

TAKE YOUR WRITING TO THE NEXT LEVEL:

# 20 EDITING TIPS FROM PROFESSIONAL WRITERS

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 Improve your writing





# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	3
<b>TIP #1</b> Use adverbs very carefully	4
<b>TIP #2</b> Avoid sticky sentences	5
<b>TIP #3</b> Don't hide your verbs, rejoice in them!	6
<b>TIP #4</b> Favor active verbs	7
<b>TIP #5</b> Vary your sentence length	8
<b>TIP #6</b> Don't overuse overused words	9
<b>TIP #7</b> Clichés are boring and redundancies are annoying	10
<b>TIP #8</b> Don't repeat yourself	11
<b>TIP #9</b> Use more transitions	12
<b>TIP #10</b> "De-tag your dialogue!" the Editor shouted angrily	13
<b>TIP #11</b> Chop away deadwood	14
<b>TIP #12</b> Beware of Purple Prose	15
<b>TIP #13</b> Watch your pronouns	16
<b>TIP #14</b> Use all five of your senses	17
<b>TIP #15</b> Always delete words that you misspell and type them again	19
<b>TIP #16</b> Check your pace	21
<b>TIP #17</b> Strengthen your metaphors	22
<b>TIP #18</b> Read your work aloud	23
<b>TIP #19</b> Always get someone else to read your work	24
<b>TIP #20</b> Stop tinkering and get it out there	25







## INTRODUCTION

Whether you are writing a novel, essay, article or email, good writing is an essential part of getting your readers to understand your ideas.

In this e-book you will find the best tips and techniques from a wide range of professional writers. Some focus on the minutia of specific word selection; others focus on the more complex ideas like finding the right metaphor, policing your work for Purple Prose, or figuring out when it's time to send it off to potential publishers.

Before you begin your first edit (and indeed all future edits), we recommend taking some time away from the text, so that when you come back to edit and redraft, you will be much more able to see what's actually there rather than what you meant to get across.

When you are ready, focus on one tip at a time. Make one session just about "adverb eradication" and then go through as much of your text as you can on just that element. Your brain will get in "strong verb" gear and it will get easier as you go along. If you try to cover every tip for every paragraph, it's easy to lose focus. Too many writers have very strong beginnings followed by mediocre middles and terrible endings simply because they have run out of editing steam. Choose small bite-sized goals and go from top to bottom.

Remember that editing often takes as long or longer than writing, so be prepared to put the time in. We promise that you will not regret it.

# TIP #1

## USE ADVERBS VERY CAREFULLY

Adverbs are words that add color or emphasis to a verb.

Compare these sentences:

- The barista made a cup of coffee.
- The barista grumpily made a cup of coffee.

The adverb “grumpily” offers an additional layer of understanding to the scene. But, as Stephen King famously said, “The road to hell is paved with adverbs.” Lazy writers tend to use adverbs to modify a weak verb instead of searching for a stronger verb. Look at these examples:

Weak verb: Weak verb + adverb: Strong verb:	James <b>ran</b> to school. James <b>ran quickly</b> to school. James <b>sprinted</b> to school.
Weak verb: Weak verb + adverb: Strong verb:	Nicola <b>spoke</b> to her daughter. Nicola <b>spoke quietly</b> to her daughter. Nicola <b>whispered</b> to her daughter.
Weak verb: Weak verb + adverb: Strong verb:	Scarlett <b>looked</b> at Stan. Scarlett <b>looked angrily</b> at Stan. Scarlett <b>glared</b> at Stan.

In all three examples the strong verb paints a much more nuanced and compelling picture of the action.

We certainly don’t suggest that you remove ALL adverbs; sometimes they will be exactly right for what you are trying to get across. But adverbs tend to prop up weak verbs and so you should always ask yourself “Is there a stronger verb I can use here instead?”

You can highlight all the adverbs in your writing by running the **Style Report** in ProWritingAid.

### QUICK TRICK

#### BRAINSTORM FOR STRENGTH

If you can’t think of the right strong verb by looking at your weak verb in context, write it alone in the middle of a blank page and add as many variations as possible. It doesn’t matter if they are only tangentially related. Write as many as you can think of and check back with your sentence. If there’s a perfect fit, go for it! If not, consult a thesaurus: you now have lots of options to input rather than just the original weak verb.



# TIP #2

## AVOID STICKY SENTENCES

A sticky sentence is one that is full of glue words. Glue words are the empty space that readers need to get through before they can get to your ideas. Generally, your sentences should contain less than 45% glue words. If they contain more, they should probably be re-written to increase clarity. Let's look at some examples.

- **ORIGINAL:** Dave walked over into the back yard of the school in order to see if there was a new bicycle that he could use in his class.

Glue index: 60.7% - Sentence length 27 words

- **REDRAFT:** Dave checked the school's back yard for a new bicycle to use in class.

Glue index: 42.8% - Sentence length 14 words

The second sentence is much easier to read. Unnecessary information has been discarded, and the wording is more concise. The point of the sentence comes across clearly.

