

### Story Notes:

1. **Numbers.** Use words to spell out all numbers below 101, including ages, and use numerals for (almost) everything 101 and above.

*I bought six new books.*  
*I'll add those to my collection of 600.*  
*My class has thirty-two students.*  
*My hometown has only 400 people.*

2. **Long paragraphs.** Keep an eye out for long paragraphs. If you go on for more than five or six lines, it can be difficult for the reader to stay with the text, and it shows up as a lot of gray when printed in a book.
3. **Specificity** – Whenever possible, choose specific words over general ones. Identify the nouns in your stories and see if each can be made more specific.

*I loved the flowers next to my grandmother's front porch.*  
*I loved the hydrangeas next to my grandmother's front porch.*

4. **Italics for emphasis.** Use italics for emphasis rather than quotation marks, all CAPITAL letters, or underlining. I want to go, *now*. It's not incorrect to use quotation marks, but it's old-fashioned, as is underlining, which was done for manuscripts written with typewriters to indicate typesetters should use italics. All capital letters are rarely used in creative writing.
5. **That.** *That* is an often-overused word. We use it a lot out of habit rather than need. Read your sentence without *that*. If the meaning is still clear, delete the extraneous *that*.

*I bought the car that I wanted all my life.*  
*I bought the car I wanted all my life.*

6. **Compound words.** Check compound words to see if they are two separate words, hyphenated, or one word—*backyard*, *front yard*, *in-depth*. You can type the word(s) in question into an online search engine followed by the words *Merriam* and *Webster* to see the current status of such words or phrases.

In today's story, *nightlife*, *backseat*, *turnaround*, *fundraising*.

7. **Overuse of *ing* words.** *Ing* words tend to be weaker words. Avoid this construction whenever possible. If you use the construction of *was working*, *swimming*, *driving*, you can usually replace it with a past tense verb, *worked*, *swam*, *drove*.

Watch out for too many phrases or clauses that use *ing* words.

*Sitting in my father's big, leather chair, I was reading a new book.  
I sat in my father's big, leather chair and read a new book.*

A smattering of *ing* words is fine. Just don't overdo them.

8. **Would** – Many, many times you can replace *would* in a sentence with the simple past tense, and it makes the sentence much stronger.

*I would go to the movies every Saturday afternoon.  
I went to the movies every Saturday afternoon.*

9. **Dollars and cents.** Isolated whole dollar amounts are spelled out if less than 101, i.e., *seventy-five dollars*, *thirteen dollars*. If the whole dollar amount is 101 or more, use the dollar sign and a numeral, i.e., \$250, \$635.

If dollar amounts lower and higher than 101 are combined in a sentence, use numerals for all.

*Tickets for the show were \$105 for the orchestra section and \$75 for the balcony.*

Drop the cents when listing a whole dollar amount unless it is included with other dollar amounts that include cents.

*Tickets for the show were \$75.00 for the orchestra section and \$65.20 for the balcony.*

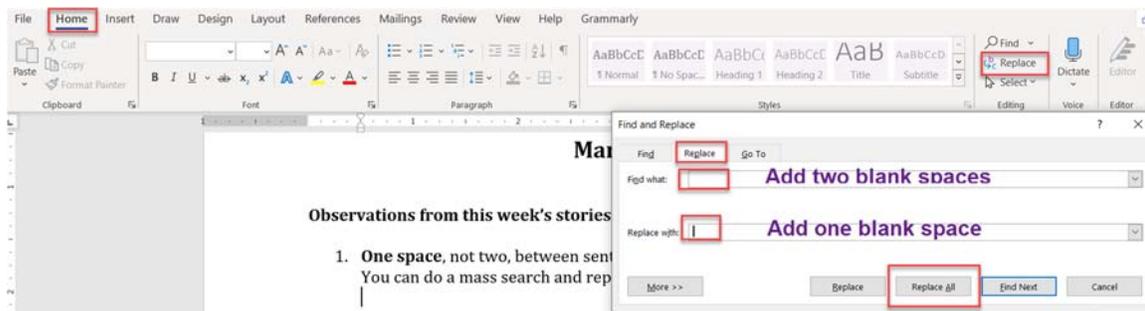
10. **Repetition.** We have at least one million words in the English language, so we don't need to repeat words in the same or nearby sentences. Make use of a thesaurus for help.

*I moved to South Florida, and then, I moved to Wisconsin.  
I moved to South Florida, and then, I relocated to Wisconsin.*

11. **Comma and independent sentences.** Put a comma in between two independent sentences connected by *and*, *or*, or some other conjunction.

*The boy ran to school, and he sneaked in without the teacher noticing he was late.*

12. **One space**, not two, between sentences, always and forever, since well before the 1990s. You can do a mass search and replace using the MS Word *replace* feature. The same rule applies to the one and only space after a colon.



13. **Semicolon.** I've heard a semicolon called the *love child of a colon and comma*, and it has *only* two uses. It can be used to *replace* a conjunction in a compound sentence.

*I enjoyed the movie, but I loved the dinner afterward.*  
*I enjoyed the movie; I loved the dinner afterward.*

A semicolon is needed for clarity a complex list where each entry includes explanatory details.

*Family members in attendance included Jeff, my brother, Mary, my aunt, and Chris, my cousin. May be six people there.*

*Family members in attendance included Jeff, my brother; Mary, my aunt; and Chris, my cousin. Accurately identifies three people there.*