Finding Space:

Line-by-Line Editing Tips for Wordiness

Laurel Wanrow

LAURELWANROW.COM

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Upcoming Author Event... My first!

0

7 HOURS by Laurel Wanrow in Conferences, NA novels, New Adult Novels, Science Fiction Romance,

RAVENCON
WILLIAMSBURG, VA • APRIL 29–MAY 1, 2016

I'll be a guest author among a hundred other fantasy authors, artist, filkers, costumers, scientists, podcasters, editors, publishers at RavenCon 2016, a weekend celebrating the genres of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror. It'll be my first time at the con, and since they strive to book new and interesting guests every year, they have given me a go!

The really featured authors are Sharon Lee and Steve Miller!

Friday, April 29th at 4 p.m. I'll be doing a reading from *The Unraveling*, during which I'll include a smattering of my series' historical facts and fictions and a historic word quiz...and a paperback giveaway!

From 9-11 a.m. on Saturday, April 30, I'm conducting a self-editing workshop: Finding Space: Line-by-Line Editing Tips for Wordiness.

Later Saturday, at 3 p.m., I'm running an all ages "Make a Pouch for your Costume."

~ ~ ~

If you're in the area, come for the day, or the weekend! The RavenCon 2016 site has all the details and the schedule should be up soon!

The Con of Opportunity

I write fantasy romance for YA, NA and adults. The first 2 books in my steampunk series are out! My inspiration boards are on Pinterest or leap over for a look at my nature blog The Squirrel Nutwork.

BUY THE UNRAVELING

BUY THE TWISTING

About Laurel Wanrow

- Lifelong naturalist
- Lifelong fantasy reader
- Ten years as a writer
- Writing fantasy, science fiction and historical mash-ups, mainly for young adults and new adult, and the crossover audiences
- Member of Romance Writers of America
- Indie-publishing

A steampunk fantasy romance for ages new adult and older.

A proper Victorian artist must learn to use her bloodline's wild magic to help the shapeshifter she loves, or risk becoming what she fears most: another cog in a magnate's plan to control agriculture.

The story continues through three volumes with spin-off stories in the future. The 3rd volume—*The Binding*—releases in June 2016.

Finding Space:

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Why?

- Simplifying saves an editor time.
- Shows the writer needs no handholding through grammar.
- Shorter word count means a self-published book costs less to produce.
- Fewer words brings more white space to the page.
- Tightens and improves your writing. It's improved with using not only fewer, but only necessary words.

“So the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads.”

— Dr. Seuss

This complete power point is available on my website. Please don’t scramble to take notes.

When to edit?

- First draft ?
- No! Write your heart out. Ignore your inner critic. Get the words on the page.
- Tweaks are for revisions.
- First review - Mark up, looking for ways you said it best, rather than spending time on a poor section.
- Next version - Look for flow, redundancies, extra words, missing words, logical sense, grammatical sense, places for emphasis.

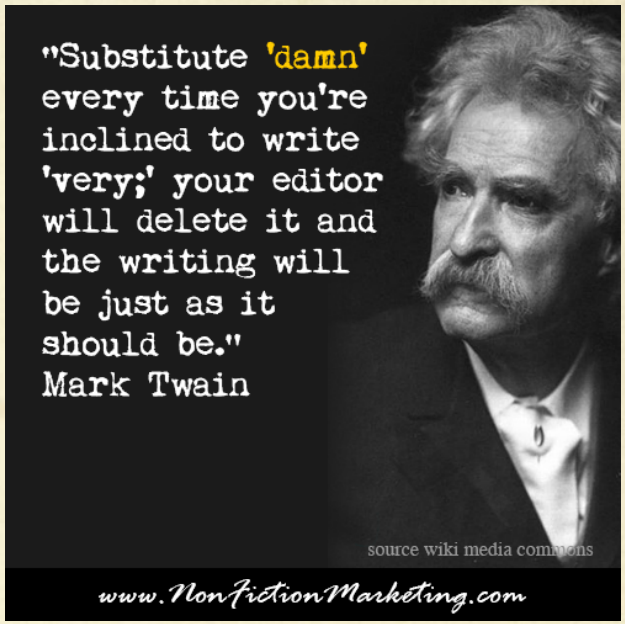
"The best advice on writing was given to me by my first editor, Michael Korda, of Simon and Schuster, while writing my first book. 'Finish your first draft and then we'll talk,' he said. It took me a long time to realize how good the advice was. Even if you write it wrong, write and finish your first draft. Only then, when you have a flawed whole, do you know what you have to fix." - **Dominick Dunne**

redundancies

- Assumed actions
- standing up, sitting down, circling around, reached his hand, sniffed with his nose, blinked her eyes, waved his hand, nodded his head
- Redundant pairs
- full stop, complete change, past history, basic fundamentals, final destination, free gift, anticipate in advance, past memories, various differences, each individual, true facts, future plans, unexpected surprise
- Redundant categories
- of a bright color, of cheap quality, often times, honest in character, at an early time
- More at: Purdue's Online Writing Lab https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/02/

qualifiers

- Weak ways to approach an adjective. Indicate a degree of something when added, but a another word may be stronger.



- The room was very big.
- The room was huge.
- The music was really loud.
- The music was deafening.
- Common ones: nearly, almost, just, seem/seems/seemed, appeared, somewhat,
- Intensifiers: mostly, mainly, clearly, basically, largely, chiefly, more, very, even, really, some, very
- Harder to see: type of, kind of, sort of, particular, slightly

extra actions with verbs

- Over-complicate the verb:
- Tried, began, started, made, came

- She began to draw.
- She drew.

- He made the choice to stay.
- He chose to stay.

- Another man came up and snatched a hold of her arm.
- Another man grabbed her arm.

had and got

vague, replace with stronger verbs

- The wall had a bulge halfway up.
- The wall bulged halfway up.

