



HOW-TO GUIDES FOR WRITERS
IMPROVING YOUR CRAFT

FILTER WORDS

BY JENISE COOK

FIND FILTER WORDS IN YOUR WRITING
AND FIX/REPLACE THEM

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Filter Words in Writing



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jenise Cook is a creative writer, author, copyeditor, proofreader, photographer, and “maker”. She is the owner of Ridge View Media (www.RidgeViewMedia.com), a freelance consultancy.

Jenise serves as **Copyeditor** on the Editorial Team of *Lost Pen Magazine*, (www.lostpenpublishing.com).

Jenise’s works have been published in *CommuterLit*, *Fifty Word Stories*, *Lost Pen Magazine*, *SpillWords Press*, and other journals. Many of her short works were initially published at these Medium.com publications: *American Haiku*, *House of Haiku*, *Lit-Up*, *P. S. I Love*

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A sample of **her photography** has found a home on www.Pixabay.com as well as on her eponymous website. Jenise also collaborates with her husband Mark Bently Crabbe and his fine art photo business.

Her **creative maker** items (greeting cards, bookmarks, and more) are available for sale from her website, and the product variety is growing.

Before her creative endeavors, Jenise’s corporate career encompassed over twenty years as a senior instructional designer, senior e-learning course developer, and senior technical writer. She still provides these services to clients upon request through Ridge View Media.

Jenise earned her B. A. and M. A. degrees in Spanish Language and Literature. Her undergraduate coursework included a study year abroad in Madrid, Spain, at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Edificio “A”) at the Universidad Complutense.

~ *Soli Deo Gloria*

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Filter Words in Writing

Listed alphabetically, with filter-word examples followed by suggested revisions. This document does not cover what are filter words. To learn more about filter words, view the **Selected Resources** at the end of this table.

Find/Replace: Use your word processor program’s **Find/Replace** feature to revise filter words in your documents.

Filter Words	Example	Revision
appear (see) appear like	Sally frowned at her husband. Jason appeared to ignore their son’s request for a piggy-back ride.	Sally frowned at her husband. “Jason, why are you ignoring Jimmy? He just wants a piggy-back ride.” <i>(Dialog example)</i>
be able to (ability)	For the first time in month, Maria was able to sleep through the night.	For the first time in a month, Maria slept through the night.
experience	Jason experienced a debilitating stress reaction to his boss’s negative comments.	When he heard his boss’s negative comments, the saliva in Jason’s mouth dried up, and his heart raced like a horse fleeing from a mountain lion.
feel (touch)	I feel sad. Marie felt the cool water cover her toes as she walked along the beach. Mikey felt sad when his dad brought him home to his mother’s every Sunday evening.	I am sad. As she walked along the beach, the cool water tickled Maria’s toes, easing the pain from last night’s dance performance. “Dad, don’t go, don’t leave me here,” Mikey sobbed as his father put the sedan in Park in front of his ex-wife’s house. <i>(Dialog example)</i>

Filter Words in Writing

Filter Words	Example	Revision
hear	<p>Alonso heard a loud scream as he walked in the darkness.</p> <p>Alonso heard a terrifying growl rise from deep in the forest. He wondered if he was walking into Bigfoot’s territory.</p>	<p>A loud scream pierced the darkness as Alonso walked down the street.</p> <p>The terrifying growl echoed deep in the forest. Alonso stopped, his legs trembling. <i>Am I walking into Bigfoot’s territory? (Thought example)</i></p>
know <i>NOTE: Editors discourage using Character + know.</i>	<p>Chester knew Leroy wanted to rob the bank.</p> <p>The idea was crazy. Leroy knew it, but he couldn’t stop himself from lusting after the thousands of dollars in the bank’s vault.</p>	<p>Leroy wanted to rob the bank. Chester hesitated.</p> <p>“Hey Chester.” Leroy cleared his throat. “I know this sounds crazy, but will you help me rob the Southern Bank and Loan?”</p> <p><i>“Know” used in dialog not functioning as a filter word.</i></p>
look (see) look like (see)	<p>John looked at the hiking trail. The ascent looked too steep for his physical condition.</p> <p>Homer looked like week-old roadkill run over by dozens of big rigs.</p>	<p>John stared at the steep hiking trail. His heart pounded in his chest. “Hey, Matt, I don’t think I can make it to the summit.” <i>(Dialog example)</i></p> <p>Homer’s ashen face and crumpled clothes reeked of week-old roadkill run over by dozens of big rigs.</p>
notice (see)	<p>John noticed that the smoke was growing closer. He felt the heat from the wildfire on his face.</p>	<p>The wildfire’s smoke grew closer to John’s campsite. The heat turned his face pink.</p>
realize (see)	<p>Keisha realized she needed to tell Jerome what she had done last week. She realized, too, that he would be very upset.</p>	<p>Keisha dreaded telling Jerome what she did last week. “I know he’s going to be very upset.” <i>(Dialog example)</i></p>

