Be Wise – Revise!

1. **Spot long sentences.** Long sentences can drag down your writing and led to reader confusion. Break them up into smaller vivid sentences.
2. **Bash out ‘bookisms’.** Tags like “he growled, he sighed, he declared, he sneered, he hissed,” can make your writing sound amateurish. Make your dialog say what you want to say, and most of the time, stick to “he said.”
3. **Eliminate adverbs.** Adverbs and adjectives are like salt: great in small amounts, but terrible large amounts. Go through and see which ones are really necessary. If they don’t add something important, leave them out. You can also replace a weak verb + adverb with a stronger verb.
4. **Perfect punctuation.** Make sure all of your commas are where they need to be, break up run-on sentences, and make sure emphasis isn’t used too much. (Especially ! and ...)
5. **Figure out the flow.** Does the writing have a natural ebb and flow? Is there a part where if this was a movie, you would go out and get popcorn? Identify those spots and jazz them up.
6. **Wrangle with the word choice.** Sometimes just the right word can make or break the effect you are trying to create. One of the biggest considerations is audience. For example, do not use contractions in a formal paper, and don’t use elaborate words in a story meant for children.
7. **Make the dialog dance.** Written dialog is never going to exactly mimic real speech. When we talk, it’s often in incomplete sentences and with a lot of fillers “Uh, ah, you know, well, so…” That being said, your dialog should still flow. If in doubt, read it aloud and find the spots where you stumble and work on those. Also consider pacing. You should more “tags” or actions when the dialog is supposed to go more slowly and fewer when it is a tense exchange.
8. **Vanquish bad verbs.** Make sure that you stick to one tense unless you have a pressing reason to do so. Passive voice almost always sounds worse than active voice, and is easy to fix. Generally, vivid verbs that give the most exact picture of the what the subject is doing make your writing more interesting. Replace plain verbs like “ran” with more interesting ones like “sprinted, dashed, hurtled.” (Remember, the same is not usually true with “said”)

Examples

1. He dashed into the castle, sword in hand and saw at once that the room was filled with beasts of every description from werewolves, to vampires, to three-headed dreadful poison-spitting dragons, and he started hacking away immediately, intent on winning the princess’s heart and through her the adoration of the entire kingdom, and perhaps some other kingdoms that might hear for his glorious deeds through the grapevine of the local taverns, ale houses and other establishments which propagate the spreading of news and gossip.
2. “You shall not slay me,” sneered the green dragon. “Ha, foolish dragon,” trumpeted the knight, “you shall taste my blade!”
3. Dancing jauntily and freely across the room, the knight mightily swung his gleaming, shining sword and repeatedly hit the dragon three times across its gross, scaly back.
4. “Alas…I…am…no…more!!!!” groaned the dragon. “What a horrible fate hath befallen me!!!”
5. Then the knight glanced into the magic mirror hanging on the wall and admired just how shiny his armor was and how nicely his tan was coming along. It made him think of the time last winter, when he had single-handedly saved a maiden from the clutches of the abominable snowman’s brother.
6. “Allow me to elucidate on the perplexities and vicissitudes of your current ponderous predicament,” said the knight. “I’m gonna kill you and chuck you into the moat.”
7. “Well, uh, that’s kinda dumb,” said the dragon. “I really, uh, you know, don’t wanna die."
8. So pity was had by the knight for the dragon. A hug was given by the knight, to the dragon, who then walked over to the dungeon and the door was unlocked by him. “I’m sorry,” said the prisoner, “but your princess is in another castle.”