



Repetition Lesson 2: Phrase Repetition

Today's lesson is on Phrase Repetition. It's very quick to learn, although it may take you a while to apply it to your own manuscript. Repeated phrases can be difficult to identify unless you are coming fresh to your work. But you can also use AutoCrit to help spot them right away—more on that later.

What are repeated phrases?

Repeated phrases are sentences or parts of sentences that you repeat too close together or too often in your manuscript.

When is it a problem?

The problem with repeated phrases is that they are much more noticeable than repeated words. That means you have to wait a longer before you can re-use the same phrase – and in some cases with really unusual phrasing, you may not be able to use it again at all without it being quite noticeable to the reader.

Think of it this way: The effect of reading a word fades fairly rapidly. For example, if you repeat a common word three paragraphs apart, the reader probably wouldn't notice. But if you repeat a phrase that close together, the reader will notice.

Here's an example:

She stared at the stream for a few **long seconds** and then said something so quietly that he missed the words. He edged closer and brushed his hand down her back. "Sorry?"

"I never said that."

His palm stopped mid-sweep. "What?"

"I encouraged him to climb."

Long seconds passed.



As with repeated words, the more unique the phrase, the longer you should wait before using that phrase again.

Consider this example:

"Your name's familiar." He waved at the waiter and motioned for a beer. His hand tapped on the table. "Hey, aren't you the chick from Manitoba? The one that snagged our Marcus and reeled him back to the flatlands?"

Compare the phrases "he waved" and "reeled back." The "waving" phrase is less unique than the "reel-back" phrase. You could probably get away with having another character wave to the waiter in this scene without the reader noticing anything. But if you use the expression "reel back" again, the reader would definitely notice—or at least sense that something wasn't right.

How do I fix it?

You can improve repeated phrases using the same methods you used to avoid repeated words.

- Use a synonymous phrase
- Change the details
- Change the action/delete the action.

Here's a fix for our first example. I use a different detail instead of the repeated phrase:

She stared at the stream for a few long seconds and then said something so quietly that he missed the words. He edged closer and brushed his hand down her back. "Sorry?"

"I never said that."

His palm stopped mid-sweep. "What?"

"I encouraged him to climb."

He waited silently for her to continue.



When can I use a repeated phrase?

There are valid reasons to repeat a phrase, including:

1. For emphasis or rhythm

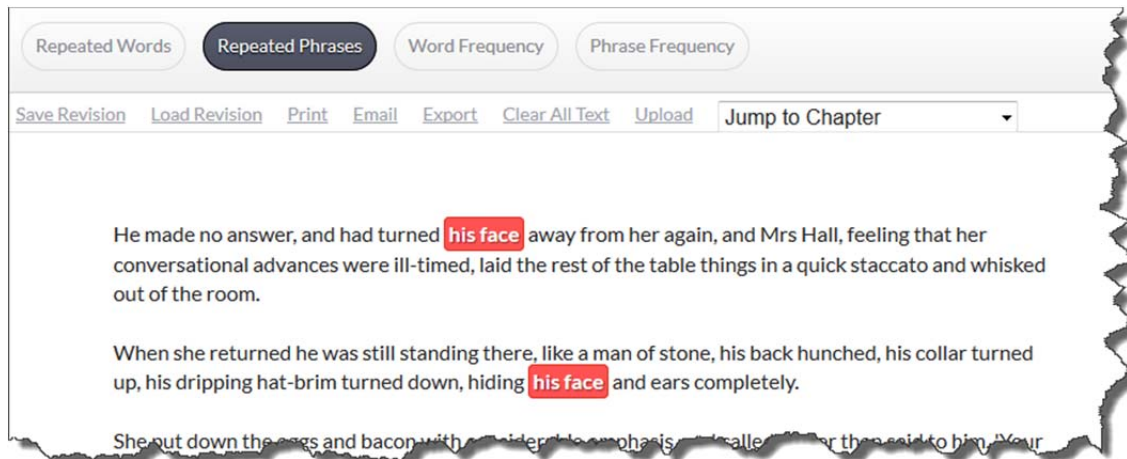
Sarah nodded. "There could be **half a dozen** spread around the traverse."

Half a dozen! Was that all? A one in six chance that someone from Alex's group had died?

2. The phrase is short and common, and the repetition works.

The news of Marcus's death had been devastating, but instant. This was different. The waiting, the not knowing, was almost worse than **the news** itself.

How can AutoCrit help?



AutoCrit has a tool specifically designed to help you spot repeated phrases in your manuscript. Within the Editor under the Repetition Tab, choose the Repeated Phrases subcategory. The Editor will highlight areas in your manuscript where you repeat the same phrases within a few paragraphs. Aim to use synonyms and unique descriptions and eliminate unnecessary repetition.



If AutoCrit shows you that you tend to rely on repeated phrases, make sure you look at your whole manuscript for repetition using the Phrase Frequency Analysis. Unusual and uncommon phrases may not necessarily appear close together and fall through the cracks of the Phrase Repetition Analysis. Two occurrences of a very uncommon Phrase might feel like one hundred to the reader.

Our next topic: Repeated Sentence Beginnings

Until then, happy editing!