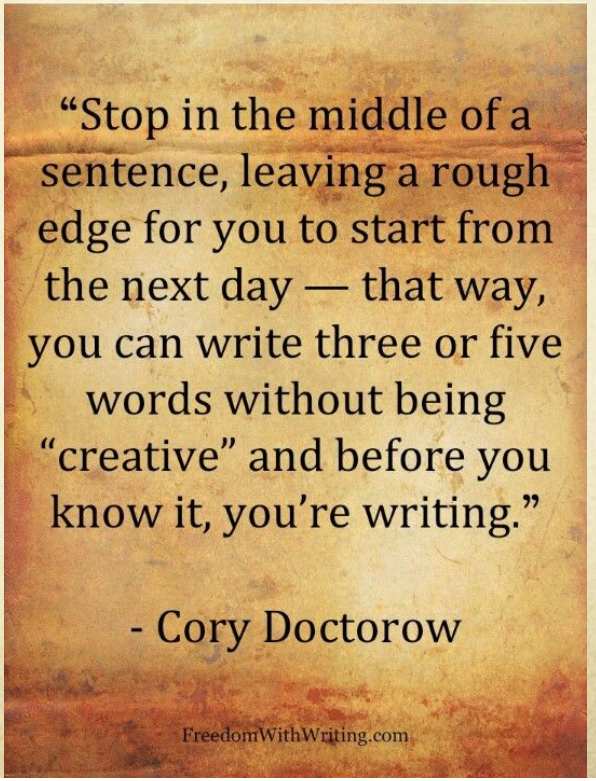
- She got to her feet.
- She rose ~~to her feet~~.

- She got the letter.
- She received the letter.
- The letter arrived.

sentence starters

Extra? Sometimes you need them, but review each case!

- as, but, and, then, with
- For example, a chapter mate removed 3k “then”s from a 350p mss



your favorite?

Everyone overuses certain words or phrases. Learn yours and search.

Mine is “all.”

Their exchange showed all the signs that neither would back down.
Their exchange showed signs neither would back down.

Use a word cloud to find your most-used words.

that

Take another look at that last example:

- Their exchange showed all the signs that neither would back down.
- Their exchange showed signs neither would back down.

- Jac planned to dump the water that was on the wagon.
- Jac planned to dump the water on the wagon.

- She turned to the boy who sat beside her.
- She turned to the boy ~~sitting~~ beside her.

- An automatic search and delete may end badly.
- If you can read the sentence without a "that," you don't need it.

- If the sentence needs something there, it's a restrictive clause and needs a 'comma' and a 'which' and another 'comma' at the end of the clause. (Some people solve this with emdashes or parentheses.)

- Which makes this advice bad:

- ~~Go on a "which hunt." Go through and take out the word "which" and replace it with "that." Then go through and take out the "thats."~~

- Note: Spelling and Grammar tools do not always give correct versions.

- “The party that I attended Friday.” = “The party which I attended Friday.” = “The party I attended Friday.” = all OK (though the “which” version is not ideal)

- However, you can’t use “that” for a restrictive clause:

- “The party, which was invitation-only, was a smashing success.” ≠ “The party, that was invitation only, was a smashing success.”

- The latter is grammatically incorrect, and if you then dropped the “that,” it would be unreadable: “The party, was invitation only, was a smashing success.”

- You may be able to remove the clause entirely!

clichés

So familiar, they roll out automatically, but take away from a unique voice.

- He took a long hard look at the book.
- He scrutinized the book.

- The house had seen better days.
- The house was shabby.

- Many are common sentence starters. Do they add anything?
- Due to the fact, ...
- Make no mistake, ...
- At this point in time, ...

- Exception!
- Clichés are acceptable in dialogue.
- May fit or flush out a characterization.

dialogue tags

- said & asked
- Shortest and most invisible.
- Sparingly use others (shouted, mumbled, spat)
- Sometimes clear from punctuation or italicizing.

- Hissed? Some prefer only if the dialogue words contain "s."
- Whispered? Usually accepted, but not necessarily a substitute for "said quietly."

- Speaking of quietly…

adverbs!

"The road to hell is paved with adverbs."

— Stephen King, On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft

- The "ly" words that modify verbs.
- People attack their use, but are they really bad? Consider what *you* need.

"Overuse at best is needless clutter; at worst, it creates the impression that the characters are overacting, emoting like silent film stars. Still, an adverb can be exactly what a sentence needs. They can add important intonation to dialogue, or subtly convey information."
— Howard Mittelmark, How Not to Write a Novel: 200 Classic Mistakes and How to Avoid Them—A Misstep-by-Misstep Guide.

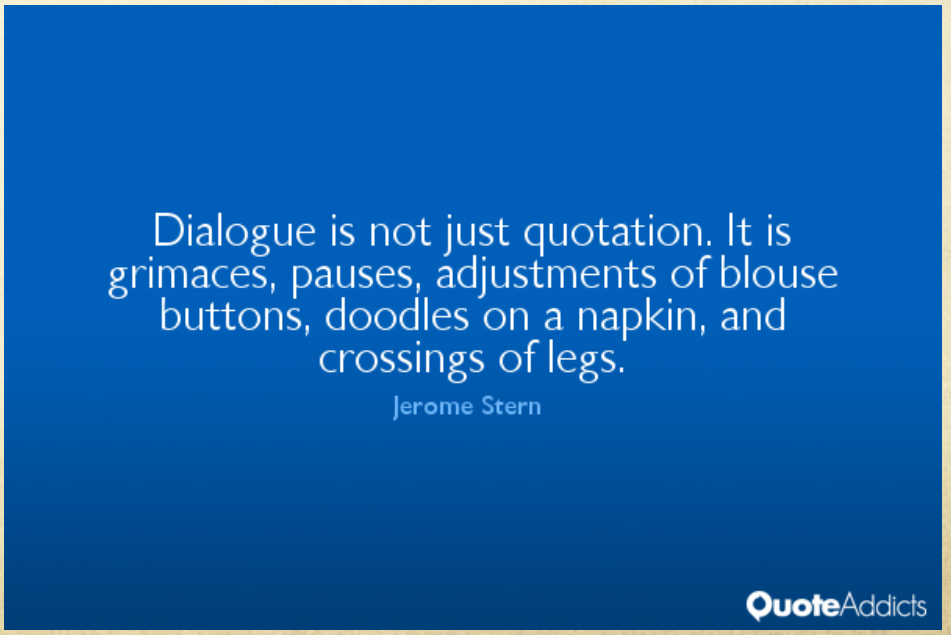
Do you need a dialogue tag at all?

