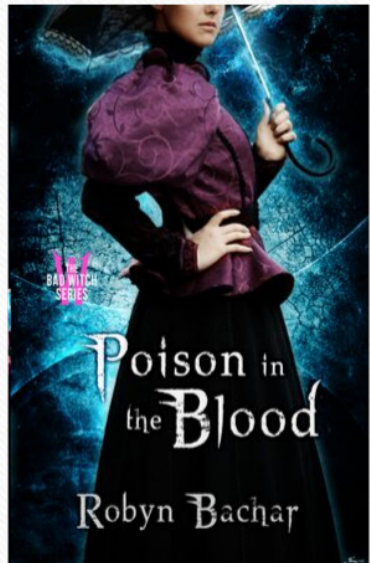


8 Easy Hacks to Help You Write Page-Turning Prose

Brought to you by Robyn Bachar,
NaperWriMo, and the
Windy City Romance Writers of America



Why should I worry about craft?

Isn't that what editors are for?

Isn't the story the most important thing?

“

Language is literally the key...putting the right words in the right order for the right audience.”

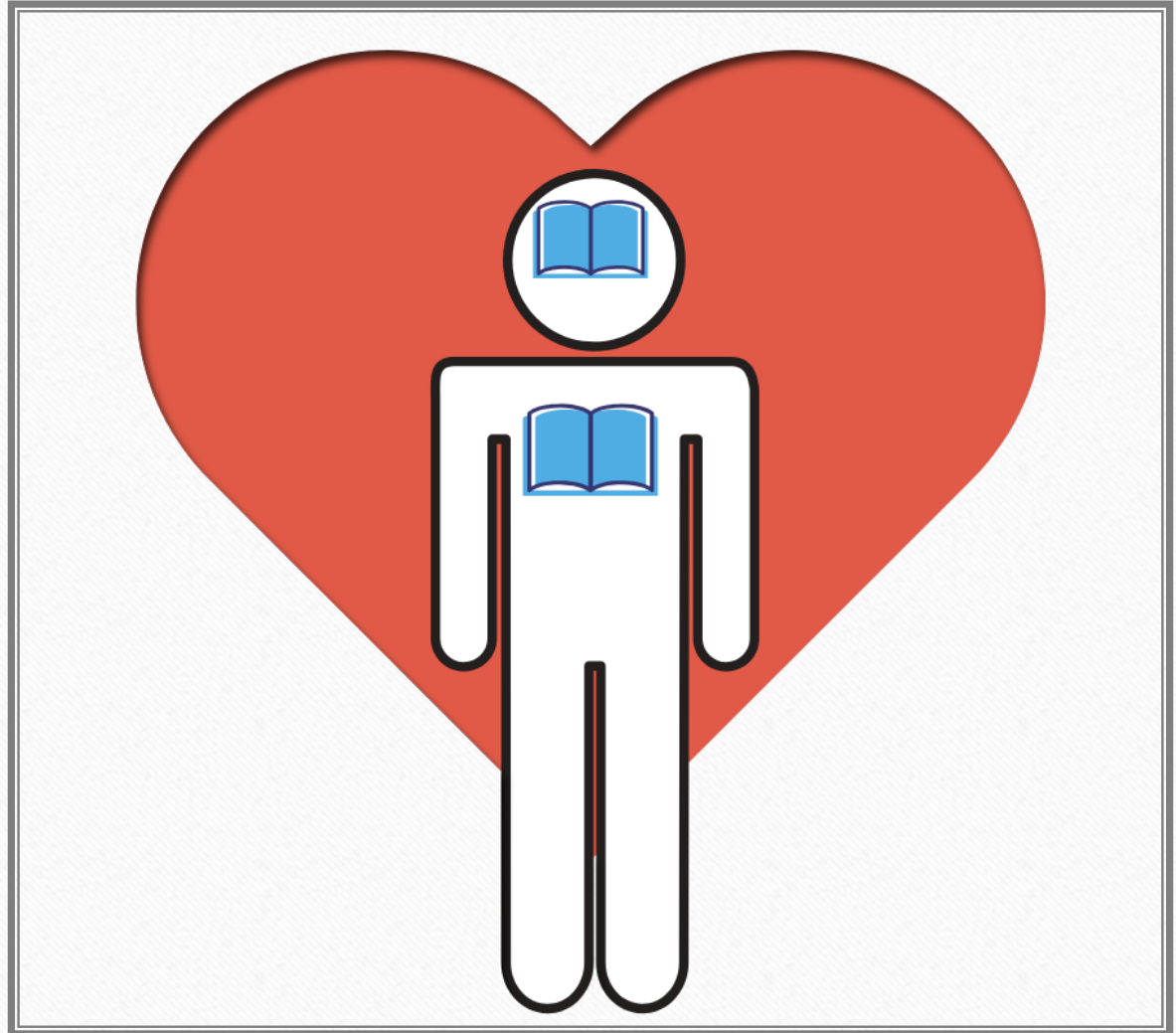
“Stories work dramatically *because* they work grammatically. ”

