

Revising Your Grannie Annie Story

Young People Learning and Sharing Family Stories www.TheGrannieAnnie.org

Once you've written a draft of your Grannie Annie story, share it with your classmates, family, teachers, and others to find out which parts work well and which parts are confusing or need more detail. Make the changes in your story that *you* want to make.

Now you're ready for an even closer look at your story. Published authors consider the specific revision topics identified below to make their writing interesting and satisfying for their readers — to make their work shine. Don't feel you need to use all these suggestions; just use those that feel right to you and work in your story.

The story excerpts that follow each revision topic provide just a few examples of the excellent writing in the stories published by The Grannie Annie. Numbers following each author's name indicate the paperback volume and first page of the story. For example, 1:15 indicates Volume 1 of *Grannie Annie*, page 15.

Beginning

The beginning of your story should provide necessary background information and should grab your readers' attention.

Imagine being a teenager and leaving your family to travel thousands of miles to a new country to live. How would you feel? In 1981 my dad had to do just that. He was sixteen years old, and my grandparents sent him to Chicago alone from Taiwan to stay with family friends. They did this because they thought he would get a better education in the United States.

"A Different Land" by Joanne Hsueh, 2:67

My grandpa was seven years old when he was shot at by the Japanese on December 7, 1941.

"Pearl Harbor Day 1941" by Avalon Derlacki, 1:69

Ending

The ending of your story should leave your readers with the final thought or feeling you want them to have.

When the weather is very cold and you listen very carefully, you can hear furniture moving in the attic where the soldiers had huddled together for warmth. To this day, the attic still creaks and moans as if two soldiers are dragging chairs together to stay warm.

"Aunt Gail's Haunted House" by Gabe Salmon, 1:62

So the next time you get the hiccups, remember my great-great-great-uncle Charles Osborne and hope that one of the home remedies for these irritating hiccups works for you! No one wants to break Charles's world record for sixty-eight years of hiccups!

"Longest Attack of Hiccups" by Madison Paige McIntyre, 1:64

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Framing Your Story

Tying the beginning and ending of your story together provides a frame for your story. A frame might repeat a key idea from the story, might create a story within a story, or might depend upon a single repeated word. The following excerpts show beginnings and endings that frame their stories.

“Grandma, will you tell me a story?” I ask. . . . This is my favorite story. It makes me feel like I’m a time traveler. My grandma passed along her history, and now I’m passing it along.

“Ferdyl” by Samuel Kramer, 2:15

A hot, humid day in June of 1972 started out to be normal, as normal is on a farm with five kids. . . . It took several days to clean up, but life was back to normal again on the farm.

“The Tornado” by Jeffrey Paul Duda, 1:21

Concrete Description

Providing concrete details, especially details that appeal to the senses, will help bring the experience to life for your readers.

With her better-paying job, Oma bought a green bicycle with lights on the front and the back so she could ride fourteen miles round trip between home and work each day.

“Growing Up German” by Sean Millard, 2:40

The owner (they called him Mr. Candy) blew hot candy into action figures, animals, fruits, and all kinds of interesting shapes. It was just like balloon animals at the fair except it was smaller and you could eat it if you wanted. Most of the kids eventually did.

“Holding Hands” by Benji Gu, 2:17

Dialogue

You know your characters are alive when they have a voice of their own. Dialogue gives readers a firsthand view of your characters. Including regional words, or dialect, can make the recreated experience even more vivid for your readers.

Hungrily Grandpa told them, “Looks larrupin’. I’m as hungry as a bear.”

“The Family Reunion and the Missing Plate” by Sara Michelle Zachary, 1:15

“It’s not my fault your stupid hog was in the road,” interrupted Uncle Paul.

“That was our best hog, and you’re going to pay for it,” yelled the bigger Lowe.

“Hank and the Hog” by Michael Joseph Rother, 1:57

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Strong, Active Verbs

Verbs, the words that indicate action, bear the greatest responsibility for keeping your writing lively. Finding the appropriate specific verb will enable you to express your idea concisely and will make your writing powerful.

