



This is a living document. I add to it all the time. Probably if I'd gotten an MFA in playwriting, I'd use different words for things, but I didn't and so these are my words. If you've ever tried to edit your script to make it stronger, deeper, tighter, cleaner, etc., then you've no doubt used some of these techniques. It's a great checklist to have handy when working through edits. Please share with your teachers, students, writing groups, and colleagues!

In no particular order...

**PILE-UP**

that thing that happens right before the Explosion

**EXPLOSION**

that thing most writers call the "Climax"

**LAYERING**

that thing when you revisit a scene and go deeper

**TORQUE**

that thing where you add friction to a scene so it turns harder and stronger

**YELP**

a cry of pain; a very quick sharp burst of a line uttered by a character in response to agonizing emotional pain or torment

**GOLD**

that thing or moment in a script that is so perfect, so right, so genuinely spot-on that, in its absence, the world would stop spinning

**LAVA LAMPING**

that thing where you devise a little something interesting to bubble up into a scene every now and then, and maybe it's never fully explained but delightful nonetheless because not everything needs an explanation; it can just be lava or whatever you want it to be

**SHADOW BOXING**

that thing where characters start taking jabs at each other and sometimes kinda passive-aggressively beating each other up before the actual fight

### **CARD TIPPING**

that thing when a character intentionally exposes himself

### **TICK TICK BOOM**

(a.k.a "Ratcheting")

this is when you go back through a high-pitched scene and carefully place words or actions that palpably lurch the tension higher or tighter in a given moment, and whatever it is you added should be stealth but clockable by anyone within a three-mile radius

### **CLOCKING**

it's that moment (a *skipped heartbeat* kind of moment) when a character notices, with undeniable clarity, something of great significance; a solid radar strike...

### **LINE TOSS**

that line you write for a character to be delivered breezily as they pass through the scene and to them it means nothing but to the other character it is total devastation

### **CLOAKING**

that thing where you take awkward exposition and break it up in such a way that it doesn't feel like someone just listing facts -- either by turning a sentence into a question, by dividing up the lines, by stylizing in a way that sounds more casual, etc.

### **PEPPERING**

that thing when you realize something about a character and you gotta go back through the script and put little spots of that in other places

### **THREADING**

(a.k.a. "Weaving")

that thing where you recognize a new layer in a character or a story and you go back looking for places to pull it through

**TENSIONING**

that thing where you prune and remove all the noise and fluffery so the scene gains electricity

**DISTILLATION**

the collective effort that is finding the absolute essentials of a script so that it gets stronger and more meaningful

**EASY MONEY**

that thing where you (sometimes anachronistically) co-opt a line or a joke from pop culture or current events because you know it will get a laugh

**BLUE'S CLUES**

that thing you put in the stage directions for an actor or a director so that even the dumbest turnip will get it

**SPIT-BALLING**

that thing where you make shit up

**SPAGHETTI-WALLING**

that thing you do when a scene is approaching *al dente* and you throw it at the wall to see if it sticks; it's also that thing when you just want to play or try something, because why not

**REPURPOSING**

that thing when you cut something you love for the sake of the scene but find a way to use it elsewhere in different context

**TEXTURIZING**

that thing when you take a scene that is thin and flimsy, but otherwise a solid choice, and just mess it up a little

**DECLUTTERING**

that thing where you get rid of all the things you aren't absolutely in love with

**TENNIS**

that thing where you turn a monologue into a back-and-forth with another character

**WEAPONIZING**

that thing where you turn one character's words or actions against them later in the play (this is pure evil, and it works best in the Fight Scene because people don't think about their words when they are in the heat of battle)

**FIGHT SCENE**

another word for "Pile-Up" but can also occur after the Explosion; either way, this is that thing where we hear the raw truth of the characters and usually where we dead-center on the crux of the matter

**PULLING TAFFY**

that thing where you draw something out so it takes a little longer or adds tension or mystery

**LIFTING**

that thing you do when a scene has gotten heavy or needs some humor, so you find a way to give the audience a break

**FOCUSING**

that thing when you rework a line or a section so that it draws more attention or gains clarity

**MUTING**

that thing where you blunt the force of a moment or a scene

**DENATURING**

a not always intentional scenario where a character is somehow stripped of his/her/their original makeup (e.g., core behaviors, objectives, values)

**FALSE SAVINGS**

that thing where you over-engineer a fix that adds little or zero value to the overall

**DEFRAGMENTING**

that thing where you examine a scene for flow and energy and remove all the dirt and shit that is getting in the way so it gets tighter and cleaner

**REFACTORING**

that thing where you have a revelation about something that kinda changes the ending of a scene or a story and you go back through and make adjustments so it fits with the new ending, or calibrate the foreshadowing and other clues so that the audience has the right amount of hints or mystery at any given moment

**REIMAGINING**

that thing where you have an idea for something and you decide to keep the gist of a scene but rewrite it in a whole new light or context or flavor

**EASY WRITING**

that thing when the words come so fast you don't trust them because good writing can't possibly be that easy

**BAD WRITING**

that thing you say when someone wants to know what's wrong with a line and you come clean about it.

**SHITTY WRITING**

a few levels down from bad writing

**ANOTHER STORY**

that section of a script you know darn well does not belong here

**POWER-UP**

that thing you give a character so they can do something hard

**HEALTH**

that thing you give a character who has been emotionally or physically wounded by another character but still needs to stay alive long enough to come back and finish the scene

**CHARITABLE GIVING**

that thing where you donate a character's lines to another character, either out of guilt because they don't have enough lines or because it's just a nice and relatively painless thing to do

**EASTER EGGING**

that thing when you steal a line from another one of your stories and wait around to see how many people notice

**EASTER EGGNOG**

same as Easter Egging except this is done quite intentionally to show continuity regarding the eternal questions that are the basis of all your writings

**CORE**

(a.k.a. "Core Writing")

a moment or section of the script that contains a high-ranking central question or narrative moment and therefore has seniority and privilege

**FLUFF**

the opposite of **Core**

**DOG LEGGING**

(a form of Tensioning)

that thing where a character asks a question and instead of getting a direct response, the other character either plays dumb or obtuse or whatever and delays the answer until another part of the conversation

**DEMOTING**

that thing where you devalue a bit of text so it's still useful but doesn't draw as much attention

**NON SEQUITUR**

that thing when something random, hilarious or unexpected happens (or is said by a character) right in the middle of something else - an element of surprise, great for releasing tension

**FRUIT FLYING**

that thing where you create a recurring nuisance for a character

**SHEET CAKING**

that thing when a character is doing something hilariously self-destructive, like maybe eating a whole sheet cake, because it's easier than dealing with actual feelings