- **ORIGINAL:** I was able to use the information that I have in my files and spoke to a number of people about the problem and managed to resolve it.

Glue index: 57% - Sentence length 28 words

- **REDRAFT:** I resolved the problem using my contacts and the available information.

Glue index: 36% - Sentence length 11 words

Like many of the tips in this guide, you need to use your own judgment as the author. Sometimes a sentence will be sticky and it's the only way that it works. That's fine. But statistics show that published writing has a low percentage of glue words, so always go back and reassess your sticky sentences.

## GLUE WORDS

The 200 or so most common words in English, including, but not limited to:

in	of	think	is
on	to	some	this
the	there	new	from
was	will	make	with
for	be	much	have
that	what	every	an
said	get	should	by
a	go	just	it
if	like	and	asked

You can highlight all of your sticky sentences using ProWritingAid's **Sticky Sentence Check**.

# TIP #3

## DON'T HIDE YOUR VERBS, REJOICE IN THEM!

Verbs are the engine of our writing. They excite, engage and thrust it forward. Many novice writers end up accidentally hiding their verbs. This process (called nominalization) turns verbs into nouns and adds a weak verb in their place. For example:

- We will make an announcement of the winner on Friday  
verb noun
- We will announce the winner on Friday  
verb

The first sentence uses a weak verb (make) and hides a strong verb (announce) as a noun (announcement). The second sentence is shorter, clearer and stronger. It relies less on those extraneous glue words that we mentioned in Tip #2.

Hidden verbs are particularly common in business writing when writers are trying to use an “official” voice:

- analyzed ➡ undertook an analysis
- discussed ➡ held a discussion
- decided ➡ made a decision
- reviewed ➡ carried out a review
- explained ➡ gave an explanation

Highlight all the hidden verbs in your writing by running the ProWritingAid **Style Report** and reveal your strong verbs in all their glory.

### QUICK TRICK

#### FIND YOUR VERBS

To search out your hidden verbs, watch out for words with the following endings:

- ance** (assistance), -**edge** (knowledge),
- ery** (discovery), -**ity** (accountability), -**ment** (government),
- sion** (expansion), -**tion** (attention).

And, keep your eye out for the following linking verbs that are often followed by a hidden verb: **Make, give, achieve, have, reach, take** and **undertake**.

“We are not nouns, we are verbs. I am not a thing - an actor, a writer - I am a person who does things - I write, I act - and I never know what I’m going to do next. I think you can be imprisoned if you think of yourself as a noun.”

Stephen Fry

# TIP #4

## FAVOR ACTIVE VERBS

This is one of those rules passed down by generations of writers: sentences written in the active voice tend to be more engaging for the reader. Using the active voice instead of the passive voice is one of the best things you can do to improve your writing.

In an active sentence, the subject is at the start of the sentence and the ordering is subject - verb - object. For example:

- Jane watched the video.  
subject   verb                  noun

In the passive sentence, the subject is relegated to the end of the sentence and the ordering is object - verb - subject:

- The video was watched by Jane.  
noun                  verb                  subject

Like many of these rules, this does not mean that you must remove every occurrence – sometimes it works – but more often than not, you should rearrange your passive sentence to make it active, and therefore more effective. Consider:

- The doorbell was rung by the mailman to deliver the package.  
noun                  verb                  subject
- The mailman rang the doorbell to deliver the package.  
subject   verb                  noun

The first sentence is written in passive voice, which means the person or thing doing the action (the mailman) follows the action (ringing the doorbell). Using the active voice turns the sentence around and puts the subject first. This makes the meaning clearer and the sentence shorter.

Sometimes in the passive voice the subject is completely omitted:

- The ball was thrown over the fence.  
noun                  verb
- Action was taken against the three trespassers.  
noun                  verb
- Katy was kissed at prom.  
noun                  verb

By whom? For the sake of clarity, it is usually better to tie your action to the person or thing that is doing the action. Otherwise your reader is left having to draw their own conclusions.

### BEWARE!

The passive voice can sometimes be sneaky and hide within a reduced sentence or get broken up by a modifier. Don't let them slip in this way:

- The ball, thrown over the fence, was later found.

is a reduction of:

- The ball (that was) thrown over the fence, was later found.  
noun                  passive verb                  split passive verb

Turn it into the active voice:

- Daniel threw the ball over the fence. Caroline found it again.  
subject   verb                  noun                  subject   verb   noun

ProWritingAid's **Style Report** will highlight all the passive verbs in your text so you can find them and turn them into active verbs.

# TIP #5

## VARY YOUR SENTENCE LENGTH

Varied sentence length is an important feature of good writing. The late Gary Provost illustrated it best:

*This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.*

*Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals – sounds that say listen to this, it is important.*

*So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.*

To maintain your readers' interest, use a variety of sentence lengths: some short and punchy, others long and flowing.

There are two easy ways to check your sentence length variety. Choose the method that works best for you.

