

# Writing in the Rainforest

## Lesson Three

### Edit Your Story

#### 1. Properly format your stories

- make your stories easy to read and edit
  - write in a minimum 12-point font
  - if writing on a computer, double-space your text
  - use a font with serifs like Times New Roman, Georgia, Garamond, or my current favorite, Cambria
  - if writing by hand, write your story on every other line
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#### 2. Two basic types of editing/revising—content and line/copyediting

- **content editing**
    - big-picture editing
    - also called developmental editing, substantive editing, comprehensive editing
    - content editing asks:
      - did you tell the story you intended to write
      - did you get your point across
      - is the information presented in an interesting way
      - does the opening grab the reader
      - are there appropriate levels of conflict and tension, if warranted
      - are the people in your stories believable
      - is the closing satisfactory and fulfilling to the reader
      - is there any missing information or anything that is unclear
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- **line or copyediting**
  - close-up editing, detail-focused editing
  - more focused on the mechanics of good writing
  - items to check include:
    - tense changes

- grammar and punctuation issues
  - spelling
  - sentence structure
  - paragraphs
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3. **Top three ways you can improve your stories tenfold**

- improve your verbs
- choose specific rather than general words
- include sensual language

4. **Two main types of verbs—active and state of being**

- **action** – describes something happening
    - *Bill **ran** the race in record time.*
    - *ran* is an active verb, something Bill is doing
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- **state of being** – describes a condition or state
    - also called helping or auxiliary verbs (*is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been*)
    - *Bill **was** exhausted after the race.*
    - describes the state Bill was in after the race
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- problem arises when we write *unconsciously* and use state of being verbs in an attempt to show action
    - *Bill **was running** toward the finish line.*
    - *Bill ran **toward** the finish line.*
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**William Zinsser**, noted journalist, writer, professor, and author of numerous books, including *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. Quotes in this lesson taken from *On Writing Well*.

“Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentences forward and give it momentum. Active verbs push hard; passive verbs tug fitfully.” (page 112)

“Use active verbs unless there is no comfortable way to get around using a passive verb. The difference between an active-verb style and a passive-verb style—in clarity and vigor—is the difference between life and death for a writer.” (page 111)

“Many verbs also carry in their imagery or in their sound a suggestion of what they mean: *glitter, dazzle, twirl, beguile, scatter, swagger, poke, pamper, vex*. Probably no other language has such a vast supply of verbs so bright with color. Don’t choose one that is dull or merely serviceable. Make active verbs activate your sentences...” (page 112)

## 5. Specificity

- “Memoir is the art of inventing the truth. One secret of the art is detail. Any kind of details will work—a sound or a smell or a song title—as long as it played a shaping role in the portion of your life you have chosen to distill.” (pages 99-100)
  - being specific rather than general is the easiest way to improve your writing dramatically
  - have a goal to create pictures with words
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## 6. Use your senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell

- way for your reader to *experience*, not merely read, what you write
  - not difficult to do but we tend to overly rely on sight
  - we need to remind ourselves to think in terms of *all* of our senses
  - do a quick inventory of all the senses in choosing what to include in your story
  - better to drip out the sensory information rather than dump it
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