

11. Rewriting

If you've tried Editing and you've tried Unwriting and your piece still isn't working, it may be time to raise more awkward questions. Try these:

- Is the central character the focal point of the piece? Perhaps the story really belongs to another character – so why not try rewriting it from his/her point of view? Perhaps a younger character might add more risk, or an older one more gravitas.
- Have you based your work too closely on your own life/experiences? Perhaps you need to get more distance, so why not change the gender of the main character? This may enable you to be more objective.
- If you've written a poem, is the voice right? The same poem may feel completely different if it's written in the first person ('I'), the second person ('you'), or the third person ('he/she'). Try rewriting it in each voice in turn, to see which works best. Perhaps some parts work best in one voice, other parts in another. Could it be possible that the poem contains two different voices? This same technique can work with prose. It might focus your mind on what is wrong with the way you're presenting a certain character.
- Are time and place right for the story that you want to tell? Perhaps you've set the action in the present day, when the behaviour of the characters might be more appropriate to the 1960s. Try rewriting it in its 'proper' context.
- Is there too much 'back story' [the history of the characters prior to the action of the story itself]? You want your readers to look forward, and you're not going to achieve this if you are constantly feeding them bits of historical information. If this history is essential to the plot, then why not start earlier? If it's not essential, then why are you telling us? The 'back story' of all your characters is something that you need to know about – it helps you bring your characters to life – but only certain parts of their histories will be relevant to the present action.