The fluffy yellow ducklings peep at our feet as we toss them stale breadcrumbs. The little birds sing their sweet songs; twitters pierce the air. We stop and listen, then continue our way down to the beach. . . . We had stood together smelling the salt air and gazing at the waves foaming and crashing against the rock.

“A Walk into the Past” by Megan M. Howson, 2:31

When [Great-Grandpa] arrived, the snow had accumulated so high that the door to the shelter was blocked. Grandma had to hoist herself up and out of a window to get outside. She climbed onto the sleigh and into the barrel, and again covered herself with the blanket. Great-Grandpa covered himself as best he could from the cold and wind, and off they went.

“Horses Know the Way to Carry the Barrel” by Karen Figenshau, 2:50 [end of story]

Sentence Variety

Imagine how dull it would be to read a story about someone’s aunt that primarily consisted of short sentences, all beginning with the words “Aunt Mary.” Varying the length and pattern of your sentences will make your writing more interesting and effective.

When my savta returned to her hometown in Romania, her home was destroyed and the factory was gone. Only 2,000 of the 8,000 Jews who had entered Mogilev had survived. From 1944 to 1947 Aunt Pearl worked hard making arrangements for my savta and her sister to travel to relatives in Canada.

“From Tragedy to Triumph” by Matan Halzel, 1:51

Growing up as a child was very hard for Harriett; she was the oldest of three kids. After her parents’ divorce, times were even harder.

“Miracles Do Happen” by Bri’Anna Brown, 2:58

Show, Don’t Tell

Describing a person’s words and/or actions — instead of naming their feeling — provides your readers with a vivid picture. Then your readers can draw their own conclusions about the person’s feelings.

Tears rolled down her cheeks because her father had recently passed away.

“And They Lived Happily Ever After” by Manny Rodriguez, 2:43

Kitty purred at Aunt Sue and my dad. He gave Grandpa that old familiar glare.

“Kitty” by Joey Rosga, 2:55

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Figurative Language and Other Poetic Devices

Using poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, repetition, alliteration, simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech can make your writing more descriptive. Try to avoid figures of speech that have been used so much that they are no longer fresh and appealing, such as “sweet as honey.”

Whoosh! Root beer was flying all over the kitchen. This was not good. There was root beer on the ceiling, root beer on the floor, root beer on the windows, root beer on the door. And the root beer was still spraying out of the bottle like Old Faithful. This was not good at all.

“Root Beer Rascals” by Timothy Andrew Metcalf, 1:37 [onomatopoeia, repetition, simile]

“You see, children, this flower is just like us. It is working hard to survive. There are many sorts of flowers here, and there are many sorts of people in New Amsterdam. But we will all work together. This pretty pink flower will grow up here, and so will we.”

“My Ancestor Philippe DuTrieux” by Emily M. Esther, 1:40 [extended simile]

Voice

Voice is the way you, the author, project yourself into your writing. Various factors, such as how serious or how formal the piece is, may affect the voice of a piece of writing. Notice how the authors’ attitudes toward their subjects differ in the following excerpts:

I will just put it right out there and say it: I am related to a klutz. No, I am not talking about my dad (though he is on my dad’s side). I am talking about my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, John Howland. That is ten *greats*, which is a lot. But then I guess you would need that many *greats* to go back to the *Mayflower*. Yes, you read this right. My ancestor came over on the *Mayflower*, and then fell off the *Mayflower*.

“John Howland” by Kaylie Hodge, 2:71 [beginning of story]

My family is Jewish, and when I listen to my grandparents’ stories, it helps me to learn more about my history and my heritage. My savta (Hebrew for *grandmother*) and her sister were born in the late 1930s in Romania. Sadly, they were subjected to one of the most tragic events in our world’s history, the Holocaust.

“The Golden Chocolate Bar” by Ariela Halzel, 2:19 [beginning of story]