### 1. CHECK OUT YOUR STATS

ProWritingAid counts every word in every sentence of your selected text, and then it gives you two scores:

#### a) Average Sentence Length

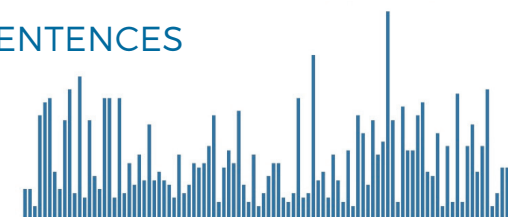
The average sentence length for most published writers is between 11 and 18 words. If your average is above 18, then your writing might be too verbose or complicated. If your average is below 11, your writing will likely feel choppy. Check your score and then rework your text if you need to.

#### b) Sentence Variety Score

The sentence variety is calculated using a concept called standard deviation. This is a mathematical measure of variety from the average. The higher the standard deviation, the more your sentence lengths vary within the document.

### 2. GRAPH YOUR SENTENCES

Create a visual representation of your work so you can easily scan to find areas that need more variety.



Whichever method works best for you, you will be amazed at how much better your writing sounds when you use good sentence variety. As Gary Provost said, "Don't just write words. Write music."

Use ProWritingAid's **Sentence Length Check** to find your stats or create a graph of your sentences.



# TIP #6

## DON'T OVERUSE OVERUSED WORDS

“Substitute ‘damn’ every time you’re inclined to write ‘very’; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.”

Mark Twain

We think Mark Twain was right. Some words have been used so often that they’ve become meaningless. When we speak, we tend to use overused words frequently, but in your text, you want to be more explicit and original with your phrasing. Try to avoid these crutches and express your ideas with more specific and fresh words.

Let’s look at some examples:

- Mia opened the door and shivered. It was cold outside.
- Mia opened the door and shivered. It was very cold outside.

The word “very” adds little to the reader’s understanding. In fact, it makes the writing sound amateurish. Instead, think of words that say exactly what you want to get across: icy, sub-zero, arctic, glacial, snowy, freezing, biting, bleak, Siberian, or severe.

- I thought the book was good; it was really interesting.
- This book grabbed my attention and kept me turning the pages until the final line.

The first sentence is full of overused words: thought/good/really/interesting. In the second example we have replaced those tired, overused words with less common ones and the sentence is much more compelling.

The word ‘then’ is another word that is particularly overused and often unnecessary.

- Charlie filled his bucket with sand and then made a castle.
- Charlie filled his bucket with sand and made a castle.

The sentence above works better without it. No one will be confused about the chronology of bucket-filling and castle-making.

Use ProWritingAid’s **Overused Words** report to highlight all of the overused words in your text. We’re not, of course, suggesting that you need to cut or replace all of them; rather, they just require a little extra re-examination to make sure that they are your best option. You can also add your own particular words that you know you overuse to help break bad habits.

### OVERUSED WORDS ARE NOTHING WORDS

Everyone has heard them a million times and they have no impact. They include, but are not limited to:

it/there	very/really	feel/felt/feeling
have/had	watch/notice/observe	use/used
maybe	nice/great	find/found
just/then	knew/know	make/made

# TIP #7

## CLICHÉS ARE BORING AND REDUNDANCIES ARE ANNOYING

### CLICHÉS

“Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.”

George Orwell

Whenever you use a cliché, you are knowingly writing something unoriginal. Clichés are what you write when you don't have the energy or inspiration to think of something new to say.

Writers often use clichés when they are working on their first draft because thinking up original wording takes time and can interrupt creative flow. That's fine. But, when you go back to edit, be creative and brainstorm for fresh ideas. A new analogy or metaphor will make much more of an impression on your readers than a dusty old cliché. A good writer may create and reject over a dozen images before finding the right one, so don't worry if it takes you a while.

#### QUICK TRICK

#### USE YOUR OWN FEELINGS TO BRAINSTORM

If you're trying to replace "she was happy as a lark", think of situations in which you are happy and magnify them. For instance, maybe you have a penchant for chocolate, which might lead to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which might lead you to "she felt as if she'd just found Willy Wonka's golden ticket".

### REDUNDANCIES

Every word in your writing should be there for a reason. Redundant expressions make writing longer, not better. Look at these four examples:

- She peered through the hollow tube.
- He stepped out on the frozen ice.
- She followed her natural instinct.
- His writing was peppered with overused clichés.

In all four cases, the penultimate word is superfluous.

Redundancies can happen across a sentence, too:

- The problems first began when Gary lost his job.

The word *began* means "the first occurrence", so the word *first* is redundant.

- Sam, Tom and Susie gathered together around the fire.

The word *gathered* means "to come together", so the word *together* is redundant.

- He reversed the car back down the driveway.

As opposed to reversing it *forward*? Drop the word *back* because it's redundant.

Redundancies add quantity, not quality. Eliminate the clutter.