Filter Words in Writing

Filter Words	Example	Revision
see	<p>I saw the sun rise over the devastated and looted city, and I saw my diner's destroyed windows.</p> <p>The tourists saw a bald eagle fly by and land atop a dead pine tree.</p>	<p>As the sun rose over the looted city, I collapsed to the sidewalk when my diner's destroyed windows filled my view.</p> <p>A bald eagle flew by the tourists and landed atop a dead pine tree.</p>
seem (see)	The night sky seemed to be jet black, black as ink, darker than the previous night.	In the moonless night sky, Jack walk back to camp with his hands outstretched and his boots feeling for obstacles on the trail.
smell like (smell)	Her newborn baby's skin smelled like rose petals.	The fragrance of rose petals enveloped her newborn baby's skin.
taste	The homeless man smiled. The cornbread tasted nutty and buttery.	Each buttery and nutty bite of cornbread melted in the homeless man's mouth.
think (know)	Sherry would have taken a long, soaking bath, but she didn't think she had time before the kids came home from school.	Sherry skipped the long, soaking bath her aching muscles desired. In fifteen minutes, her kids would come home from school.
touch	Simon touched Bill's shirt and felt something wet and sticky. Blood.	A wet and sticky substance from Bill's shirt covered Simon's fingers. Blood.
wonder (know)	He wondered how his dad would feel when the truth came out on the local news.	Anguish ate him alive. What would his father say to him when the truth came out on the local news?

Filter Words in Writing

Additional Filter Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciate (taste) • ascertain (know) • assume (know) • be capable of (ability) • be equal to (ability) • be subjected to (experience) • be up to the task (ability) • become aware of (see) • believe (know) • bring to mind (know) • can (ability) • catch (hear) • could / couldn't (ability) • decide (know) • deem (know) • delight in (taste) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detect (see) • detect the smell of (smell) • diagnose (smell) • discern (see) • discover (know) • distinguish (see) • eavesdrop (hear) • enjoy (taste) • face (experience) • feel like (touch) • gather (know) • get (know) • get a whiff of (smell) • give the impression of (see) • glean (know) • go through (experience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guess (know) • have the ability to (ability) • have what it takes to (ability) • identify (see) • infer (know) • intuit (know) • learn (know) • like (taste) • listen to (hear) • live through (experience) • note (see) • observe (see) • overhear (hear) • perceive (see) • posit (know) • recognize (see) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regard (know) • relish (taste) • remember (know) • reveal (see) • savor (taste) • scent (smell) • sense (see) • sight (see) • sound (hear) • sound like (hear) • spot (see) • suffer (experience) • suspect (know) • take in (experience) • take pleasure in (taste) • undergo (experience) • understand (know) • watch (see) • whiff (smell)
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Selected Resources

- **H. Duke**, “How Filter Words Make Your Writing Boring”, *The Writersaurus* (blog), January 23, 2015, <http://thewritersaurus.com/2015/01/23/filter-words-make-writing-boring/>
- **Kathy Steinemann**, “Filter Words and Phrases to Avoid in Writing Fiction”, *Anne R. Allen's Blog... with Ruth Harris* (blog), June 11, 2017, <https://annerallen.com/2017/06/filter-words-and-phrases-to-avoid-in-writing/>
- **Leah McClellan**, “What Are Filter Words?”, *Simple Writing* (blog), January 2020, <https://simplewriting.org/what-are-filter-words/>
- **Leah Wohl-Pollack**, “How to find filter words and filter them out”, *Invisible Ink Editing* (blog), January 13, 2019, <http://www.invisibleinkediting.com/blog/how-to-find-filter-words-and-filter-them-out/>

