



Writing Tips – Bonus Handout

- 1. Avoid clichés like the plague.** Not just plain as day clichés, but clichéd openings, such as the first line describing your character waking up, seeing the sun streaming in the window, and looking in the mirror to describe him/herself.
- 2. Avoid telling, unless bridging scenes.** Scenes should be shown to the reader with action, description, and dialogue. Bad: *Susan was mad.* Better: *“I hate Windows!” Susan screamed, then threw her computer across the room, delighting in the explosion.*
- 3. Avoid to-be verbs.** There are always better verbs that make the sentence more active, more visual. Bad: *There was a dog at her feet.* Better: *The puppy curled up at her feet.*
- 4. Avoid creative dialogue tags.** Bad: *“How are you?” he queried.* Better: *“How are you?” he asked.* Bad: *“Let’s go to the beach,” she enthused.* Better: *“Let’s go to the beach,” she said.*
- 5. Avoid unnecessary dialogue tags.** Replace with body language or action? Better: *“Let’s go to the beach.” She tossed him the keys with a wink. “You can drive.”*
- 6. Avoid -ing verbs.** These are called present participles and they weaken the writing. Replace them with past tense whenever possible. Bad: *The crickets were chirping.* Better: *The crickets chirped.* Even better: *The crickets’ song filled the air.*
- 7. Avoid -ly words.** These are adverbs and can always be replaced with a stronger, more visual verb. Bad: *He walked slowly up the sidewalk.* Better: *He trudged up the sidewalk.*
- 8. Avoid double writing.** Don’t explain what your words will show. Bad: *She was so angry. She stood up, stormed out, and slammed the door.* Better: *She stood up, stormed out, and slammed the door.* Bad: *Mother scolded me. “Don’t run with scissors!”* Better: *“Don’t run with scissors!” Mother had her hands planted on her hips—never a good sign.*
- 9. Avoid intensifiers.** Very is the biggest offender. Don’t say *very happy* when you can say *elated*. Others include: *totally, really, completely, utterly.*
- 10. Avoid helping verbs.** Bad: *He began to untie his shoes.* Better: *He untied his shoes.* Even better: *He kicked his shoes off.*
- 11. Avoid naming emotions.** This is just another way of saying show, don’t tell. Bad: *She was happy.* Better: *She threw her arms around him and squealed with glee.*
- 12. Avoid head hopping.** Figure out whose head we need to be in to hear the story best and stay there. If you have omniscient point of view, then you shouldn’t be in any heads. If you switch points of view, do so at a natural breaking point (new chapter, new scene).