Use ProWritingAid's **Cliché and Redundancy Check** to highlight those that have crept into your writing.

# TIP #8

## DON'T REPEAT YOURSELF

Repeating a word or phrase happens to the best of us, especially if you're writing an article and using a specific vocabulary for your topic. You won't even notice you've used the same word several times in the span of one paragraph because it's foremost in your mind. But those repeats can set off an echo in the reader's mind – that subconscious feeling of “Didn't he just say that?” It can be irritating to read and, worse, it can detract from what you are trying to say. The more uncommon a word or phrase, the more likely it is to echo, even pages apart.

Consider the following text:

- **At your next get-together, cook together as a family and enjoy the benefits of creating a meal together and the bond you'll create.**

It is easy as the reader to point out how many times “together” is used in the above example, but as the writer, you know what you meant to express and so the emphasis sounds natural to you.

Although it happens all the time, it can be difficult for you, as the writer, to spot when you re-read it. When you are editing you usually go over the same piece several times and so you become impervious to that echo feeling. And when you are looking at a sentence on its own and making amendments, you can sometimes input a word that is just right for that sentence, forgetting that you also used it in the one before or after.

ProWritingAid's **Repeats Check** highlights words and phrases repeated within a few paragraphs so you can easily track down unintended repetition and replace it with a more diverse vocabulary.

### QUICK TRICK

#### SOMETIMES PURPOSEFUL REPETITION MAKES THE BEST POETRY

Use your own best judgment about repeating a word or two in your text. Dickens' opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* is a great example of effective repetition:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.*



# TIP #9

## USE MORE TRANSITIONS

Imagine a road with no street signs. How would you follow the right route if you didn't have a sign showing you which way to go?

Transition words are the road signs in writing. And great transitions help your reader follow your train of thought without becoming bogged down trying to discern your meaning. Words and phrases like "similarly", "nevertheless", "in order to", "likewise," or "as a result" show the relationships between your ideas and can help illustrate agreement, contrast or show cause and effect:

- Mark avoided the campus dining hall where his ex-friends hung out. He didn't like its food.
- Mark avoided the campus dining hall where his ex-friends hung out. Equally important, he didn't like its food.

In the second example, you understand that the two thoughts are both important and related. Mark is not just avoiding the dining hall because he doesn't like the food; he is also avoiding the people who used to be his friends.

- Kate thought her mother was over-reacting to her announcement. She waited two days after the first phone call to visit.
- Kate thought her mother was over-reacting to her announcement. Because of this, she waited two days after the first phone call to visit.

The use of "Because of this" in the second sentence makes clear to the reader that the gap in time between the call and the visit was a direct result of the over-reaction.

- The boy kicked the ball into the street. A speeding car came around the corner.
- The boy kicked the ball into the street. At the same moment, a speeding car came around the corner.

Now we see the action in a wider lens: the ball goes into the street just as a car comes careening around the corner. The first illustration is short and choppy. It doesn't flow well. The second sentence with a transition leads you smoothly between two related, but different thoughts.

The ProWritingAid **Transitions Report** will scan your writing and give you a "transitions score", which is based on the percentage of sentences that contain a transition. We recommend that you aim for a score of 25% or higher, which means that you use at least one transition word or phrase every four sentences.

# TIP #10

“DE-TAG YOUR DIALOGUE!” THE EDITOR SHOUTED ANGRILY

Dialogue tags are the words that refer dialogue to a specific character. The two most common examples are “said” and “asked”.

- “I’m not going!” said Charlie.

They are essential in writing, particularly in scenes that include several characters, because they help the reader follow the conversation. Novice writers, however, have an annoying tendency to use more flowery dialogue tags and pepper them with adverbs.

- “I’m not going!” said Charlie angrily.  
tag                      adverb

- “I’m not going!” shouted Charlie.  
tag

- “I’m not going!” roared Charlie furiously.  
tag                      adverb

More than anything, tags like these tend to distract the reader. Ideally, your dialogue tags should be invisible within your writing, just signposts that point out who is speaking. The character’s actions or the dialogue itself should be carrying the emotion. Don’t depend on an adverb to make your reader feel something.

Where possible, try to omit dialogue tags altogether. Instead, use description and action to point out your speaker and build your scene.

- Charlie slammed his fist on the table. “I’m not going and that’s final.”

In this example, Charlie’s anger was shown, not told. The reader knows that he is the one speaking – even without a tag – and his fist shows that he is angry instead of an adverb. It gives much stronger sense of the scene.

“If the dialogue is so weak that the writer has to re-explain what emotions or motivations are being conveyed, there may be more serious problems lurking.”

Joe Moore, author of *The Cotten Stone Mystery Series*

Use the ProWritingAid **Dialogue Tags Check** so that you can find a better way to demonstrate emotion.

# TIP #11

## CHOP AWAY DEADWOOD

If you take one key message from ProWritingAid, it's that when it comes to writing, less is more. Make every word count. If it doesn't move your plot forward or express an essential idea, cut it!