Filter Words in Writing

Selected Resources (continued)

- **Louise Harnby**, “Filter words in fiction: Purposeful inclusion and dramatic restriction”, *Louise Harnby: Fiction Editor & Proofreader* (blog), April 29, 2019, <https://www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com/blog/filter-words-in-fiction-purposeful-inclusion-and-dramatic-restriction>
- **Michael R. Emmert**, “An Introduction to Filtering”, *Scribophile* (blog), Date unknown, <https://www.scribophile.com/academy/an-introduction-to-filtering>
- **Suzannah Windsor Freeman**, “Are These Filter Words Weakening Your Fiction?”, *Write it Sideways* (blog), January 14, 2011, <https://writeitsideways.com/are-these-filter-words-weakening-your-fiction>

Examples from Resources

<i>Filter words in use.</i>	<i>Editor’s suggested revision.</i>
<p>Maria noticed James had gone silent and was staring past her out the coffee shop window. Turning and looking herself, she saw a beautiful woman on the sidewalk, talking animatedly on a mobile phone. Maria felt a little tug of jealousy, and she turned back around furiously and stared at James, who jumped and looked down at his espresso. She realized he wasn’t blushing, but he seemed uncomfortable. “Who is that?” she asked as she watched his face for any sign of guilt. She wondered if he could ever tell her the truth. She decided right then this would be his last chance to regain her trust.</p>	<p>James had gone silent and was staring past Maria out the coffee shop window. A beautiful woman was outside, talking animatedly on her mobile phone. Jealousy tugged at Maria’s gut, and she glared at James, who jumped and shifted his eyes to his espresso. He wasn’t blushing, but that didn’t mean anything. “Who is that?” she asked. Was he guilty again? Was he even capable of telling the truth? Perhaps he deserved one more chance to regain her trust.</p>
<p><i>From:</i> Leah Wohl-Pollack, “How to find filter words and filter them out”, <i>Invisible Ink Editing</i> (blog), January 13, 2019, http://www.invisibleinkediting.com/blog/how-to-find-filter-words-and-filter-them-out/</p>	

Filter Words in Writing

Filter words in use.

Sarah **felt** a sinking feeling as she **realized** she'd forgotten her purse back at the cafe across the street. She **saw** cars filing past, their bumpers end-to-end. She **heard** the impatient honk of horns and **wondered** how she could quickly cross the busy road before someone took off with her bag. But the traffic **seemed** impenetrable, and she **decided** to run to the intersection at the end of the block.

Editor's suggested revision.

Sarah's stomach sank. Her purse—she'd forgotten it back at the cafe across the street. Cars filed past, their bumpers end-to-end. Horns honked impatiently. Could she make it across the road before someone took off with her bag? She ran past the impenetrable stream of traffic, toward the intersection at the end of the block.

From: Suzannah Windsor Freeman, "Are These Filter Words Weakening Your Fiction?", *Write it Sideways* (blog), January 14, 2011, <https://writeitsideways.com/are-these-filter-words-weakening-your-fiction>

Filter words in use.

John **realized** he needed to tell Marie. He'd **wondered** about how awful it would be. He'd long **felt** the weight of guilt bearing down on him, but now he'd **decided** it was time to let that go. He'd **become aware** that he'd fallen out of love with her months earlier and **thought about** what had gone wrong between them as soon as Mark had come into their lives.

He recalled their most recent argument and **felt himself** shudder. He'd **looked on** as she'd screamed abuse at him, **seen** the spittle fly from her mouth. He'd **felt** sadness at first but that had turned to fear when **he'd seen her** pick up a knife from the table.

Editor's suggested revision.

John was dreading telling Marie. The guilt had been eating him alive, but he was done with that. He'd fallen out of love with her months earlier, Mark's entrance into their lives the trigger.

He shuddered, recalling their most recent argument. At first, there'd been only sadness as she screamed abuse at him, spittle flying from her mouth, but that had turned to fear when she'd reached for the knife on the table.

From: Louise Harnby, "Filter words in fiction: Purposeful inclusion and dramatic restriction", *Louise Harnby: Fiction Editor & Proofreader* (blog), April 29, 2019, <https://www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com/blog/filter-words-in-fiction-purposeful-inclusion-and-dramatic-restriction>

Thank you for choosing this resource. Questions? Feel free to contact Jenise Cook.
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