

# REVISING YOUR WORK

All through this guide I've been saying, "Don't worry about how your writing sounds. You can fix it later." Later has arrived. You've written your first draft, and now it's time to revise your work.

I'll tell you a secret: I don't like to revise. I complain about it all the time, but I do it. I have to. I used to think of revising as an extra step—something you do after you write a piece. Now I realize I was wrong. Revising is part of the writing process. It's as important as—maybe even more important than—all the other steps we've talked about so far.

**The best and easiest way to do a good revision is to have someone besides yourself read your first draft and give you comments.** I have editors to do that. You can show or read your piece to a friend, or your parents, or your teacher. Listen to what your reader says. Listen to the questions that come up. Ask questions of your own.

**Is the story clear?** Did the reader laugh at the funny parts? Did he or she picture the setting? Is the main character likable? Other people are always better judges of your writing than you are. You know too much about the story to be a judge.

**But what do you do if there is no one around to help?** You can let me help you. When it's time to revise, first do the R.L. Stine markup (see page 7 of this guide). Be sure to write down all the questions that should be answered and mark up all the parts that need more specific details.

**Now, before you write your final draft, as Emeril says, "Let's kick it up a notch."** This time we're going to revise your piece with the help of my Super Revision Checklist. I promise if you go over this checklist and follow these tips, your story will be stronger and clearer.

## R.L. STINE'S SUPER REVISION CHECKLIST

**1. Are my verbs strong ones?** What do I mean? Verbs are action words. They tell the reader what the characters are doing. Strong verbs give the reader a clear picture. They are specific. They have punch. "I burst into the house" tells you that something important and urgent is going on. "I went into the house" doesn't give the reader a picture. It's a weak verb.

**TIP:** When you revise, circle all the action words in your story. Ask yourself: Is this a strong word, or should I replace it with a more active verb?

**2. Is my writing up close and personal?** Your story will be much more interesting to your readers if they can put themselves in your main character's shoes. For example, I want my books to be scary. To do that, I have to make you feel that the main character is scared. The more the readers can feel the character's fear, the scarier the story will be.

Compare these two sentences.

- It was raining as Amy walked home.
- Amy felt the cold raindrops running down her face as she stared at the long, dark road ahead of her.

Both sentences give you the same information (it's raining). But sentence number two lets you see and feel the rain through the character's eyes.

**TIP:** Look at the descriptions in your story. Step into your character's shoes. Then ask: What do I see and feel?

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## (CONTINUED)

### R.L. STINE'S SUPER REVISION CHECKLIST (CONTINUED)

**3. Does my writing have enough variety?** Try not to use the same word two or three times in the same paragraph. Use a dictionary or thesaurus to find other words. But never use a word unless you are sure of the meaning and how to use it.

Don't start all of your sentences the same way. It's boring to read a paragraph like:

I got undressed. I pulled on my pajamas. I got into bed. I went to sleep.

Doesn't this sound better?

I got undressed and pulled on my pajamas. Then I tucked myself into bed. Before I knew it, I was fast asleep.

**4. Are my paragraphs too long?** Start a new paragraph when you introduce a new idea or describe a new action. Always start a new paragraph when a new character speaks. These little breaks make your story easier to follow.

**5. Did I leave anything hanging?** It's important to finish what you start in a story. You can't introduce a character, then forget to mention him again. If he goes away, the reader wants to know why.

All writers have problems with loose ends. I get mail from kids who find them in my books.

**TIP:** You usually have to read a story two or three times to find these problems.

**6. Don't tell. Show.** Which of these paragraphs is more interesting?

#### Paragraph #1

I swept the beam of light around the basement. I could see a large, low-ceilinged room, cluttered with cartons, old wardrobes, a battered dresser and other furniture, a stack of folding chairs, cans and jars, old newspapers piled nearly to the ceiling . . . Then . . . then . . . a human figure! A figure standing stiffly in an empty square of bare floor. He had his back to me. He wore a dark jacket, collar raised, over black pants. At first I thought it was a mannequin or clothing dummy. But then he moved. Captured in the light, he turned slowly. A boy with long, black hair. He raised a bony hand and pointed at me with a slender finger. The flashlight started to slip from my hand. I grasped the flashlight tightly. "Who—who are you?" I choked out.

#### Paragraph #2

When I went downstairs, it looked creepy. Then I saw a boy. He pointed at me. I didn't know who he was.

The first one is more interesting because it shows the reader what happened. The second one just tells it. The first is like a movie you see in your head. The second is just a summary.

**TIP:** Think about your writing as a group of scenes. The scenes are all part of a movie you want your readers to see.

Once you've revised your story, use a dictionary or spell check to correct any spelling mistakes. Now comes the best part. Let people read it.