

WRITING WOMEN'S FICTION  
by Deborah Raney

**Social Issues in Christian Fiction**  
compiled by Deborah Raney

[www.bit.ly/CFsocialissues](http://www.bit.ly/CFsocialissues)

For the complete article by Francine Rivers, click here:



The image shows a screenshot of the Francine Rivers website. At the top, there is a banner with the name "FRANCINE RIVERS" in white capital letters over a blue and white abstract background. Below the banner is a dark blue navigation bar with links for HOME, ABOUT, BOOKS, BLOG, LIFE WITH FRANCINE, MEDIA, CONTACT, and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Blogger. The main content area features a portrait of Francine Rivers, a woman with short brown hair wearing a denim jacket. To the right of the portrait, the text reads: "New York Times Bestselling Author" and a quote: "Writers like Rivers are why people buy Christian fiction." —Publishers Weekly. At the bottom of the main content area, the title "Setting the Record Straight" and the website "francinerivers.com" are displayed.

<https://francinerivers.com/setting-the-record-straight/>

## CHECKLIST FOR WRITING A WINNER

- 1. OPENING** – Is there a hook to capture the reader’s interest? Does the book start in the right place?
- 2. CHARACTERS** – Are the lead characters likeable? Do they feel larger-than-life, yet real? Do they change and grow from opening to end?
- 3. PACING** – Does the reader want to keep turning pages?
- 4. DIALOGUE** – Does the dialogue sound natural and realistic? Does it build characters and move the story forward?
- 5. SECONDARY CHARACTERS** – Are the secondary characters believable? Do they provide a valid addition to the story?
- 6. SETTING** – Is the setting well-described and integral to the story?
- 7. POINT OF VIEW** – Is the POV for each scene wisely chosen and well-distributed? Are transitions smooth and important? Does the writer avoid head hopping?
- 8. STYLE** – Is the author’s voice unique and appealing?
- 9. CLICHÉS** – Does the writer avoid clichés and stereotypes in plot, dialogue, characterization, narrative? (If tried and true plot devices are used, are they done in a fresh way that makes you want to read on.)
- 10. MOST IMPORTANT** – **Would you recommend this book to a friend?**

# Spit Polishing Your Manuscript

## 5 Quick Fixes

Deborah Raney

- 1. Search and destroy speaker attributions.** Replace with action beats where necessary to make it clear who the speaker is and to paint a more vivid visual image. Avoid most speaker attributions other than “said” (such as retorted, exclaimed, asked, inquired, etc.) But don’t kill *all* attributions! It’s better to have too many, than for the reader to be confused about who’s speaking.
- 2. Search for pet words and phrases and “lazy” words.** Every writer has personal pet phrases they overuse—usually a different set of phrases for each book. Discover what your particular pets are and do a manuscript search. Delete or alter them for variety. Words like *really, just, even, that*, and superlatives, *very, most, -est* words, etc. usually signify lazy writing. Search and delete or replace with fresher, more precise word choices.
- 3. Check first and last paragraphs.** The first paragraph of each chapter should set the scene and establish the POV so the reader has an immediate frame of reference. The last paragraph of each chapter should be a “hook” to keep the reader turning pages.
- 4. Sprinkle in the 6 senses.** Most manuscripts could benefit from a bit more sensory info. Quickly scan the book, looking for places to judiciously add in a few more of the unique images, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile feel of the scene. Don’t forget that “sixth sense”—perception, intuition, spiritual awareness, etc.
- 5. Allocate white space.** Go over each page with an eye to the graphic, visual look of it. Plenty of “white space” makes a book more reader-friendly. Are there paragraphs or series of paragraphs that are too long, making for an intimidating “block” of type? If so, can you break the scene into shorter paragraphs or add a bit of dialogue to incorporate some white space on the page? (Note: Often in a novel, a lack of dialogue for several pages means you are telling not showing—a good way to risk losing your reader.)