Writers often use deadwood phrases: the wordy ways of saying simple things. Why write "has the ability to" when you can write "can"? You're just using more words to say the same thing, which actually makes your writing much less readable. Look through your writing for a simpler way of saying the same thing.

I believe more in  
the scissors than  
I do in the pencil.

Truman Capote

Some other examples include:

at this point in time ➡ now

due to the fact that ➡ because

in order to ➡ to

in the event that ➡ if

prior to the start of ➡ before

has been found to be ➡ is

a sufficient amount of ➡ enough

at such time as ➡ when

for the reason that ➡ because

in close proximity to ➡ near

it is our opinion that ➡ we think

serves the function of being ➡ is

in the near future ➡ soon

Use the **Diction Check** in ProWritingAid to highlight deadwood words or phrases and replace them with succinct language.



# TIP #12

## BEWARE OF PURPLE PROSE

Purple Prose is writing that is so flowery and pretentious that it ruins the flow of your writing by drawing excessive attention to itself. It feels as if the author is saying “Look how clever I am with my enormous vocabulary and intricate description.”

It is characterized by the use of overly complicated words (why use *pachyderm* when you can just say *elephant*?), excessive adverbs (we’ve mentioned their evils before), and an unnecessary amount of adjectives.

- **Discombobulated, Anna lay languidly on her aquamarine Charmuese bedspread and speculated forlornly about the myriad of alternatives available to her.**
- **Confused, Anna lay in her room, wondering what she should do next.**

See? You can tell that I had to use my thesaurus to write that first one. It’s unnatural and awkward, and the flowery words distract from the meaning. The second option is clean and clear. Authors sometimes end up writing “Purple Passages” when they have run out of places to go with their narrative. Because they are having trouble moving their plot or argument forward, they overcompensate by filling the pages with wordy description. It is both frustrating and dull for the reader to wade through.

If you want to show you’re clever, do so by maintaining the flow of your writing, cutting the nonessentials and keeping the reader’s attention until the end.

Searching for Purple Prose is slightly more complicated as it can manifest in many different ways. Try running ProWritingAid’s **Complex Words Check** to find unnecessarily complicated words, and the **Diction Check** to find overly complicated phrases. The **Style Check** can also be useful in tracking down passages that are overly purple.

### WHY PURPLE?

The term Purple Prose was coined by the poet Horace. He found this pretentious kind of writing unbearable and compared it to poor people who sewed patches of purple onto their clothing because purple was associated with wealth. The patch was not a signifier of true wealth, just as Purple Prose is not a signifier of true great writing.

# TIP #13

## WATCH YOUR PRONOUNS

When you are writing in creative mode, you often rely on pronouns to keep your narrative moving: "He did this," "She did that," "They ran there," "I found out." That's fine. It's more important to keep your writing momentum up than it is to get every sentence just right.

When you go back and edit, however, you should check your pronoun percentage. Ideally it should fall somewhere between 4% and 15%. Any more than this and your writing can feel dull. This is especially so with initial pronouns – those at the start of the sentence. Your initial pronoun percentage should be under 30%.

- John turned the corner and saw Doris marching down the road toward his house. She looked like she was angry. He wondered what it was that he had done this time. He tried to remember if he had cut his lawn and turned off his sprinkler. He sometimes cut through his back yard just to avoid running into her.

Pronoun percentage 17.8%. Initial pronoun percentage 80%

- John turned the corner and saw Doris marching down the road toward his house. What had he done to make her angry this time? She loved being the first to point out his gardening lapses. Had he cut the lawn? Had the sprinkler been left on? Sometimes he cut through the back yard just to avoid running into her.

Pronoun percentage 13.6%. Initial pronoun percentage 17.7%

Use ProWritingAid's **Pronoun Check** to find those areas in your text that would benefit from a reduction in pronouns.

## PRONOUN CHART

	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	OBJECT PRONOUNS	POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES	POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS	REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS
1st person	I	me	my	mine	myself
2nd person	you	you	your	yours	yourself
3rd person (male)	he	him	his	his	himself
3rd person (female)	she	her	her	hers	herself
3rd person	it	it	its	n/a	itself
1st person (plural)	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
2nd person (plural)	you	you	your	yours	yourselves
3rd person (plural)	they	them	their	theirs	themselves

# TIP #14

## USE ALL FIVE OF YOUR SENSES

It's important to use all five senses in your writing. Every writer has a tendency to favor one or two of their senses over the others, and this affects the way that he or she experiences the world, processes information and makes memories. This means that we tend to describe characters, settings or actions using words related to our own favored senses. Writing that skews too far toward one sense over the others will resonate more with readers who favor the same sense and less so with those who do not.