Is the speaker clear from context?

If only two characters, can generally tag the first appearance, and as a rule of thumb continue for 4 lines.

The reader should be able to tell who is speaking by the context of the conversation, voice of the characters, opinion, and reactions.

What substitutes might you use?



action tags

He slammed down his good foot. Rivley lunged forward to catch him, but Daeryn tottered aside. “Damn!”

“Still bad then.” Rivley poked him and pointed to the wing chair. “Have a seat.”

“No, it’s just stiff. I can make it back.”

“It’s me, Dae. Shut up and sit.”

“Back off. I’d be fine if you weren’t standing on my sheet. It’s—”

Tap, tap, tap.

He froze. Not Miriam. Please. She’d skin him alive.

“Ha.” Grinning broadly, Rivley called, “Come in.”

Daeryn grabbed his sheet and dropped into the wing chair just as the door opened.

- Don’t cut everything!
- Take note of the rhythm of the dialogue with either or *both* dialogue and action tags. Read it aloud. Insert “beats” within the spoken lines to break up the rhythm of the sentence.
- For example:

"No one knows. That's what 'vanished' means." She paused. "Well, there is one man who says he knows about it, but everyone says he lives in California," she said, "and is mad. I was thinking of going to see him because it seems the only lead I've got on what happened to me."

— *So Long and Thanks for All the Fish*, by Douglas Adams

tagging caveats!

Some actions leave your character dancing: he nodded, he raised his eyebrows, he turned, he sat.

- Learn which you overuse. Keep a list. Use search and make substitutes until you train yourself.
- Better to do something (Build a fire, fix food) and have all the actions relate to the activity.
- “He never went home to Rockbridge.” Mary Clare gathered the tubular leaves and sniped into them.

  “Not once in three years.”

  “Ever mention—”“No.” She grabbed a larger handful and tried to cut the entire thickness at once.

identifiers

An alternative to dialogue tags. Direct address, though use with caution. People don't use given names much naturally in dialogue. However, many give voice to a character.

- Madam, Sir, Doctor, etc.
- A parent calling the children by name.
- An endearment: duck, Guv, luv, my dear, lad
- She took Annmar's proffered hand in her strong ones, her gaze as warm and welcoming. "All right, duck?"

  Duck. Annmar swallowed. She hadn't heard the friendly endearment used by Peak District folks since Mother had died.
- "Good morning. Will it be tea or coffee, duck?"

Some dialogue techniques may add or subtract words

- Use a particular swear word or phrase for a specific character
- Land's sake, D'arvit (Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl)*

- Speak in blunt sentences. (the gruff patriarch)
- What are you doing? (vs. What do you think you are doing?)

- Drop the subject.
- "Don't know what you mean."

filter words

Sometimes called distancing words.

- He thought, looked, saw, watched, knew, noticed, recognized, felt, smelled, tasted, wished
- An issue writing in 3rd person.
- Instead, put the reader in the character's head

- She watched the healer come through the door.
- The healer strode in.

- She realized she was hungry.
- Her stomach growled.

- Annmar wanted to ask if all happened as she was imagining, with people as animals fighting off other vicious animals.
- Had it happened as she was imagining, with people as animals fighting off other vicious animals?

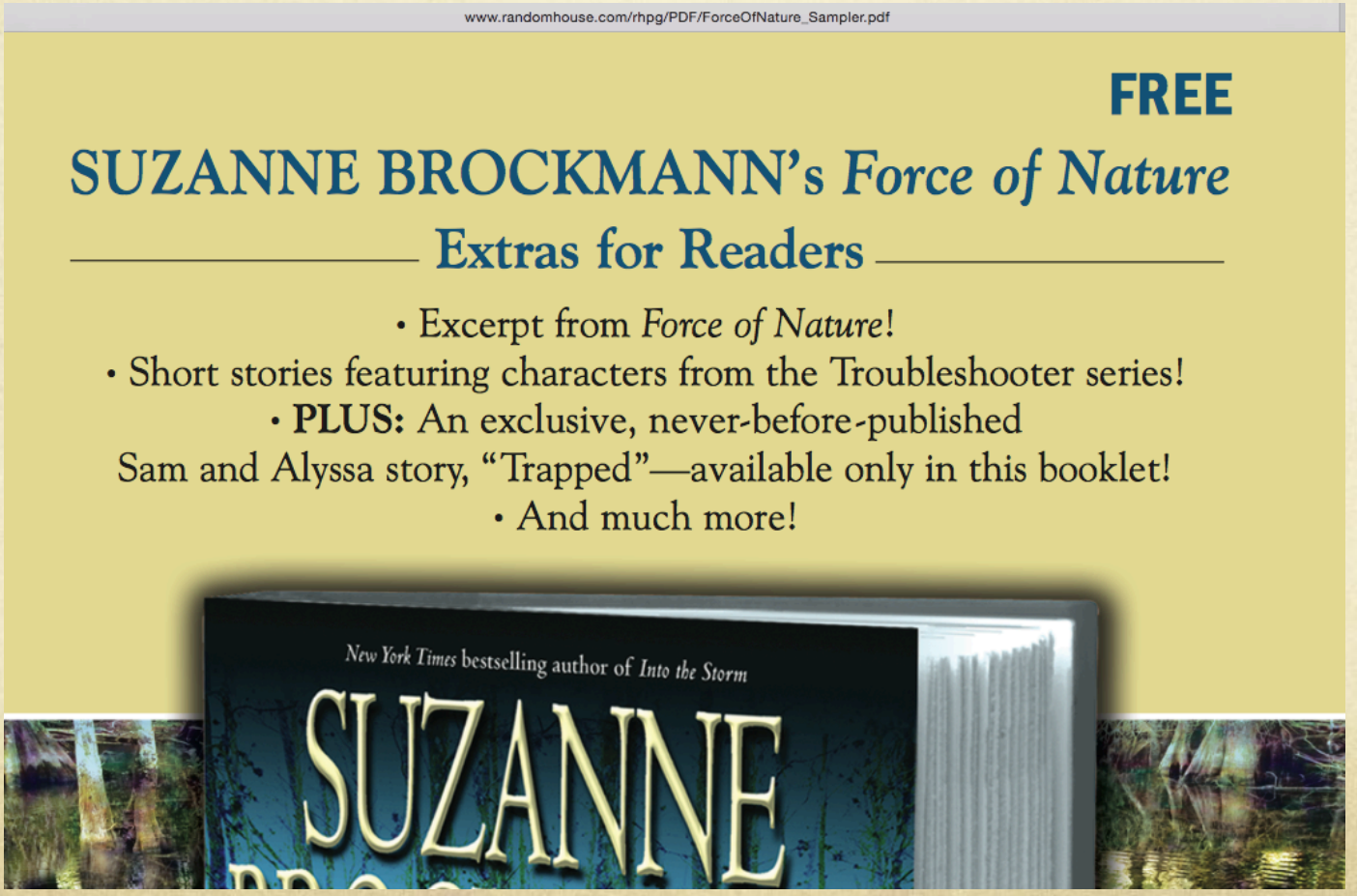
- “Feel” is the trickiest to eliminate.

