

# How to Revise Your Writing

After writing a first draft, the challenge is how to polish your good idea. How do you do that?

1. **Take a break from your story.** It's easier to re-envision a story when you can read it the way a first-time reader would.
2. **Form a vision for your story.** Write about why you wrote your story, what excites you about it, and what you suspect needs work.
3. **Focus your vision.** Write what your story is about in one word, one sentence, and one paragraph.
4. **Examine your story intuitively.** Read your story as a first-time reader, noting where it flows well and where it needs to be strengthened.
5. **Analyze your story.** Examine your characterization, voice, structure, plot, scenes, etc., and create a list of revisions you want to make.
6. **Rewrite, revise, and edit.** Begin with big structural and character issues, working your way to smaller issues at the sentence level. Rewrite in the same intuitive, instinctive way that you wrote your first draft.
7. **Get feedback.** Writing workshops and writing groups offer a way to get constructive and positive feedback on how to develop your craft.
8. **Repeat all steps as needed.** Expect to revise a story multiple times. The revision process is a series of rewrites that brings the work closer to a polished piece.

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# Rewriting Tips

1. **Keep your protagonist active.** Watch for scenes where your main character is passive when they could be active.
2. **Reveal character with every word.** The reader is looking for clues about each character, so cut text that isn't revealing character.
3. **Avoid "yo-yo" emotions.** A character's emotions need to build in a steady and realistic way. Watch for places in your writing where a character's emotions are inconsistent.
4. **Raise the stakes.** Watch for scenes that read "quiet" and increase the threat or make the stakes more costly or even destructive.
5. **Avoid dumping information.** Do not pause a scene to interject lengthy description, explanation, or back-story.
6. **Show, don't tell.** Dramatize key moments through character actions, dialogue, thoughts, and body language, rather than telling through exposition.
7. **Vary scene locations.** If you've used the same setting frequently, consider whether it could be changed to someplace more interesting, unusual, or tension-raising.
8. **Strengthen hooks and cliffhangers.** You want the reader to be drawn in at the beginning of each chapter/scene and then feel compelled to continue reading at the end of each chapter/scene.
9. **Use "said" for most dialogue tags.** The great value of the tag "said" is that it becomes invisible.
10. **Avoid over-used phrases.** Any phrase you've read somewhere else is not original (for example, "she shrugged").
11. **Strengthen your verbs.** Avoid weak verbs like "to be," "to feel," and "to seem." They are less expressive than strong verbs.

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