# The Perfect Word

## Deborah Raney

1. Charles James Stanford IV brushed a freshly manicured hand across the sleek mahogany desk and depressed the blinking intercom button.
2. Shorty Stanford raked rough palms over the splintered desktop, shoved aside a jumble of coffee-stained newspapers, and grabbed his phone.

The two opening sentences above are each just 20 words about a man sitting at a desk. The two men even share the same name, but how much do these men—and these sentences really have in common? Let's dissect them one word/phrase at a time to discover how the perfect word paints a perfectly unique picture.

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

**MOTION PICTURE**

**OBJECT LESSON**

**INTERIOR (or exterior) DECORATING**

**EMOTION POTION**

**THE BIG PICTURE (it's in the details)**

**THE UNDERLINING ISSUE**

Choosing precisely perfect words in every sentence ultimately results in a perfect paragraph, a perfect page, a perfect chapter, maybe even a perfect book—one word at a time.

## Study questions

1. Type out the first paragraph of your own work in progress in a word processing program. Highlight the character names or references in **red**. Highlight the verbs/action words in **blue**. Highlight the objects of the verb in **green**. Highlight the description(s) in **purple**. Highlight words/verbs that show emotion in **orange**. Highlight the details in **turquoise**. (Some of these may overlap.) **Underline** short, seemingly inconsequential words.
2. Are there colors missing from the "rainbow" of your sentence? If so, make a list of the colors that are missing and try to add those elements to your opening paragraph in a way that is subtle and organic.
3. Examine each highlighted word or phrase again.
4. Does your character's name and the way he thinks of himself (**red**) tell us something about the character? Can you emphasize this by tweaking the way you use your character's name?
5. Have you used the strongest verbs (**blue**) possible to show action that reflects the character's personality and emotions? Do the objects of your verb (**green**) reveal a new aspect of your character or setting?
6. Are your emotion verbs/words (**orange**) specific enough to make the reader feel what the character is feeling?
7. Will your descriptions (**purple**) and details (**turquoise**) paint a picture and set the stage for the reader, making them see more than is actually on the page?
8. Look at your **underlined** words and decide if you have selected the exact word that best fits your character and scene.
9. Now, start from scratch and write a "colorful" opening sentence for your next scene. Practice tight writing by trying to limit yourself to twenty words.

## SYNONYMS FOR COMMON WORDS

### THINK

believed  
brooded  
conceived  
concluded  
considered  
contemplated  
created  
deemed  
envisioned  
imagined  
mulled  
mused  
pondered  
presumed  
reasoned  
recalled  
reflected  
regarded  
remembered  
speculated  
thought  
viewed  
weighed  
wondered

### WONDER

considered  
deliberated  
marveled  
muller over  
pondered  
puzzled  
questioned  
speculated  
thought

### SMILE/LAUGH

chuckle  
giggle  
grin  
guffaw  
snicker  
snigger  
titter

### GO/WALK

ambled  
darted

dashed  
floated  
glided  
hiked  
hurried  
jogged  
loped  
marched  
moved  
paced  
paraded  
proceeded  
rambled  
ran  
scampered  
skittered  
sashayed  
sauntered  
scrambled  
scuttled  
slithered  
slogged  
staggered  
strode  
strolled  
toddled  
tottered  
tramped  
traveled  
trekked  
trod/treaded  
trudged

### LOOK

admired  
affixed  
analyzed  
assayed  
beheld  
blinked  
browsed  
checked  
concentrated  
contemplated  
detected  
examined  
explored  
eyed  
feasted eyes on  
fixed

gaped  
gave it a gander  
gave the once-over  
gawked  
gazed  
glanced  
glared  
glowered  
inspected  
lifted his eyes  
looked  
marked  
mooned  
noticed  
noted  
observed  
ogled  
peeked  
peered  
perused  
pored over  
regarded  
scanned  
scoured  
scrutinized  
skimmed  
sought  
spied  
spotted  
squinted  
stared  
studied  
surveyed  
traced viewed  
visualized  
watched