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Top Ten Errors Writers Make That Editors Hate

What are they? And how do I fix them?



Helga Schier, PhD

The Basics: Writing

Beyond the Basics: Writing in Style

**Far Beyond the Basics: Writing to
Make Your World Come to Life**

The Basics: Writing

The easy stuff. Stuff everyone can fix. The surface structure of the words and sentences on your page.

1. Editors Hate it when it's clear that you never ran that spell-check.



Spelling

- Typos
- Commonly mistaken words (die/dye)

Punctuation

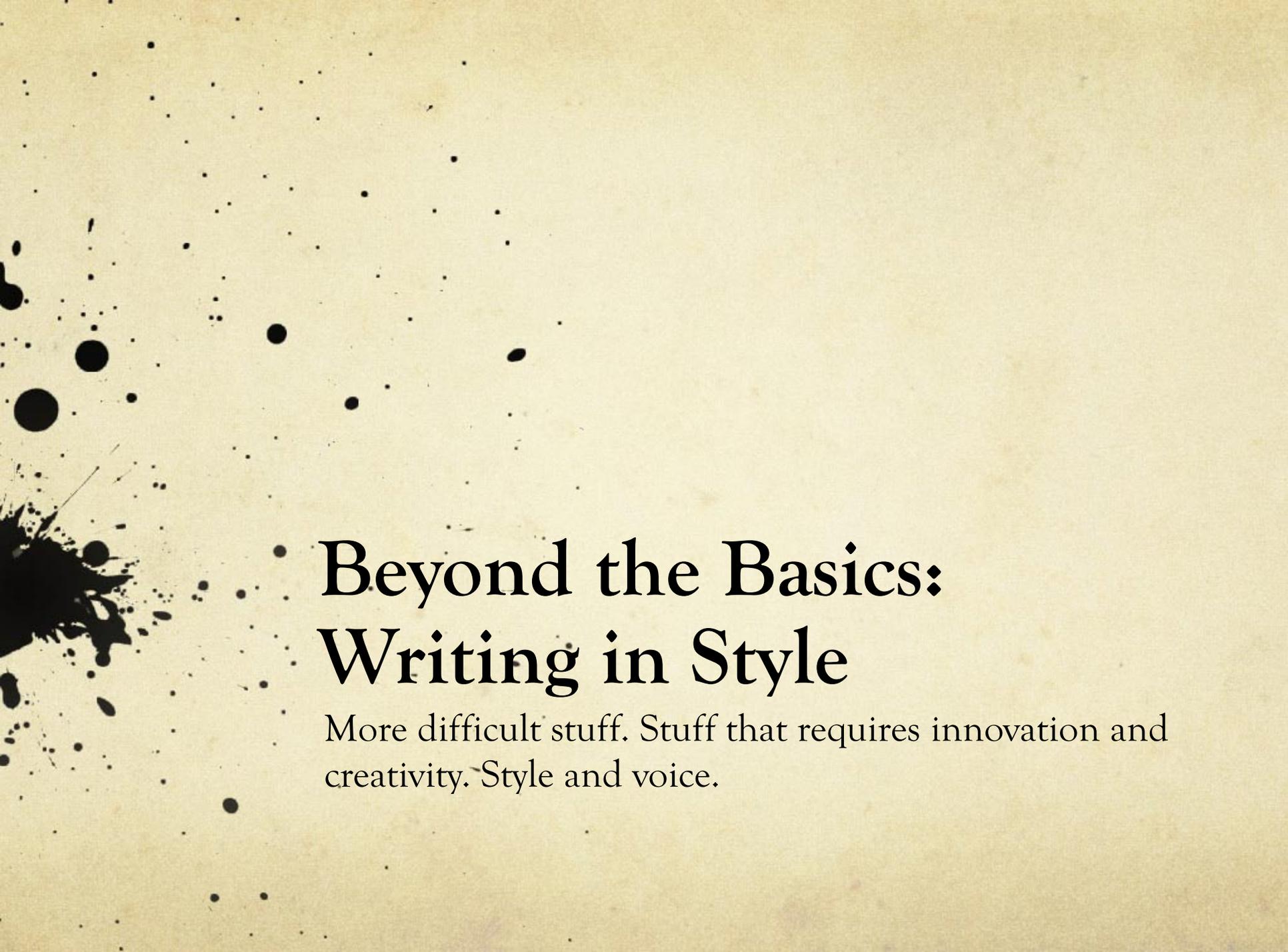
- Commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points
- Quotation marks