The term "NLP predicate" refers to those words (primarily verbs, adverbs and adjectives) associated with the specific senses. There are thousands of words associated with each but some examples are included, right:

VISUAL PREDICATES	KINAESTHETIC PREDICATES	AUDITORY PREDICATES
see view clear illuminate showed appeared	felt grasp hard rough shape turn over	heard silence listens resonates tunes deaf
OLFACTORY PREDICATES	GUSTATORY PREDICATES	AUDITORY DIGITAL PREDICATES
smell fragrant stench sniff odorous stank	tasted bitter sour flavor ate acerbic	think decide motivate consider understand know



# TIP #14 CONTINUED

## USE ALL FIVE OF YOUR SENSES

### HOW TO EXPERIENCE AN EXPLOSION

We created the following example for a guest post on DIY Author in 2015. Imagine a fictional situation that can be described using different predicates to resonate with different senses.

- The blast from the explosion was blinding. Jane searched the sky and saw a plume of smoke rising from her office.
- The heat from the explosion hit Jane like a bus. Her legs felt riddled with bullets as she struggled along the rough brick wall toward her office.
- The explosion was deafening. Sirens immediately began to wail as Jane struggled to her feet, her ears drumming like machine gun fire.
- The explosion filled the street with an acrid cloud of noxious smoke. Jane choked on the fumes as she pulled her sweater up over her burning nostrils.
- The explosion filled the street with an acidic cloud of toxic smoke. With the taste of charcoal burning her tongue, Jane struggled toward her office.
- The explosion came from behind and Jane knew immediately that it was her office. She thought of the files on her desk and knew that she needed to go back.

Now check out this example where more than one sense is used together:

- The heat from the explosion hit Jane like a bus. Sirens began to wail and a plume of smoke rose from her office. With the taste of charcoal burning her tongue and her ears drumming like machine gun fire, Jane thought of the files on her desk and knew that she needed to go back.

The reader experiences the explosion in a much more vivid way when several of her senses are ignited.

When you are writing for a broad audience, you should try to use words associated with all of the senses. It will help emotionally engage with the widest range of people.

Run your writing through ProWritingAid's **NLP Predicates Report** and make sure that you have all five senses covered.

# TIP #15

ALWAYS DELETE WORDS THAT YOU MISPELL AND TYPE THEM AGAIN

“I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.”

Pablo Picasso

This is a great tip for improving your spelling. In today's world of spellcheckers it's easy to go on misspelling words forever as you just correct them with your mouse. We recommend spending a bit of time upfront improving your spelling to save time in the future. Every time you misspell a word, delete the whole word and re-type it again, paying attention to the spelling.

We learn best if we are rewarded for getting something right, or punished for getting it wrong. Having to re-type a word is a small, annoying punishment for getting it wrong. You'll be amazed how quickly your brain learns the right spelling.

When you run the **Grammar Check** in the free version of ProWritingAid, your spelling mistakes are presented to you in a read-only format. This is good because it forces you to go back and correct the error in your document. The premium version allows you to edit as you go along. You can correct errors by choosing from a drop down menu (online) or double-clicking (add-in). This saves time in the short term and is great when you have a lot of text to get through, but we still recommend that if you see a word that you know you have trouble with, take the time to retype it. It will help stop you from making the same error again in the future.

Which of these commonly misspelled words do you get wrong? These examples from Oxforddictionaries.com illustrate some of the most common mistakes:

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISPELLING
accommodate, accommodation	two <b>cs</b> , two <b>ms</b>	accomodate, accomodation
achieve	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>	acheive
across	one <b>c</b>	accross
aggressive, aggression	two <b>gs</b>	agressive, agression
apparently	<b>-ent</b> not <b>-ant</b>	apparrantly
appearance	ends with <b>-ance</b>	appearence
argument	no <b>e</b> after the <b>u</b>	arguement
assassination	two double <b>s</b> 's	assasination
basically	ends with <b>-ally</b>	basicly
beginning	double <b>n</b> before the <b>-ing</b>	begining
calendar	<b>-ar</b> not <b>-er</b>	calender
Caribbean	one <b>r</b> , two <b>bs</b>	Carribean
cemetery	ends with <b>-ery</b>	cemetary
chauffeur	ends with <b>-eur</b>	chauffer
colleague	<b>-ea-</b> in the middle	collegue
committee	double <b>m</b> , double <b>t</b> , double <b>e</b>	commitee
completely	ends with <b>-ely</b>	completly
conscious	<b>-sc-</b> in the middle	concious
definitely	<b>-ite-</b> not <b>-ate-</b>	definatly

