

Writer's Crutches

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Most writers have a bad habit or two when writing. After revising draft after draft, they can become blind to their overuse and reliance on an unnecessary sentence structure or word: a crutch, which weakens the readability that readers expect from a polished work.

One significant way to strengthen the readability and professionalism of your story is to find and replace the crutches in your manuscript.

A common crutch for some writers is to overuse "And" and "But" to start a sentence. Once in a while it's fine to start a sentence that way if it is followed by a subject and verb. By conducting a "Find" search, examine how many instances you use your crutch and see if there is a way to rewrite each sentence to achieve fresh and varied vocabulary and sentence structures.

Another example of a crutch is unnecessary and overuse of curse words. When many characters are all cursing and using the same "F" word, the characters become indistinguishable, monotonous and distracting to the story. It can also be confusing as to who is speaking.

A better approach is for each character to express themselves with greater individuality and speech pattern. Leave the "F" word for the most volatile character; the other characters should express themselves with a speech pattern that reflects their character. If a second character has to use an expletive, he could use idioms such as "The hell with that" or "Oh, my, my, my" or "Are you kidding me?" to contrast against the harshness of the "F" word.

In general, if you notice the use of a word more than a couple of times, it may be advantageous to input that word into the Find function to see just how many times it is used throughout the manuscript. If the number of times the word is used surprises you, then you have discovered a crutch. You can then replace each instance with an alternative word choice.

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