- She could feel the freshness of it, the tight coils of the spare pattern ready to spring forth.
- Freshness emanated from it, the tight coils of the spare pattern ready to spring forth.

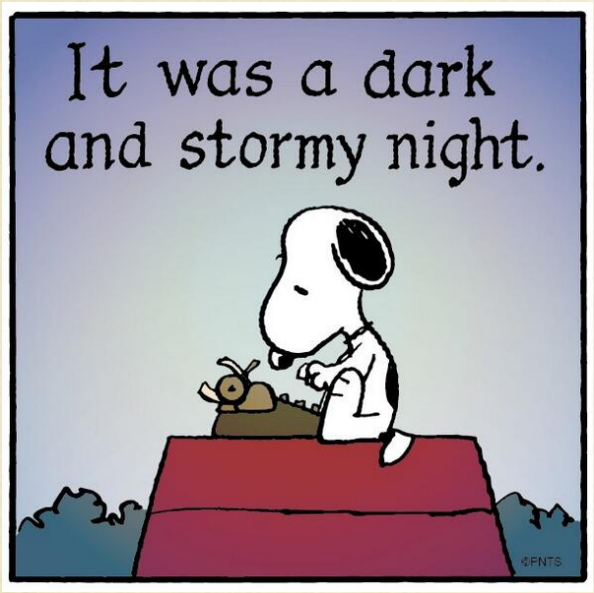
- Characters can be degraded, made weaker and uncertain through use of filter words.

Caveat!

- The POV character cannot "notice" something he doesn't see: He didn't notice Mark grabbing a cookie.
- If the POV character blacks out…the scene is over until the character comes to his senses. (No lines like: Charlie tried to revive her.)



it was & there was



"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents — except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

— *Paul Clifford*, by Edward George Bulwer-Lytton (1830)

- It was his choice to stay.
- He made the choice to stay.
- He chose to stay.
- He decided to stay.

- There was the sound of a key in a lock, then a latch lifting, and the door opened.
- A key scraped in the lock, then a latch lifted, and the door opened.

- But there were precious few of them in the pattern, just four.
- Precious few of them wiggled in the pattern, just four.

passive vs. active construction

Typically referred to as avoiding the use of am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been

- Caveat!
- Appearance of “was” is not always passive voice:
- Mr. Shearing was a powerful talker.
- Even her lifelong dream was not worth losing her dignity.

- Often misunderstood! There **will** be instances when you need was.
- The passive voice is when the object is made into the subject and the subject is shunted into a prepositional phrase.

passive vs. active examples:

- PASSIVE:

  Her hair (object) **was being brushed** (passive-voice verb, NOT "to be" verb) **by** (preposition) **the maid** (actor/subject as object of the preposition)

- ACTIVE:

  The maid (subject) **brushed/was brushing/had brushed/had been brushing** (all ACTIVE verbs in different moods/tenses) **her hair** (object).

- **Her hair was being brushed by the maid.**

  The maid brushed her hair.

The jewel was wanted by every wizard in the land.
Every wizard in the land wanted the jewel.

The fire was put out after dinner by Marc.
Marc put out the fire ~~after dinner~~.

to be

Not the same as the use of “be” as a form of the verb.

- He was considered to be the greatest swordsman in England.
- His countrymen considered him their greatest swordsman.

- Sue finds it hard to be on time.
- Sue often runs late.

as

A conjunction like: but, and, for, yet, or, nor, so

- Overuse occurs when trying to put more than one action or event in a sentence.
- The bell rang as she took the pot from the fire and carried it to the bench.
- The bell rang. She carried the pot from the fire to the bench.

- She thrust the sword into the fire as she spoke. “Hurry up!”
- She thrust the sword into the fire. “Hurry up!”

- Caveat! As has specific uses, so don’t delete them all:
- These cuts don’t trouble me as much as running on that tendon.
- Come as you are.
- Is your AS bad? (Blog post by Alex Sheridan on Critiquecircle.com)

negative construction

- She wasn't satisfied with the decision.
- The decision annoyed her.

- Except for Mary, everyone in the family had a good time.
- Everyone in the family but Mary had a good time.