Grammar

- Noun-pronoun-verb agreement
- Inconsistent use of tense
- Dangling modifiers
- Run-on sentences

2. Editors hate it when you serve leftovers.

- Plot or character inconsistencies
 - Characters appearing or disappearing
 - Subplots left unresolved
- Timeline issues



Beyond the Basics: Writing in Style

More difficult stuff. Stuff that requires innovation and creativity. Style and voice.

3. Editors hate it when the writing is heavier than a ten-ton-truck.

- Inflated Sentences
- Stilted language
- Overuse of adjectives and adverbs

The game was spectacularly wonderful. I didn't score the defining goal, but I did manage dexterously to pass the ball to my amazingly talented teammate who adroitly kicked it between the goalie's desperately reaching fingers and the rigid frame of the right-hand corner of the goal.

- **Overuse of adjectives and adverbs**

- She was listening to music as she was happily walking down the street.

Better:

- Listening to music and skipping to the tune, she made her way down the street.

- “Turn down that music,” he angrily said.

Better:

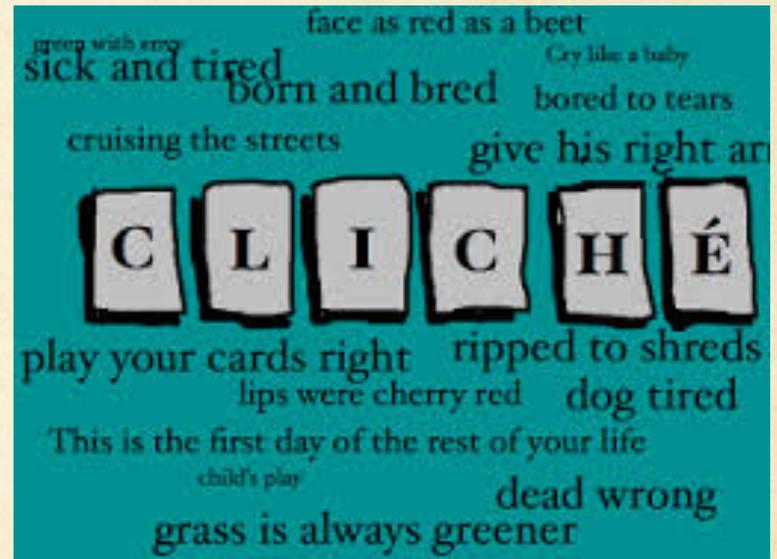
- “I’ll break that stereo of yours if you don’t turn that music!”

