

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.

karen crossing

Author for kids and teens
www.karencrossing.com

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.

karen crossing

Author for kids and teens
www.karencrossing.com