

## How to Keep Your Writing Style Fresh

The market for getting a children's book published is very competitive. In order to make your manuscript rise above the rest, you not only need an enticing story and vivid characters, but your prose must be solid and fresh. Write exactly what you mean, but write it differently from everyone else. Sound impossible? It's not, if you know what to look for.

The following are words which, if used in excess, will cause your writing to lifeless. While these words can't be eliminated entirely, often they can be replaced with more creative choices. In children's book writing, every word counts, so let's see how we can make the most of every one we use.

### \* Quantifiers

Really, very, all, big, little, many, some and "a lot" are used too often and rarely add much to a sentence. The key with descriptions is to find the precise word or phrase that will paint a picture in your reader's mind. "Uncle Bill was very tall" does not give the reader any useful information. But if you offer a point of reference, the reader can visualize Uncle Bill's height: "Uncle Bill was so tall that when Jessie stood on a chair she could barely see his whiskers." This not only tells the reader exactly how tall Uncle Bill was, but it also mentions another physical element--his whiskers-- which makes him more interesting.

Sometimes removing the quantifier will make the sentence more powerful. "Sara stood at the bus stop. She was very cold." The word very is not necessary and delays the reader from getting to the essence of the sentence, which is that Sara is cold.

### \*Telling Instead of Showing

"Like", "as if" and "seemed" can make writing sound passive instead of active. "Tom picked up the puppy, who seemed as if she was afraid." This is lazy writing, because the author relies on the reader to fill in what "afraid" means. "The puppy was curled up in a corner of the sofa. When Tom picked her up, she let out a soft whimper. He could feel her shaking as he held her close to his chest." By giving concrete details, the author shows the reader exactly how this puppy acts when she is afraid.

One word many authors rely too heavily upon is "felt". How a character feels should be clear from the surrounding text and dialogue. If the author has to tell the reader that Max feels happy, then the rest of the text is not working as hard as it should be. Show how Max is happy (perhaps he's turning cartwheels on his way home from school), and let the reader draw his own conclusions.

Laura Backes is the Publisher of Children's Book Insider, the Newsletter for Children's Book Writers. Want to learn how to become a successful children's book author? Come hang with the Fightin' Bookworms at <http://cbiclubhouse.com>. Whether is writing picture books, chapter books, young adult novels, finding children's book publishers -- or anything else -- you'll find all the answers at the CBI Clubhouse!

## About the Author

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