

Suggestions for Revision

- Elizabeth Stuckey-French

*It takes time to figure out what you've written and how best to get it across. Don't send things out in a white heat of confidence. Wait till you can see your work with a cool and objective eye.

*Read your drafts aloud. Yes, even novels. Every wrong note will blare.

*When you're stuck, confused, or sick of your story, put it away for awhile and come back to it.

*Attack revision in small bits rather than telling yourself that you have to go in and "make it better." Using a camera analogy--you might want to start with the big questions and move in.

LONG SHOT

1. **What's my story about?** Not just the plot, but deeper than that. What's the deep (usually repressed) emotion at the heart of the story? Why did I write this story? Why is it important to me? What about it tickles me or makes me want to cry? Mixing fun with desperation is fiction writer's strange potent cocktail.
2. **What does my main character desire?** (Not just a surface desire for a new pair of shoes: What do those shoes represent to your character? Have I made that desire the central focus of my story? (Everything in the story must somehow relate to that desire.) What has he or she learned, or how has s/he changed by the end?
3. **Is the situation in the story as intense and the conflict as close-to-home as it can possibly be?** Is the present time of the story dramatic and compelling? Is the problem a bear at the door? Should characters be combined or separated, or forced into closer proximity? Have you made your character as vulnerable as he or she can possibly be? Have you shown the complexity of situations and characters? (Consider ways in which you typically evade intensity. Do you keep troublesome characters off stage? Avoid a full-blown crisis scene by ending things too quickly? Keep your character simmering and stewing instead of acting? Do you drop hints to the reader instead of diving in and exploring sticky, scary situations? Avoid

telling us your character's thoughts, feelings and reactions? Hide by spiraling off into in the weird, random, melodramatic or overly-clever? Etc.)

4. Is the point of view the best one for the story? If the voice of the story is flat and/or if you are having trouble accessing the mind/heart of your main character, trying writing a page using a different pov. You'll know right away whether it's going to work.
5. Is the overall setting the best one for the story? Is it a clear and present factor? Does it increase the tension in the scene? If not, change it up!

MIDDLE SHOT

1. Does the story begin in the best possible place?
2. Do you need to restructure your story—shortening or deleting less important scenes and /or adding new ones? Are the scenes in the right order? Does something surprising happen in every scene—something that surprises us and/or the main character? Each scene should have rising and falling action, like a miniature story.
3. Are your scenes well-paced? Is dialogue balanced with vivid description of people and place, action and thought?
4. Need more back story or less back story? Is it specific and revealing and concise? Is it well placed?
5. Is the ending as powerful and satisfying as it needs to be? (Probably not. Endings often take awhile. Play around with many possibilities. You can get away with more at the end than you can at the beginning—pumped up language, wild images, flights of fancy, etc.)

Close Up

1. Before you do anything else, clean up all spelling and grammar and punctuation errors.
2. Is your language specific and vivid?
3. Dialogue? Read it aloud. Sharpen and condense. Make it work on more than one level. Make it surprising. Make it believable.
4. Sentences? Vary them. Make them crystal clear. Let the rhythm of the sentences reflect the mood.
6. Metaphors? Do they work?
5. Cliches? Weed them out.
6. Is every word the right word?