

#EditorChat

Transforming stories. Inspiring better writers.

Common mistakes...and how to fix them!

Writing is hard, no two ways about it. But learning how to expand and grow as a writer does not have to be difficult or stressful. In our work as editors and writing mentors, we typically see a lot of the same mistakes on the page, but this is not a reason to be discouraged. Instead, we encourage you to think of these areas as opportunities for your development as a writer. Writing is a creative journey; it involves tapping into the greater truth of the universe and telling stories. It's not only about publication and sales. There is joy and deep satisfaction in embracing your creative craft as something alive and dynamic. This way, you learn new ways to deepen your writing and make more impact on your reader.

Kelly Rigby – Editor and Writing Coach

Staying on the surface of the scene. This is one of the most common writing mistakes I see in my work. It's when the writer focuses on the external action in the scene rather than looking at this event/moment in time as a piece of the characters' lives where everyone brings their own personality, needs, desires and baggage to the scene. Even if you have created a scene with plenty of conflict, we don't want to move characters around like chess pieces

in ways we just think are cool. An exciting scene won't necessarily make the reader care if the action doesn't build on deeper emotions and needs, and strengthen the story and character arc. If you want to engage a reader so they follow your characters and story to the end, they have to feel like everything that happens on the page is logically motivated and holds stakes for the POV character and is part of the wider story.

When assessing a scene you have written or planning a scene you're going to write (depending on how you work), ask yourself: what is this really about? Go deeper than the action on the page. What's motivating the characters and why do we absolutely need this scene in the book? What does it tell us beneath the actions and dialogue? Are we also learning more about the characters – their hopes and fears, backstory,

and abiding truth beyond the scene? Your scenes should also have subtext- ask yourself what is not said but inferred in the scene? For example, if two characters argue about who gets to choose the restaurant for dinner, what are they really arguing about? Show the reader. Has the POV character

changed emotionally by the end? Has the story progressed?

Don't have this just be an entertaining few pages you wanted to write. Make sure everything that stays in the book has a purpose.

Not enough internal reactions. This ties in closely with the point above. Internal reactions from your POV character ensure you don't put all the focus on what action is happening while leaving out why it's happening or what it means for the characters. Yes, we want to guide the reader through the story by using high-pressure events, but we also need to provide internal reactions 'in the moment' to those events so the reader can understand who the POV character is at their heart – not just what they show the world. This allows you to build richer characters too. If the hero and heroine have an argument and she is the POV character and walks out on the hero, slamming the door, that could mean any number of things. Without internal dialogue to show what's happening beneath the surface, we don't really know. The fight could've been about him being late for dinner, for example; but inside her heart and mind, what's really bothering her is she doesn't feel respected, and that is triggering emotions from her last boyfriend. Right away, internal



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dialogue makes this scene richer.

The most important thing in a scene is not what happens but how it is perceived by the POV character. This is where we get the stakes. Internal reactions can also provide exposition about the story and characters in a way that is more SHOW than TELL and ties that exposition to the actual unfolding of the story and the wider character arc. Without clear internal dialogue in the character's voice, we have a much shallower story.

Libby Iriks – Romance Book Coach

The story starts too late. Writers are often told their story starts too early. "Cut the first chapter. Start with the action!" But in doing so, the writer often gives no sense of who the protagonist is. They get straight to the action, usually the story's first turning point, and overlook setting up the main story problem and showing the reader what's at stake.

How do you rectify this issue? Firstly, it's important to know how your protagonist will change throughout the novel. They should

be an entirely different person at the end of the story from who they are at the beginning. And so, for the reader to understand this arc of change, you must show who the character is and what their life is like in the story's first scene. By all means, start with action, but ensure that action shows the protagonist's flaws, hopes and dreams, and the obstacles preventing them from becoming the person they're meant to be. These are the things that will make the reader care and want to root for the character.

There is no evidence of backstory. Due to a misinterpretation of "the rules" – namely, "cut

the backstory" – new writers delete any mention of events that happened in the protagonist's past. But backstory is the foundation on which your story stands.

Think about your own life: how much does your past dictate your decisions, reactions, and code of ethics? It's everything, right? It's the same with our characters. Their past experiences, desires, and beliefs will influence their every move. As such, backstory should be woven through every facet of your novel to give it meaning and purpose.

How is this achieved? The key lies in knowing how to recognise an info dump. An info dump is a chunk of information, presented either in the narrative or in dialogue, that is irrelevant to what's occurring in the scene. Backstory presented as an info dump is usually a result of the writer putting their thoughts on the page and believing it's part of the story. But while it's important for the writer to know all facets of a character's backstory, a good storyteller will only reveal such details at the time that best serves the story.

Jo Speirs – Editor and Proofreader

The the most common proofreading mistakes

Did you spot the 'double the' in the header? Don't beat yourself up if you didn't. Not many people do. The truth is, few people are good at spotting common proofreading mistakes, especially in their own work. Generally speaking, our brain is wired to see what it thinks it should see, and most times, this isn't the small details. Proofreading is about training your brain to look at the small details and stop working on instinct.

In my time as a trained proofreader, it's become clear some mistakes crop up in pretty much every manuscript. They are...

♥ *Homophones* are words that sound the same but have different meanings, and because of this, spelling and grammar checkers fail to pick them up.

Some of the common ones are: there/their/they're, new/knew, to/too/two.

♥ *Inconsistencies* come in many forms, and because there are so many potential ones, it's not surprising that a few are missed. They are hard to spot because, individually, they aren't wrong; it's only when they appear throughout the manuscript in a different form that they stand out.

Some of the common inconsistencies are: compound words, numbers, quote marks, hyphens and dashes. Creating a style sheet is the best way to track your preferences and reduce the number of inconsistencies.

♥ *Double or missing words* are easy to miss, especially if you're a speedy typist, not using the spelling and grammar checker (not sure why you wouldn't!), or reading a printout. Reading your work out aloud is a great way to pick up these mistakes.

♥ *Commas*, you either love or hate them! They're the most corrected

punctuation in the proofreading stage and cause heartache at times for many a writer (and proofreader). Did you know that nearly 40 comma rules are listed in CMOS (Chicago Manual of Style)? You don't need to know them all; instead, know where to find a reference to determine when and where to use them.

♥ *Repetition and overused*

language or words are common in manuscripts, especially if you've done all the editing yourself. You are so familiar with the narrative and often fail to see when a character always smirks, uses a particular word in dialogue, or you repeatedly use filler words such as: really, very, actually, and probably (mostly adverbs).

Do you recognise any of these mistakes in your writing? If so, don't despair. Becoming a good storyteller and a proficient writer takes time, and our skills develop and improve as we practise and experiment. So continue reading articles such as this one, look for opportunities to grow as a writer, and be kind to yourself as you implement what you learn in your writing.

A New Look Graphic Designer ?

Website Designer?

We all love and cherish our RWA, and it is a place where people come to explore, grow, and belong. So, we are updating our look to be just as welcoming.

Submissions for a new logo and website are invited.

(One or both, whatever you are interested in)

Check your emails for full details