- It is not unlikely he'd run if he had the chance.
- The battle scared him.

- Out of the whole group, only Tom was unhappy with the dinner.
- Everyone but Tom was happy with dinner.

laundry lists

Reconsider long descriptions of people or places.

Better to work in traits a few at a time or as the reader needs them.

Show as part of characterization.

Don’t spend unnecessary detail on secondary characters. Terry Pratchet a master.

transitions

- Don't need to be detail-laden and unwieldy.

- Patricia McKillip's *The Riddle-Master of Hed* showcases many examples.
- They rode out of the city and onto the plain.

- Get out early, enter late.

- On the flip side, don't be Dan Brown. You're not writing a movie. Not every chapter or scene needs to end on a cliffhanger. It's okay to END a scene.

consider the tone before cutting

- Longer sentences slow the pace, inviting the reader to linger with the characters while they mull story problems.
- For a few seconds, the hidden half sovereigns slipped over each other between her fingers, clinking faintly like the call of carefree sparrows.
- Shorter sentences physically jump the reader along with the action and increase reading pace.
- Moments or perhaps minutes later, her name—*Annmar*!—echoed as if from a distance.
- *Annmar*!—her name echoed as if from a distance.
- Chell vaulted from its web, hitting me square in the face so I staggered back.
- Chell vaulted from its web, hitting me square in the face. I staggered back.

When to apply edits?

- Tweaks are for revisions. Give the manuscript a break, a week to a month, if you can. You want fresh eyes.

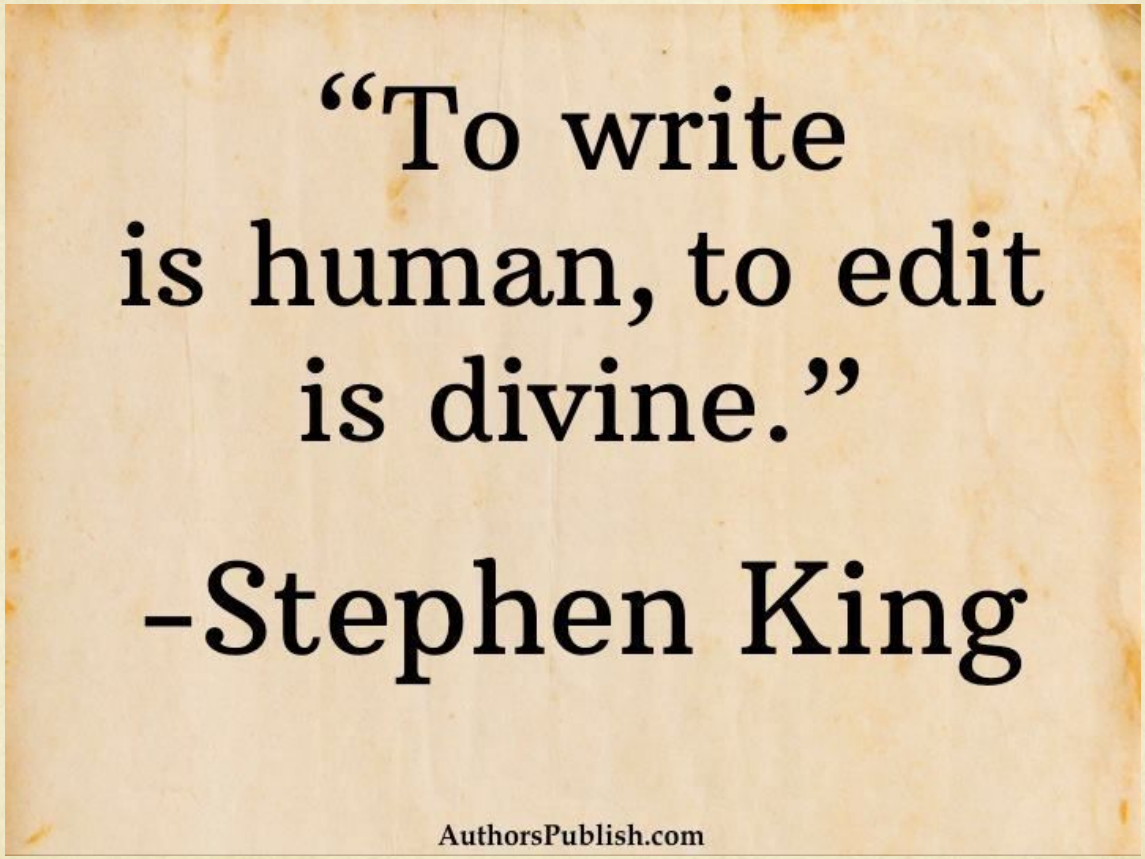
- First review: Mark up, looking for ways you said it best, rather than spending time on a poor version.

- Next version: Look for flow, redundancies, extra words, missing words, logical sense, grammatical sense, places for emphasis.

  Several passes may be necessary.

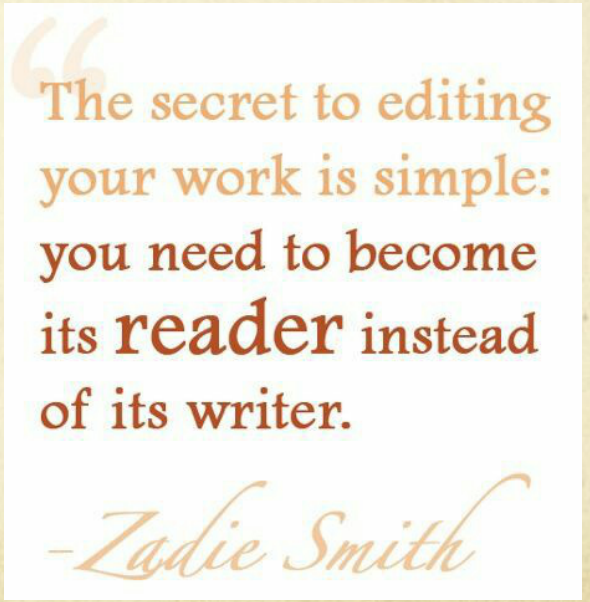
- Final: Change the look: single space to double, different font, different color, read it aloud slowly, have a program read it aloud to you.