# TIP #15 CONTINUED

ALWAYS DELETE WORDS THAT YOU MISPELL AND TYPE THEM AGAIN

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISSPELLING
disappoint	one <b>s</b> , two <b>ps</b>	dissappoint
ecstasy	ends with <b>-sy</b>	ecstacy
embarrass	two <b>rs</b> , two <b>s's</b>	embarass
existence	ends with <b>-ence</b>	existance
Fahrenheit	begins with <b>Fahr-</b>	Farenheit
fluorescent	begins with <b>fluor-</b>	florescent
foreign	<b>e</b> before <b>i</b>	foriegn
foreseeable	begins with <b>fore-</b>	forseeable
gist	begins with <b>g-</b>	jist
glamorous	<b>-mor-</b> in the middle	glamourous
harass, harassment	one <b>r</b> , two <b>s's</b>	harrass, harrassment
idiosyncrasy	ends with <b>-asy</b>	idiosyncracy
immediately	ends with <b>-ely</b>	immediatly
incidentally	ends with <b>-ally</b>	incidently
independent	ends with <b>-ent</b>	independant
irresistible	ends with <b>-ible</b>	irresistable
liaise, liaison	remember the second <b>i</b> : <b>liais-</b>	liase, liason
millennium, millennia	double <b>l</b> , double <b>n</b>	millenium, millenia
necessary	one <b>c</b> , two <b>s's</b>	neccessary
noticeable	remember the middle <b>e</b>	noticable
occasion	two <b>cs</b> , one <b>s</b>	ocassion, occassion
occurred, occurring	two <b>cs</b> , two <b>rs</b>	ocured, occuring
occurrence	two <b>cs</b> , two <b>rs</b> , <b>-ence</b> not <b>-ance</b>	occurance, occurence

CORRECT SPELLING	SPELLING ADVICE	COMMON MISSPELLING
persistent	ends with <b>-ent</b>	persistant
politician	ends with <b>-cian</b>	politican
possession	two <b>s's</b> in the middle and two at the end	posession
preferred, preferring	two <b>rs</b>	prefered, prefering
publicly	ends with <b>-cly</b>	publically
receive	<b>e</b> before <b>i</b>	recieve
referred, referring	two <b>rs</b>	referred, referring
religious	ends with <b>-gious</b>	religous
resistance	ends with <b>-ance</b>	resistence
separate	<b>-par-</b> in the middle	seperate
siege	<b>i</b> before <b>e</b>	seige
successful	two <b>cs</b> , two <b>s's</b>	succesful
supersede	ends with <b>-sede</b>	supercede
tattoo	two <b>ts</b> , two <b>os</b>	tattoo
tendency	ends with <b>-ency</b>	tendancy
therefore	ends with <b>-fore</b>	therefor
threshold	one <b>h</b> in the middle	threshold
tongue	begins with <b>ton-</b> , ends with <b>-gue</b>	tounge
truly	no <b>e</b>	truely
unforeseen	remember the <b>e</b> after the <b>r</b>	unforseen
unfortunately	ends with <b>-ely</b>	unfortunatly
wherever	one <b>e</b> in the middle	whereever

# TIP #16

## CHECK YOUR PACE

“In many cases when a reader puts a story aside because it ‘got boring,’ the boredom arose because the writer grew enchanted with his powers of description and lost sight of his priority, which is to keep the ball rolling.”

Stephen King

Pacing refers to the speed at which a story is told and how quickly the reader is moved through events. Good writing contains faster-paced sections, such as dialogue and character action, as well as slower-paced sections, such as introspection and backstory.

A book that is entirely composed of car chases without taking the time to make you care about the character being chased just won't be effective at bringing readers into the story. Likewise, a story that has four chapters in a row dedicated to your main character's Zen contemplation may need a bit of action to keep readers interested. Differently paced sections should complement each other, allowing the reader to move with you through the narrative.

ProWritingAid's **Pacing Check** finds those areas in your writing that are paced more slowly so that you can spread them out. Too many slower paced paragraphs in a row and your reader's attention may wane.

## PACING VISUALIZATION



Any areas shown in white are areas of slower pacing. Try and add some more action to areas that contains lots of white.

### QUICK TIP

#### FIND THE RIGHT PACE FOR YOUR STORY

Different stories will allow for different paces. Readers will expect more slowly paced passages in a dense historical drama than in a modern thriller.

# TIP #17

## STRENGTHEN YOUR METAPHORS

A strong metaphor has an unparalleled ability to convey your meaning. We understand new things by relating them to things that we already know.

Writers often use events from their own lives that parallel what they are trying to explain. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.” Of course, he didn’t literally mean that the planet is a giant stage. He used his own understanding of theatre to create a metaphor that helps us understand a larger point about human nature. It is much more effective than if he had just written “People undertake many different roles throughout their lives and sometimes pretend to be something other than their true selves.” The metaphor gets across a nuanced insight because readers and audience members are able to take everything that they know about stage performances and apply it to this concept. As such, there is a great deal of depth already embedded in their understanding.

Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Not Taken* (see box) is another brilliant metaphor. Frost never mentions anything other than the physical elements of a road, yet the reader understands that his point is about choosing the right option in life, even if it is difficult or unpopular. Similarly, the parables in the Bible are extended metaphors aimed at teaching a moral lesson. Some writers even use metaphor as the basis for a whole book. This type of extended metaphor is known as an allegory. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell is an allegory of the events leading to the Russian revolution, and was written as a critique of Stalin.

Finding the right metaphor is like dating: you may have to reject many before you find the right one, and when you find it, you’ll know it’s the perfect match.

