

10 MISTAKES NEW WRITERS MAKE

1. They Forget about Editing

Nothing looks worse than a book full of typos and structural errors. It also says, “I don’t care.” Your readers will put it down, return it, and then tell their friends. Writers, good writers, spend more time editing than actually writing, and then they hire a professional editor. Believe it.

2. They Rely on Clichés

A cliché is a word or phrase that has been so overused that it has lost its punch. One of my favorite professors said something I will never forget: “If someone has a twinkle in their eyes, put the book down. It is not good literature.” ‘Nuff said.

3. They Don’t Use Imagery

You are building a world for your readers. Don’t rely on assumption to do all of the work. Use imagery to engage readers, and make your unique setting and characters real.

4. They Are Too Wordy

Don’t use a twenty-five cent word when a five-cent word will do. Why do you need three pages to describe a garden that has no bearing on your story? Rethink, revise, rewrite.

5. They Have a Lack of Structure

In media res (starting a narrative in the middle) is a great writing tool if you know how to use it. Done right, you can skip long, tedious character and setting introductions. It’s tricky, but if you master it, you can begin your story right in the middle of the good stuff. Done wrong, you’ll dump readers in a scene without enough information to make them care about your characters. New writers often overuse flashbacks and flip-forwards to tell a story instead of building a strong structure.

6. They Use Inappropriate Dialogue

Dialogue is a neat trick to help you describe your characters and their setting. It can also help move your plot along without using paragraph after paragraph of text. The pitfall some writers fall into is creating dialogue that’s too formal or stiff to be considered realistic for everyday speech. Other writers write dialogue that’s too relaxed for a serious book. Brushing up on dialogue techniques will help you elevate your stories.

7. They Don’t Pay Attention to Dialect

Time, place, and social context are important. Choose your words carefully because your regional characters use special words that reflect their social group and culture. Don’t stick a native Chicagoan with a “Y’all.”

8. They Don’t Keep Punctuation in Check

Where do commas go? How do you use a semicolon? How is dialogue technically written? This tip alone separates real writers from the amateurs.

9. They Overdo Literary Devices

Too many allusions, metaphors, symbols, etc. will render your book unreadable. Use your literary devices with care, purpose and intent.

10. They Show Everything All at Once

There is something to be said for a little mystery. Reveal a little about a character, and then wait a little while before revealing more. Keep your readers on the hook, wanting more. It’s a myth that nobody likes a tease.