



# JUST Write for KIDS

E M M A W A L T O N H A M I L T O N

## Editing Checklist

### 1. Does your manuscript...

- Capture the essence of your story in 1000 words or less?
- Have a strong, multi-dimensional main character relevant to, and resonant for, kids?
- Tell a compelling story with a satisfying arc – beginning, middle, end?
- Contain a problem to be solved?
- Does the main character learn something or change by the end, and as a result of his/her own actions or initiative?

### 2. Measure the story against this sequence:

**Something happens** to someone

Which leads to their **wanting/needing something**, and/or making a goal

Which needs a **plan of action**

But forces try to stop the protagonist (**obstacles occur**)

Yet they **move forward** (because there is a lot at stake)

But then, there's a **crisis!** Things get as bad as they can

And they learn an important **lesson**

Which helps them **overcome** the final obstacle

Thus **satisfying the need** created by something in the past.

### 3. Make a dummy/storyboard:

- 32 pages, 16 double page spreads
- Include title page, dedication and acknowledgements
- First page on the right, last on the left
- Look for illustration ideas/actions to be illustrated
- Look at balance of text on each page, and balance between first, second and third acts
- Look for “page-turn moments” - what happens at the end of each page to make the reader want to turn to the next page?

**4. Read it aloud – often!**

**5. Read it to kids/your target audience.**

**6. Use Microsoft Word's 'Find & Replace' and 'Thesaurus' Tools:**

*EDIT → Find → Type in word you want to track down → Find Next → Change word to whatever you want → Find Next.*

Track down and replace...

- Cheap modifiers (very, just, etc.)
- Passive verbs / tentative or weak sentence construction (was going, been having, seemed, felt etc.)
- Words you use too often (wonderful, like, suddenly, little)
- Adverbs that prop up weak verbs.
- Change a character's name (Replace All)

**7. Consider hiring a freelance editor for an evaluation or a line edit.**

Conduct a search via...

The Editorial Freelancers Association ([http://www.The\\_EFA.org](http://www.The_EFA.org))

Elance (<http://www.elance.com>)

Guru (<http://www.guru.com>)

Media Bistro (<http://www.mediabistro.com>)

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (<http://www.scbwi.org>)

Google or other search-engine (<http://www.google.com>)

## Weak, Overused & Unnecessary Words

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Use your “Find and Replace” tool to root out these words, and evaluate alternatives:

**BACK:** Often used with other words that imply back or make it redundant.

- *She turned to look back at her mother.*
  - *She turned to look at her mother.* (“Turned” implies “back.”)
- or
- *He returned back to the end of the line.*
  - *He returned to the end of the line.* (“Returned” implies “back.”)

**BEGAN:** Often unnecessary – creates wordiness.

- *She picked up the toothbrush and began to brush her teeth.*
- *She picked up the toothbrush and brushed her teeth.*

**COULD:** Often unnecessary. Check if you can convey the information without it.

- *He could hear his stomach growling.*
- *He heard his stomach growling* (or, without the filtering, *His stomach growled.*)

**DOWN:** Often unnecessary if the verb implies down.

- *He sat down on the bed.*
- *He sat on the bed.*

**FELT – FEEL – FEELING:** Weak words – are you telling rather than showing? Can you convey the feeling through the dialogue or behavior?

- *Thomas felt sad. He knew he had lost the contest.*
- *Thomas’s shoulders drooped. He had lost the contest.*

**JUST:** An overused modifier. Try: *merely, only, simply, purely, barely.*

**KIND OF, SORT OF:** Wishy-washy. Either he was or he wasn’t.

**LIKE:** Overused. When using similes and metaphors, there may be a juicier verb you can find. Or perhaps you can get away without it.

- *Leaves fell to the ground like snowflakes.*
  - *Leaves fluttered to the ground.*
- or
- *He was like a sumo-wrestler in size and shape.*
  - *He was a sumo-wrestler in size and shape.*

**-LY:** Evaluate adverb use. Are you using it to prop up a weak verb?

- *She walked quietly across the hall.*
- *She tiptoed across the hall.*

**OUT:** Often unnecessary, if the verb implies out.

## Bonus 1 – Editing Checklist

- *They lay out on the grass.*
- *They lay on the grass.*

**REALLY:** Overused, often to prop up a weak adjective.

- *He was really hungry.*
- *He was starving.*

**SEEMED:** Weak/passive, and often used to tell rather than show. Use only when you want to suggest doubt.

- *Her voice seemed to shake.*
- *Her voice shook.*

**SOMEHOW:** Wishy-washy, as with kind of and sort of, and often unnecessary or redundant. Only use it if your character genuinely has no idea how. (*Somehow, she would find a way!*)

**SOMETHING:** Same as somehow. Vague, often unnecessary – and suggests you couldn't come up with a better word. Only use it to create suspense. (*Something stirred in the bushes.*)

- *Her face was shaped something like a melon.*
- *Her face was shaped like a melon* (or better yet, *Her face was melon-shaped.*)

**STARTED:** Same as began. Usually unnecessary.

- *He sat down and started eating his cereal.*
- *He sat and ate his cereal.* (Notice we lost the 'down' too!)

**SUDDENLY:** Overused, and often unnecessary. Usually the action implies it. Or find a juicier verb and you won't need it.

- *Suddenly, the phone rang.*
- *The phone rang.* Or, *The phone shattered the silence.*

**THAT:** Overused – sometimes necessary, often not. Try the sentence without it.

- *He thought that she was kidding.*
- *He thought she was kidding.*

**THERE IS, THERE ARE, THERE WERE:** Passive. Check all "there's" especially those followed by "to be" verbs. Find better verbs!

- *There were puffy clouds in the sky.*
- *Puffy clouds dotted the sky.*

**THING:** Overused and vague.

- *The thing that bothered him was the amount of time it took.*
- *What bothered him was how much time it took.* Or, *He was bothered by how much time it took.*

**TO BE:** Often unnecessary, and contributes to wordiness.

## Bonus 1 – Editing Checklist

- *She wanted to be hugged.*
- *She wanted a hug.*

**UP:** Often unnecessary, if the verb implies “up”.

- *He rose up in indignation.*
- *He rose in indignation.*

**VERY:** An overused modifier, similar to “really” or “just”. Find a stronger adjective, or omit it.

- *It was a very long time before they saw each other again.*
- *It was a long time before they saw each other again.* (or, better yet, *It was a long time before they were reunited.*)