- Self-editing steps under 'tidbits' here: http://www.annieedits.com/tidbits.html


“To write
is human, to edit
is divine.”
-Stephen King
AuthorsPublish.com

How to make this second nature?

- Critique others!
- Nothing makes you see your own wordiness like reading it in other manuscripts.
- Critiquecircle.com



Critique Circle
3
Nutshell
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Critique Circle
Reminders
You can select the most useful crit you received in the 13 Apr - 20 Apr period (do not ask again)
✓ (9 Apr) Draconis Asinum by Ek89027 is up for review
✓ (6 Apr) True Color of Betrayal, c1 by Jkang is up for review
✓ (4 Apr) A critique by Xc0000005 of the story True Colors of Betrayal (version 3) is available
✓ (4 Apr) A critique by Xc0000005 of the story True Colors of Betrayal (version 3) is available
✓ (4 Apr) A critique by Tonin of the story True Colors of Betrayal (version 3) is available
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✓ (30 Mar) True Color of Betrayal by Jkang is up for review
✓ (28 Mar) Draconis Asinum by Ek89027 is up for review
more buddy events... · clear buddy events
You need to grade critiques
What are you reading? (do not ask again)
You have 1 critiques in the works
Bookmarked Stories
Chapter 2 - Spaceysund
Hot discussions
Thread
Forum
Continue college or drop it to focus ...
On writing
word association (7)
The Procrastination Lounge
Two words, keep one, change one (26)
The Procrastination Lounge
as coldly as... (what?)
On writing
Do you keep track of your tit for tat...
About the Critique Circle
more hot discussions
Poll
Do you subscribe to Kindle Unlimited?
Yes, and I find enough books in it to make the monthly fee worthwhile.
I used to, but cancelled because it was too hard to find material I wanted to read.
I signed up for the free trial, but didn't renew because I wasn't impressed with the selection.
No. It's unavailable where I live / I prefer to buy books outright / I find the monthly fee too expensive
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Ghost Tree Chapter One - Chuckster

Mirror Twins Chapter 2 Scenes 4-5 - Jadedsidhe

~~Love Be A Lady Pt. 4~~ - Mooderino

The Trapdoor Adventures - Chapter 3-6 - Rhodaj

View all

News

14 Sep 2015 at 07:15

Attention bloggers!

CC has among its members quite a few wonderful bloggers and we wanted to ask you if you might perhaps write a post the CC Blog? We are looking for blog posts that deal with the life of a writer, tips and pitfalls; whatever comes to mind and has to do with writing and ... (more)

View All

Tip of the day

Rearranging the frontpage

You can drag the boxes around by grabbing them by the icon in the top left corner and moving them to a new location. You can also close individual boxes by clicking on the icon.

View all · Bookmark

Quote of the day

The role of a writer is not to say what we all can say, but what we are unable to say.

Grammar

21. Apr 2016 - 28. Apr 2016

Capitals

• Titles preceding names, but not title that follow names

examples:

She worked as the assistant to Mayor Hanolovi. (more)

On-line writing lab

View older rules · Bookmark

Word Of The Day

cudgel

- A short heavy stick used as a weapon; a club.

View all · Bookmark

Manuscript Progress

Exercise

19. Apr 2016 - 3. May 2016

Vanished

Your character falls asleep at home after a normal day of school/work. When he/she wakes they discover everyone in the entire town has va... (more)

- Grade solutions of Mind Reader (4 Apr - 19 Apr)
- View best solution of Tommy, Mommy and Daddy (19 Mar - 3 Apr)
- View older exercises

Writing Numbers

Although usage varies, most people spell out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words and use figures for other numbers:

Words
over two pounds
six million dollars
after thirty-one years
eighty-three people

Figures
after 126 days
only $31.50
6,381 bushels
4.78 liters

Punctuating Dialogue

A **dialogue tag** is a phrase that indicates who is speaking.
He said
She exclaimed
The teacher asked
They yelled
When these phrases are attached to sentences of dialogue, they must be punctuated specifically, according to where the dialogue tag falls.

Dialogue followed by a dialogue tag:
"I love to eat at Hamburger Heaven," she said.
Put a comma inside the quotation marks and a period at the end of the dialogue tag.

Dialogue tag followed by a line of dialogue:
I replied, "Hamburger Heaven is gross."

CritiqueCircle.com

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- *Anaïs Nin*

Bookmark

Care to crit?

- Grade solutions of Mind Reader (4 Apr - 19 Apr)
- View best solution of Tommy, Mommy and Daddy (19 Mar - 3 Apr)
- View older exercises

