectives and adverbs can't. They can suck the life out of your writing." Larry Leech, Florida author

<https://sites.google.com/site/novelwritingsite/adverbs-in-prose-fiction>

**Bad:** Jess grabbed the handrail **tightly**. She looked **uneasily** up to the dark mouth of the hatch opening. A draft cascaded **coldly** against her skin. She climbed **slowly, steadily** to the loft. She hauled herself up and sat **despondently** on the lip of the opening. She looked down **uneasily** and could see Justin at the foot of the ladder staring **harshly** up at her.

**Better:** Jess grabbed the handrail. She looked up into the cave-like mouth of the hatch opening. A cool draft cascaded past her face. She climbed to the loft and hauled herself up onto a dusty rafter where she sat. She looked down and could see Justin at the foot of the ladder staring up at her."

<http://www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/write-first-chapter-get-started/nobles-writing-blunders-excerpt>

**Bad:** The **dark, dreary** house had an empty, suspicious feel to it, the **thick** air stale and **sour** with undefined, scary kitchen odors

**Better:** The house had an empty feeling to it, the air stale with undefined kitchen odors ...

## **WRITING EXAMPLE #5: Avoid excessive use of passive voice.**

Passive voice is generally weaker than an active voice.

**Passive:** Why was the road crossed by the chicken?

**Active:** Why did the chicken cross the road?

**Passive:** The city was burned to the ground by the raging fire.

**Active:** The raging fire burned the city to the ground.

**Passive:** I was almost hit by the bicycle.

**Active:** The bicycle almost hit me.

## **WRITING EXAMPLE #6: Avoid Clichés**

<http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/avoiding-cliches/>

Clichés are words and phrases that have been used so often that they're no longer very interesting or effective. They may have started out as a colorful, inventive phrase, e.g., *as sick as a parrot*, but they've been picked up and used so widely and indiscriminately that they've lost their impact and become stale.

### Some common clichés

- at the end of the day
- back on track
- the fact of the matter
- few and far between
- a level playing field
- in this day and age
- to all intents and purposes
- when all's said and done
- in the final analysis
- come full circle

- par for the course
- think outside the box
- avoid someone or something like the plague
- in the current climate
- mass exodus
- at this moment in time
- the path of least resistance
- a baptism of fire
- in any way, shape, or form
- fit for purpose

**Bad:** I felt like a bump on a log, left in the dark, didn't know where to turn.

**Better:** I felt useless, abandoned. I had no idea what was going on, and didn't know who to call.

**Bad:** For all intents and purposes, and when all is said and done, we accomplished what we set out to do.

**Better:** We had a plan and it worked. We succeeded.

**NOTE:** Clichés are to be avoided in narration; they are a sign of weak writing. However, they may be appropriate in dialogue if that's the way your character would actually speak. For example:

“To use a cliché, if the shoe fits wear it,” Harold replied.

“My Momma always told me, if it ain't broke, don't fix it,” and with that Marcus left the boardroom.

“Hey guys, let's get back on track or we're going to lose for sure,” pleaded the coach.

“All we want is a level playing field,” the Mayor exclaimed.

### Writing Example #7: Don't ignore grammar and punctuation

Punctuation is important. Consider the following examples from *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (pages 9-10). The same exact words for each example, with totally different meanings depending on punctuation.

1.

A woman, without her man, is nothing.

A woman; without her, man is nothing.

2.

Dear Jack,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy – will you let me be yours?

Dear Jack,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn! For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,

Grammar is important too! Here are 5 common errors (See <http://www.copyblogger.com/5-common-mistakes-that-make-you-look-dumb/>)

Conflating your with you're

Your voice is beautiful ("your" is possessive)

You're driving me crazy with that racket (you're is a contraction for "you are".)

Confusing it's with its

It's comforting to know you will be there. (It's is a contraction for "it is.")

The dog won't eat its food. (Clearly, "it is" would not fit.)

Mixing up there with their

We had dinner at their house. ("Their" is possessive)

We are going there at 6 pm. ("There" is reference to a place)

Confusing affect vs. effect

His speech, good as it was, won't affect their opinion. (Affect as a verb, meaning "to influence" or "to change")

His teaching will have a positive effect on their test scores. (Effect as a noun, meaning "result").

Using a dangling participle

**dangling participle.** noun, Grammar. A **participle** or participial phrase, often found at the beginning of a sentence, that appears from its position to modify an element of the sentence other than the one it was intended to modify. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/dangling-participle>

Examples:

- Plunging hundreds of feet into the gorge, we saw Yosemite Falls. ("We" did not plunge into the gorge.)
- After rotting in the cellar for weeks, my brother brought up some oranges. ("My brother" did not rot in the cellar.)
- Featuring a V-8 engine, I strongly recommend the new model. ("I" do not feature a V-8 engine.)

- END -

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