

Repetition

One of the easiest mistakes we writers make, or as least I make, is repeating an idea. Once I have told the reader “his father was working at the stove,” there is no need to say two paragraphs later, “he approached his father at the stove.” I’ve already said where he was. No need to repeat that. It only slows the reader down and causes the story to drag. “He approached his father” is sufficient.

And furthermore, repetition insults the reader. Over-telling represents a kind of distrust and denigrates the reader’s intelligence. Unfortunately it is dangerously easy to do. Because I want to be sure my reader knows something that will later be important, I sometimes find myself telling them a second time when it comes into play later in the story. That’s insulting. It is vital to give the reader credit for having a memory. Nobody likes to be told something they already know.

There is tremendous value to foreshadowing. You drop in a seemingly trivial item earlier in the story and then use that tidbit later as a piece of something important. The reader then thinks “Aha, I know about that!” But just don’t retell them as if it were a new element. Accept what you’ve told them earlier and move on from there.