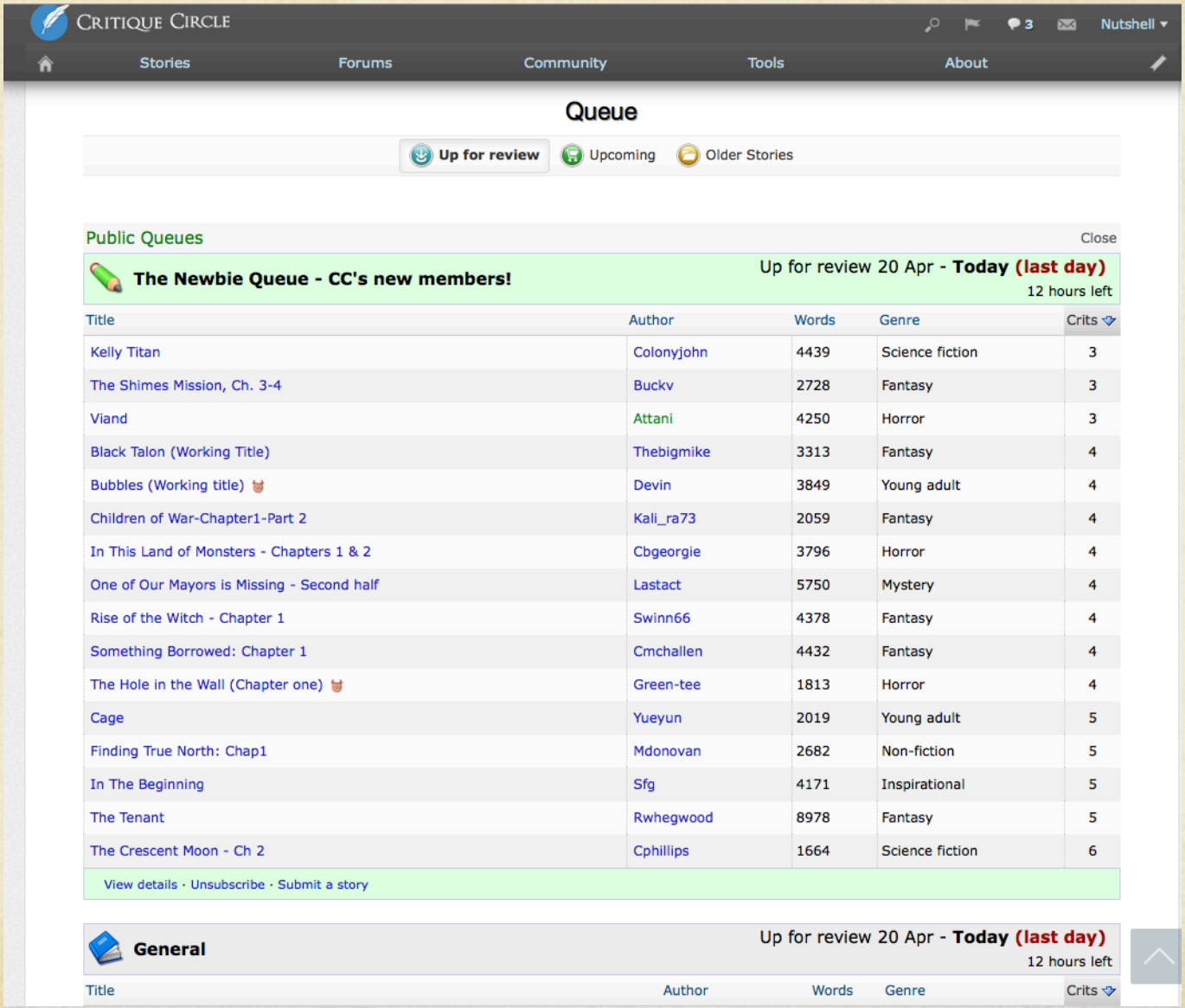
The CC Blog

On the Internet, who knows if you're a dog? -- by Megan Carney
Monday, 18 Apr at 04:43

Anonymity and the Internet is a tricky topic for writers because it can get highly technical. In most cases, if you're asking yourself if your character can be anonymous the answer is 'it depends.' Whether or not your character (we'll call her Alice) can remain anonymous really depends on how badly their opponent wants them not to be. With that in mind, here are some real-world tools that people use to protect their privacy online, and what exactly those tools do. [more...]

Response from Imjustdru 18 Apr at 22:55
I have. It does make people think about all that stuff. [read all 4 responses...]

- Why I write -- by Maya Mendoza (Mon, 11 Apr at 05:49)
- Frequency and Echoes; Redundancy and Repetition -- by Lydia Harris (Mon, 4 Apr at 05:56)
- Want more crits? Five Tips for Beginners -- by Charlie Aylett (Mon, 28 Mar at 05:00)
- How to Gather a List of Agents to Query -- by Lynn Petroski (Mon, 21 Mar at 05:03)
- Drama, Drama, Drama! -- by Charlie Aylett (Mon, 14 Mar at 04:55)
- More blog entries...



CritiqueCircle.com

Island Legends: Echoes of the Past - Ch 12	Alio83	1958	Fantasy	6
Guarantors (working title) Chapter 5	Pranabow	2511	Urban fantasy	7
Crow and the Sun King, Chapter Three	Jones0901	3153	Fantasy	8
Children of Zalmoxis ~ Chapter 27	Auraxx	1362	Fantasy	9
Fire Weaver - Ch 1	Bppage	790	Fantasy	15

View details · Unsubscribe · Submit a story

The Hook Next *Hook* weekend will start Friday, 6. May at 02:00

Title	Author	Words	Genre	Crits

There are no stories up for review.

View details · Unsubscribe · Submit a story

Science Fiction Up for review 20 Apr - **Today (last day)** 12 hours left

Title	Author	Words	Genre	Crits
God of Light draft #2	Clintone	2137	Science fiction	1
Generational: Age 1 - Chapter 2	Tunnell	2998	Science fiction	2
End War: Lonely Hunter - Ch 30	Trevose	3460	Science fiction	3
Hope's Folly - Ch 19 (part 2)	Rxd01	3132	Science fiction	3
Inter-dimensional Woes (working)	Leexid	1387	Science fiction	3
Silence the Living (Chapter 12 & more)	Brianb	3448	Science fiction	3
M.A.D.A. Revised	Osiris	2588	Science fiction	4
House of Stars (2nd draft) - Ch 15	Rellrod	5261	Science fiction	6
The Devil You Know, rev. 2 - Ch 8	Lauraeve	3519	Science fiction	6
The Gadget - Ch 4	Reindeer	3553	Science fiction	7
The Day after the End of the World - Ch 1	Bru	1054	Science fiction	8
TP 1000 Chapter 2 rewrite	Pmartissm	4186	Science fiction	11

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Women's fiction - Romance - Chick-lit Up for review 20 Apr - **Today (last day)** 12 hours left