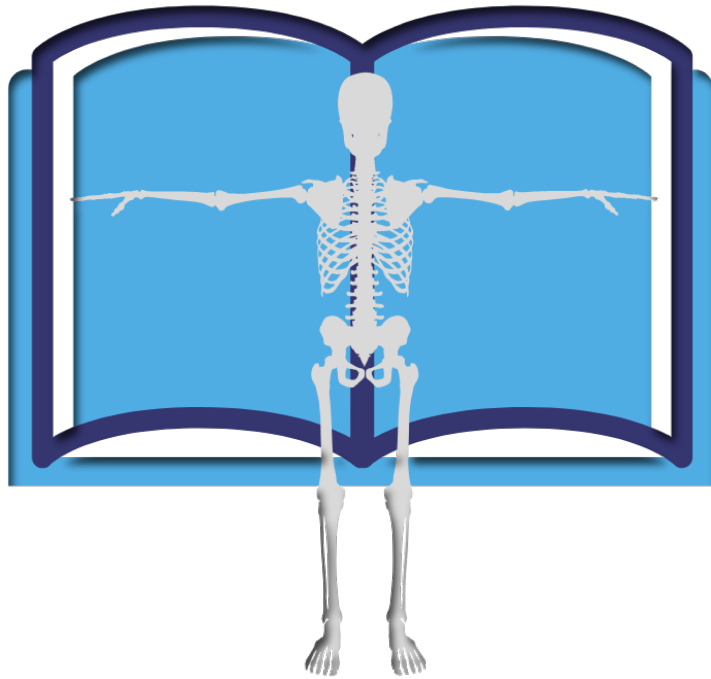
Damon Suede

Verbalize: Bring Stories to Life & Life to Stories

Think of your novel like a body.

Your content is the heart and
mind of your story.





Craft is the body's structure.

Your words are the bones,
tendons, and muscles that
support your characters and allow
them to **move** through the story.

**Action,
Movement, and
Active Voice**

“

Stories don't critique actions or comment on actions; they're not *about* actions. **Stories are made of actions the way that pigs are made of pork.** ”

Damon Suede

Verbalize: Bring Stories to Life & Life to Stories

Hack (transitive verb):

- To cut, clear, sever, or shape

Transitive Verbs

Transitive verbs impact someone or something. They require a direct object to receive their attention, which means that the subject interacts with the object. Someone is doing something to something.

- Jane spiked the punch.
- John stole the money.
- Ms. Bev slayed the words.

Part I: Flexing Your Craft Muscles

Or, How To Avoid Looking Like A Rookie When Submitting Your
Novel To Contests, Agents, and Editors

The First 4 Hacks

- Be Active, Not Passive.
- Kill Your Adverbs. Viciously.
- Death to Dialogue Tags!
- The Truth About Semicolons, Em-Dashes, Exclamation Points and...Ellipses!

Be Active, Not Passive

Passive Voice

- Jane was walking down the street.
- The pain made Jane cry out.

Active Voice

- Jane walked down the street.
- Jane cried out from the pain.

Tired

Jane was walking
down the street.

Wired

Jane walked
down the street.

Inspired

Jane [verbed]
down the street.

Use Find and Replace to Locate and Eliminate Passive Words with Active Verbs

Contest Entry Example

After a few minutes Jane still felt nauseated, yet her anxiety had begun disappearing. The memory of John, his pickup truck, cliffs, and trees began appearing more vivid in her cloudy thoughts.

Possible Edit

Jane still felt nauseated, but after a few minutes her anxiety faded. The vivid memory of John, his pickup truck, the cliffs and trees returned as her mind cleared.

Strong Verbs = Strong Characters

Murder Your Adverbs

Viciously. Completely. Expeditiously.

What's Wrong with Adverbs?

- Adverbs tell, not show.
- Empty adverbs clutter your sentences and add little to no value. Avoid using words like: actually, totally, absolutely, completely, literally, probably, really, unfortunately, ironically, incredibly, hopefully, and finally.

Tired

Jane walked
quickly down the
street.

Wired

Jane [verbed]
down the street.

Examples

- “He whispered quietly.”
- “He ran quickly.”
- “He drank thirstily.”
- Whispered means quiet, so this is redundant.
- One doesn’t run slowly, so this is also redundant. Sprinted? Dashed?
- Did he gulp the drink? Chug it? Down it like a shot?

Death to Dialogue Tags!

Turn Tags Into Action

Contest Entry Example

“Sorry, I wasn’t comparing us,” Jane said, yawning and gazing at the rising cliff walls, beautiful wildflowers, roadside brush, tall prairie grass waving in the summer wind, and the distant mountain peaks.

Possible Edit

“Sorry, I wasn’t comparing us,” Jane said. She yawned and gazed at the rising cliff walls...

Eliminate Unnecessary Tags

Contest Entry Example

“You can’t fix the world’s problems. It’s falling apart today, and it’ll crumble tomorrow,” John said, raising his voice and clearing his throat like a politician arguing with a persistent journalist.

Possible Edit

...tomorrow.” He raised his voice and cleared his throat like a politician arguing with a persistent journalist.