### THE ROAD NOT TAKEN BY ROBERT FROST

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*



# TIP #18

## READ YOUR WORK ALOUD

The human brain is always trying to be helpful by filling in missing information. Most of the time, that's great. It's how animation works. Animators just need to show you a succession of images, and your brain links them all together and provides the missing information that turns them into a movie.

The same thing happens when you are reading, especially if it's your own writing. I'm sure you have all carefully proofed a sentence and still missed an obvious typo. That's because your brain guesses what's supposed to be there and so replaces it in your head with the correct word or spelling. This was circulating on the internet a while back:

I cdn'uolt blueiee taht I cluod aulacfty uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg; the phaonmneel pweor of the hmuan mnid. Aoccdrnig to a rseearch taem at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Scuh a cdonition is arpppoiatrely cllaed typoglycemia.

Isn't your brain clever to make sense of all that nonsense? Yes, but, this very same skill is what makes self-editing so much more difficult. Your brain sees what you meant to say, rather than what you wrote.

When you are reading aloud, however, it's much harder to skip over errors. You are more likely to hear what is actually on the page rather than what you meant to write.

### QUICK TRICKS

#### CHANGE YOUR FONT

Before you read your writing aloud it is a good idea to change the text to an unfamiliar font. Your brain needs to work that extra bit harder to read each word, so you are more likely to catch those errors.

#### USE TEXT TO SPEECH SOFTWARE

You could also try listening to your text by inputting it into a Text to Speech app like Ivona. Hearing your words read aloud, even if it's by a computer-generated voice, is a great way to catch errors.

# TIP #19

## ALWAYS GET SOMEONE ELSE TO READ YOUR WORK

Even the most popular authors in the world have people in their lives that read their work and give them feedback. It may be their husband, best friend or a professional editor (or all of those people at different points in their writing process) but they find the person they trust to give them that essential feedback to improve their writing.

Use an editing tool and some of the techniques listed here to get your writing as close to perfect as you can manage. Ideally 80% of your technical editing should be done by you so that your beta reader or editor can focus on the meat of your writing. They can help you develop your strengths as a writer and point out areas that need further development.

“At its foundation the role of the editor is a blend of meddler and midwife

Nell Frizzell, journalist

There are huge numbers of online writing communities that help writers find readers for their work. “Beta readers” are non-professionals who love reading and giving feedback and there are millions of them around the world. Try websites like Scribophile or Creative Critique to find an online beta reader, or use Google to find local writers’ groups.

### QUICK TRICK

#### ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

To avoid generic feedback like “I liked it” or “it was good”, ask your reader specific questions. For **articles and blog posts**, ask a friend or colleague:

- 1 Did it read smoothly from top to bottom, or were there areas that felt rough or out of place?
- 2 Were there any sentences that you had to read twice to get the meaning?
- 3 Were there words that you were unfamiliar with?
- 4 Was the argument cohesive?
- 5 Are there elements that should be fleshed out further?
- 6 Is the tone right for the target audience?

For **fiction writing**, here are some questions that you might find helpful:

- 1 Did the beginning of the story capture your interest right away?
- 2 Did you find the main character relatable? Did you care what happened to him or her?
- 3 What was your favorite scene?
- 4 What sections did you find boring?
- 5 Were there points in the story that didn’t make sense or that you found frustrating?
- 6 Did you feel compelled to keep reading? Why or why not?
- 7 Did you ever get confused about who was who?
- 8 Were there any sections that you felt got bogged down with too much backstory, dialogue, or description? Or that needed more?

# TIP #20

## STOP TINKERING AND GET IT OUT THERE

“Art is never finished,  
only abandoned.”

Leonardo da Vinci

Writing is not like doing a mathematics equation. It's never perfect. It's never solved. There is never a moment when you think “Yep, every word in this manuscript now adds up completely to form the perfect story.” The tricky part is knowing when to stop.

We have stressed throughout this document that editing is essential. Writers should expect to spend almost as much time editing as they do writing. Every paragraph should be reassessed, revised or even rewritten at least a couple of times. No one writes so well on their first draft that they can't think of ways to express some of their ideas in a better way. It is an essential process if your writing is going to appear polished and professional to readers and potential publishers.

**BUT...**

...too many writers tinker away at their manuscript far past the moment when they should have sent it off to prospective publishers and agents. At some point you will reach the stage where you are no longer improving the piece, just making it different. In your final edit (which may be your 3rd, 9th or 21st, depending on how long it takes you to get there), you should be able to read each paragraph and not be able to come up with any substantive differences that you are confident will improve on your ideas or how they are communicated. You can always waffle over decisions like whether “division” or “separation” is best, or whether “has been” or “went” makes the most sense in this context. But you will no longer be rewriting sentences entirely or moving paragraphs around.

At the end of that edit, you are probably ready to let it go. Stop focusing on making the book, and start focusing on getting it out into the world.

And that, my author friends, is a whole other e-book!

Good luck and happy editing!