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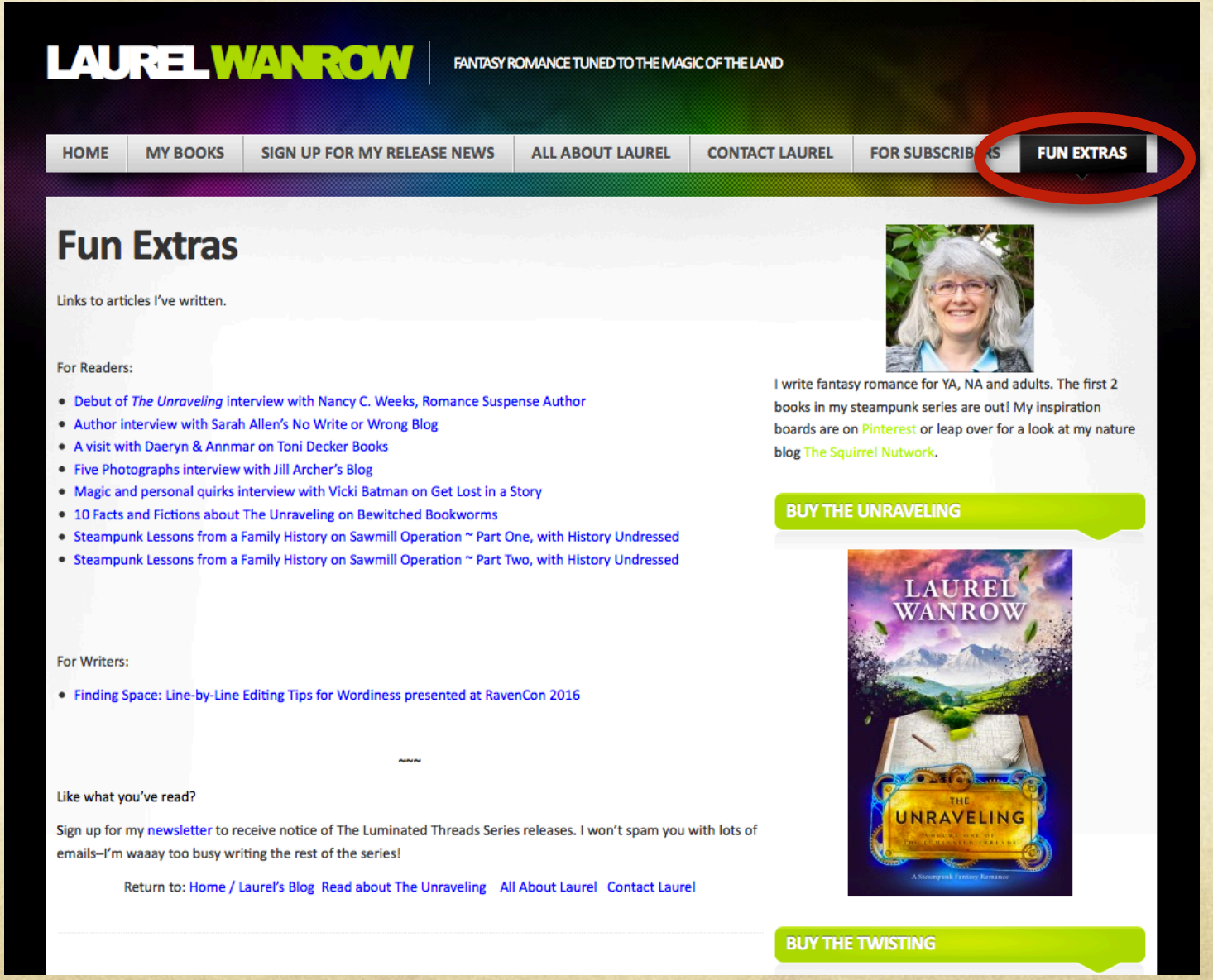
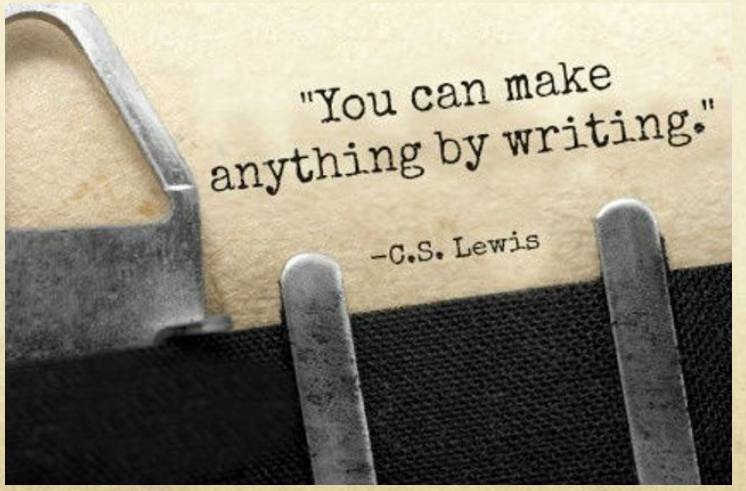


Thank you for coming! Questions?

- Drawing for a paperback copy of *The Unraveling*.
- Presentation available at laurelwanrow.com
- Contact me at laurelwanrow@me.com
- Stick around if you'd like to workshop your WIP!



resources

- Online Writer Forums, like CritiqueCircle.com - a grammar column, blog, word of the day

- The Critique Survival Guide is available as a FREE e-book on Smashwords.
  https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/609502

- Suzanne Brockmann's Going Deep With Point of View
  18 pg pdf: http://www.randomhouse.com/rhpg/PDF/ForceOfNature_Sampler.pdf
  at the end of excerpts from *Forces of Nature* in 2007

- Great ideas under tidbits for techniques for self-editing
  http://www.annieedits.com/tidbits.html

- Purdue Online Writing Lab:
  https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/02/

- Look for 'For Writers' section on authors' websites of articles.