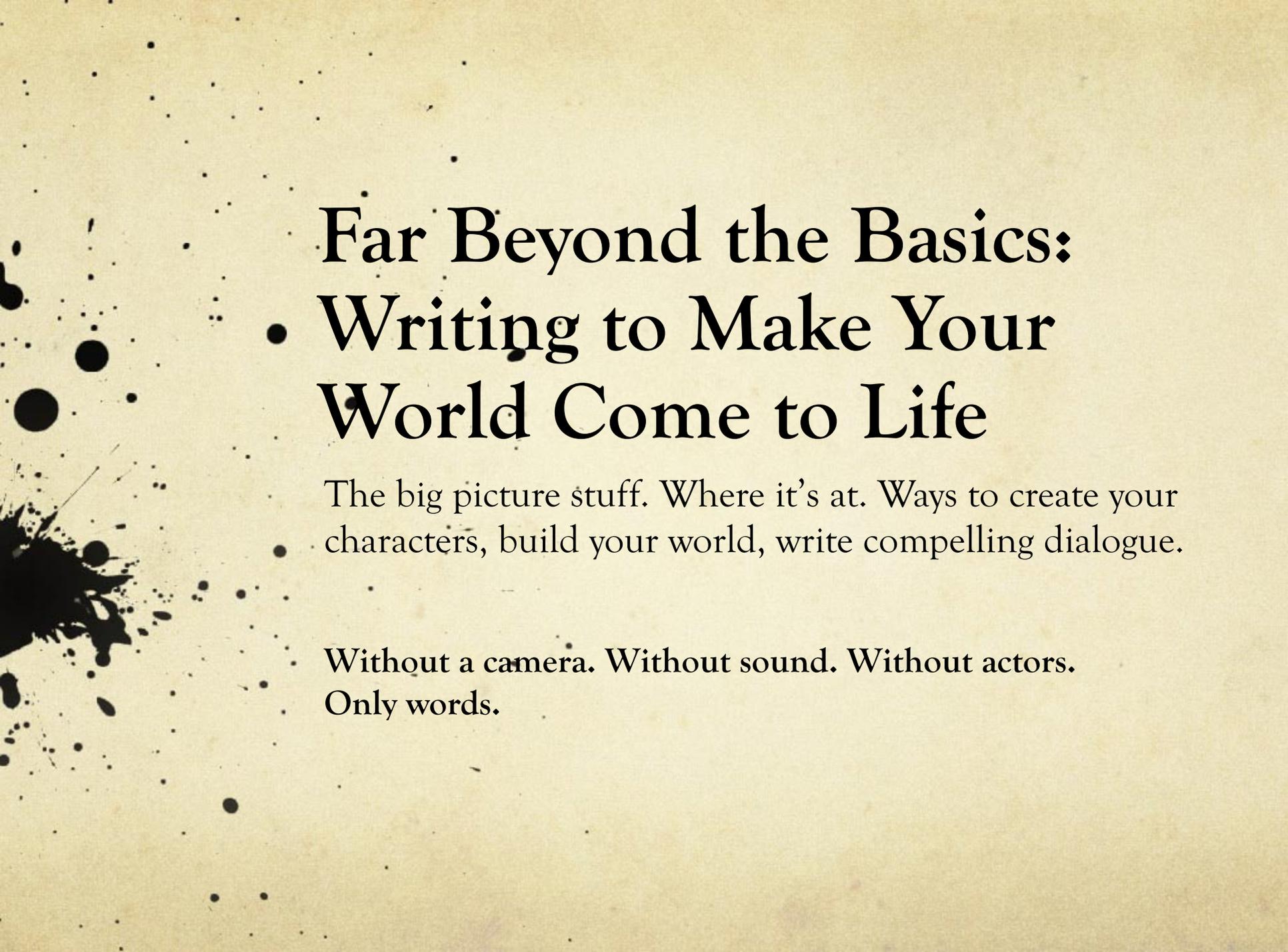
4. Editors hate it when style isn't really style but writing in your comfort zone.

- Repetitive use of vocabulary
- Repetitive sentence structure and length

5. Editors hate clichés. Except when they don't.

- Innovate and personalize clichéd images and comparisons.
- Use cliché's and stereotypes as character markers.
- Turn stereotypes upside down to define a personality or relationships.





Far Beyond the Basics: • Writing to Make Your World Come to Life

• The big picture stuff. Where it's at. Ways to create your characters, build your world, write compelling dialogue.

• Without a camera. Without sound. Without actors.
Only words.

6. Editors hate it when characters resemble cardboard cutouts.

What happens when the President chews gum?



Far Beyond the Basics : Writing to Make Your World Come to Life

7. Editors hate it when the narrative tells rather than shows.

Scenes need to show characters
act and interact.

Narrative needs to observe, not
comment.



8. Editors hate it when dialogues turn into speeches.

- Dialogue requires that people interact with each other verbally and non-verbally.
- Dialogue passes on information.
- Dialogue defines characters and their relationships.
- Dialogue exposes tension and conflict.



9. Anything goes!

But just because you say so
doesn't make it so.

- Events must be caused by earlier events and lead to the next.
- Natural story development depends on the interplay of plot and character.
- A character's behavior must be motivated by his/her psychological disposition.

10. Editors hate hangnail writing.



- Everything in your story has an impact on your readers.
- Show and tell your readers only what is relevant. No more.
- Show and tell your readers everything that is relevant. No less.

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Unlock the potential of your manuscript!

Take time off. Then reread your work. Three times.

1. First, for concept, story, character, plot.
2. Second, for style and voice.
3. Third, for grammar, punctuation, spelling.

