

# Writing in the Rainforest

## Lesson Three

### Edit Your Story

#### Annotated Editing Checklist

\_\_\_ **Have I checked my piece against the items on my common mistakes list?**

- Review your personal editing checklist.

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\_\_\_ **Did I use only one space after the ending punctuation mark of each sentence?**

- Use the search and replace feature to remove extra space until you train yourself to add only one space between sentences. “Nothing says over forty like two spaces after a period.”

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\_\_\_ **Did I check my spelling?**

- Standardize on one version or one dictionary—online or print.

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\_\_\_ **Did I check my grammar?**

- Know the grammar rules, and don’t always rely on grammar checkers.
- **Verbs**
  - Keep verbs active as much as possible.
  - Verbs and subjects must match in number.
    - *Sam swims daily.*
    - *Sam and Dolly swim daily.*
- **Pronouns - I, he, she, it, we, they, all, everyone, everybody**
  - Pronouns stand in for nouns.
    - *Bobby loves baseball. He loves baseball.*
    - If you use a pronoun, it needs to be close to the identifying name.
      - *When George ran into the fence with his car, he did a lot of damage to it. - What’s it—the fence or the car?*
  - Pronouns must match in number and gender.
    - *Bobby and Steve love baseball.*
    - *They love baseball.*

- The English language has no gender-neutral pronouns
  - Some use plural *they/them/their* for singular nouns. I'm not a fan of that.
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\_\_\_ **Did I punctuate correctly and consistently?**

- With punctuation, consistency is key.
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\_\_\_ **Did I avoid overusing exclamation marks?**

- Exclamation marks don't make dull sentences exciting.
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\_\_\_ **Did I avoid the repeated use of any one piece of punctuation?**

- Too many dashes, ellipses, exclamation marks, etc., distract the reader.
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\_\_\_ **Did I use italics appropriately?**

- Use italics for emphasis, not quotation marks, bold, or underline.
    - *Now* is the time to act.
  - Use italics for titles of long works, e.g., books, albums, movies, television shows.
    - *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Abbey Road, Topgun, Law and Order*
  - Use quotation marks for titles of short works, e.g., stories, chapters, poems, songs, television episodes.
    - "Coming Undone" – "Hello, Hello, Henry" – "The Beat Goes On" – "Murder for Hire"
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\_\_\_ **Did I position all punctuation correctly inside/outside of the quotation marks?**

- Periods and commas *always* go inside quotation marks.
  - All other punctuation goes in or out, depending on the sentence.
    - *Did Joe ask Sue "to be my date for the prom"?*
    - *Did Joe ask Sue, "Do you want to go to the prom with me?"*
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\_\_\_ **Have I deleted all extraneous commas and added ones that help clarify?**

- Experts say 90% of writers use commas correctly only 75% of the time.
  - You need commas for clarity, to make sure the reader understands the sentence.
    - *The dog said my dad is scratching at the door and must go for a walk.*
    - *The dog, said my dad, is scratching at the door and must go for a walk.*
    - *Woman without her man is nothing. Woman, without her, man is nothing.*
  - Put a comma before the conjunction when connecting two independent clauses.
    - *We went to the beach, and we fished off the pier.*
  - Use the Oxford comma.
    - *Her bag contained a hairbrush, mirror, lipstick, and a Swiss army knife.*
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\_\_\_ **Did I avoid using bold, underline, or ALL CAPS in my piece?**

- Never, no way, ever. Don't do it.
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\_\_\_ **Did I vary my sentence lengths, i.e., short, medium, long?**

- Even the most interesting sentences can sound boring if all sentence lengths are the same.
    - Short sentence – up to 15 or so words
    - Medium sentence – from 16 to 25 words
    - Long sentence – more than 25 words
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\_\_\_ **Did I vary the structure of my sentences?**

- We all have favorite sentence structures, and we'll begin many sentences that way if we do not look for that in editing.
    - *As we drove along Highway 441, a deer leaped in front of the car.*
    - *The deer leaped in front of the car as we drove along Highway 441.*
    - *The deer, a buck with a large rack, leaped in front of the car.*
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\_\_\_ **Did I vary my sentence starts?**

- Don't begin most of your sentences in the same way, e.g., using the same word, subject/verb, opening phrase or clause followed by the main sentence, etc.
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\_\_\_ **Did I write out numbers consistently?**

- Use words for all numbers 1-100. *She is forty-one years old today.*
  - Use numbers 101 and above. *The class includes 205 freshmen.*
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\_\_\_ **Have I checked my story's style to ensure it is consistent with the appropriate guide?**

- Creative writers typically follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* guide, all 1,146 pages. Style is how your writing looks on the page and governs things such as when to use numerals or percent signs, how to treat abbreviations or special terms, grammar and usage, punctuation, etc.
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\_\_\_ **Did I capitalize correctly and consistently?**

- If you have a pronoun before the noun, do not capitalize the noun.
    - *my mother, Mother, Dad, my poppy*
  - Capitalize titles only when they precede a person's name.
    - *United States Senator Eleanor Smith*
    - *Eleanor Smith, United States senator*
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\_\_\_ **Did I verify the correct usage of all the words I often confuse?**

- Make sure you choose the correct word for the job.
    - *you're/your – there/their – it's/its – affect/effect – accept/except – capital/capitol – envelope/envelop – principal/principle – advice/advise*
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\_\_\_ **Have I examined my sentences for words I may have left out?**

- Text-to-speech apps like Read Aloud in Word, similar features in Google Docs and Apple Pages, or the paid Natural Readers app help with missing words.
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