The Truth About Semicolons, Em-
Dashes, Exclamation Points
and...Ellipses!

The Semicolon, Better Known as the Winky Smile ;-)

Many times the semicolon can be replaced with an em-dash, a comma (avoiding comma splices), or you can change the semicolon to a period.

The Em-Dash

This is an em-dash: —

“

Imagine every time you see an exclamation point in the book, the character is shrieking the sentence at the top of their lungs, sounding like a tween girl at a Miley Cyrus concert. Unless that's the affect you're going for, delete the exclamation mark. ”

Sasha Knight, Editor

Ellipses, or Imagine...your Words...Read by...William Shatner.

- In fiction, ellipses indicate a pause in speech or thought.
- Ask yourself, “Do I really need this pause?”

Part II: Dem Bones

Or, How To Create Strong Stories and Healthy Pitches

The Last 4 Hacks

- Story Hooks: Never Begin at the Beginning.
- Exposition: How to Avoid Spoiling the Soup.
- Head Hopping: Don't Change Pilots Mid-Flight.
- Choose Your Verb: Taglines, Pitches, and Defining your Brand.

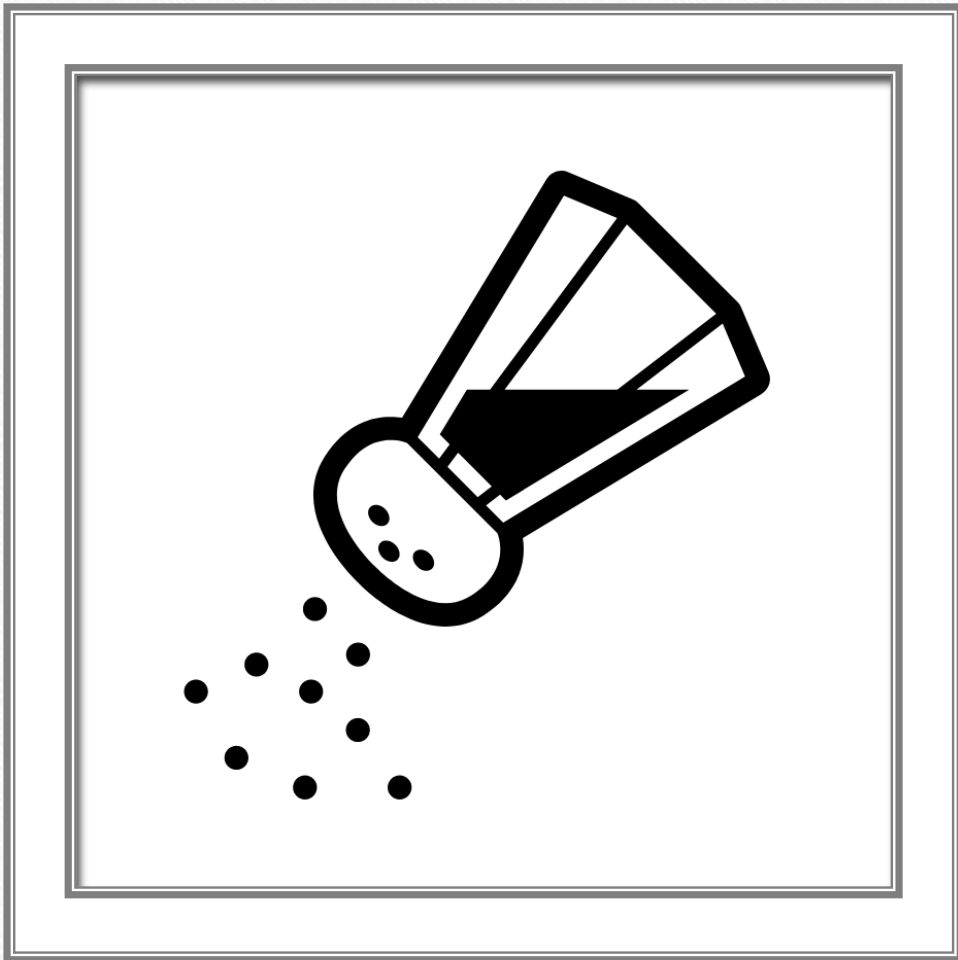
Story Hooks

“ Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop. ”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Exposition

Or, How To Avoid Spoiling the Soup With Too Much Backstory



Think of your Back Story like Salt.

A pinch of salt seasons the soup.

Too much salt spoils it.

Head Hopping

Keep Your Story Steady By Not Changing Pilots Mid-Flight

Choose Your Verb

Using Active Language in Taglines, Pitches, and Defining your
Brand

“

Suit the action to the word, the
word to the action.

”

William Shakespeare

Your Characters are Defined by What They Do

- Characteristics aren't character.
- What do your characters DO?
- If the character was an action figure, what would be their special ability?

In Conclusion

Resources

- Damon Suede, *Verbalize: Bring Stories to Life & Life to Stories*.
- Patricia Holt, “Ten Mistakes Writers Don’t See (But Can Easily Fix When They Do).” <https://holtuncensored.com/the-ten-mistakes/>
- *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>, free app available in the Apple App Store and Google Play Store.