

# Self-Editing Content/Development Checklist 2.0

The first thing to do is to take off your Writer hat. A good strategy may be to put on your Reader hat, and go through the story, using a notebook to write down what you could change or revise (without making any changes to the document yet). Then, as an Editor, make those changes.

## Story

- Approach the story like you're a random reader picking it up off the shelf. Make a list of what doesn't work. You can include possible suggestions for how to fix those things.
- Again, as a reader, read through and make a list of things about the story you like. (This can be done at the same time as the above point.)
- Sum up the story in a few brief sentences. If you can't do so, ask yourself why.
- Have you hooked your reader's attention in 13 lines or less?
- Does the narrative follow one main character, or does it split between multiple? How does this affect the story?
- What is the conflict or the story? (Character vs. technology; Character vs. nature; Character vs. character; Character vs. self; Character vs. society; Character vs. supernatural; Character vs. machine; Character vs. fate)
- Does the story make sense?
- Why are *you* writing *this* story?

## Message/Themes

- What is the main takeaway/message of the story (what do you want your readers to learn)? Does it come across clearly?
- What are some themes in the story (ie. family, acceptance, love, self-worth, etc.)?
- What are your strategies to convey this message/these themes? Is it clear to the reader without being in-your-face obvious?

## Structure

- Review the POV (point of view). Is it 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person (I, you, he/she)? Consider how the POV affects the story. Does it change at any point? If so, why?
- Review the verb tense you're using. Is it past tense or present tense? Would changing the tense affect the story?
- Does the narrative follow one main character, or does it split between multiple? How does this affect the story?
- Have you included a prologue and/or epilogue? Are they necessary?
- Does the story progress chronologically, or does it flash forward/backward in time as it progresses?

- Is this book part of a series? If so, what is the overarching goal of the series, and how does this book play a role in that?
- What is the significance of starting the story at the point that you did (as opposed to earlier or later)?

## Plot

- Rewrite the story in main points. Outline the progress of the plot in the five stages (normal life, catalyst, rising action, climax, resolution).
- What is the overarching goal of the story? Have you accomplished this goal?
- Does each scene serve to move the plot forward? Are there any that exist merely to provide information about the world and/or characters? (If so, revise. Character building can be done in scenes that also progress plot.)
- Are there any scenes/events that happen for the sake of the plot moving forward (coincidences, etc.)?
- Is the conclusion reached as a result of character action? Why or why not?
- What is the climax of the story? The big event that takes place and everything after that is a result of it. (ie. Tybalt dying in *Romeo & Juliet*; Katniss threatening to eat the berries to win the Hunger Games)
- Does the story end in a satisfying way? Why or why not? Is anything unresolved?

## Characters

- Review your main character. What are their flaws? What are their strengths? What makes the reader root for them to succeed?
- What lesson does your main character learn over the course of the story? How do they grow/evolve as a person?
- Is your main character also your protagonist? Why or why not?
- Who is the antagonist? If it is a character, what drives them? What is their backstory, and what is their ultimate goal? Are they unredeemable?
- Who are your supporting characters? What are their strengths? What are their flaws? What do they bring to the story?
- Are there any characters that can be combined into one?
- As a whole, do your characters feel realistic? If they're one-dimensional, how can you fix that?
- Are the characters acting, or are they merely reacting" (What drives them to do what they're doing?)
- Reading with the mindset of a stranger, do the characters blend into one another, or are they unique?
- Do any characters share names with one another? What is the specific reason for that?
- Are there any points where the reader may be confused by a character's actions and/or motivations that isn't resolved?
- Is their dialogue interesting and informative?

- What does each character *want*? What is their underlying desire? Is this clear to the reader? if not, is that intentional?
- Which characters undergo development throughout the story? Which characters stay the same?
- Do your developing characters have a clear arc that they follow?
- What lesson does your protagonist learn throughout the story? What lesson does your antagonist learn (if they do)?

### Relationships

- Does your story contain any romantic relationships? If so, are they healthy or unhealthy?
- Does your story contain any familial relationships? How close/distant are the members?
- Does your story contain any friendships? How long have they been going on? How close are the friends?
- Consider the main takeaway you want your readers to have about the relationships. Which do you want them to embody?
- If including a romantic relationship, what is the chemistry like between your characters? Would they work as friends first?
- Consider the speed in which your characters fall into romance. How is the pacing?

### Worldbuilding

- Is your story set in the real world or a made-up world?
- If real, are there any aspects that are made-up or fantastical (not including your plot/characters)?
- If real, how accurate do you want to be? (Correct facts, history, dates, weather, etc.)
- If made-up, what new conventions are you introducing to your reader?
- If made-up, does your world feel too generic, or is there something making it unique?
- Do the worldly conventions stay consistent throughout?
- Is there anything that may be confusing to your reader? if so, how can you fix it?
- Does the writing match the time period? (Avoid anachronisms: words, phrases, slang, inventions, events, references, etc.)
- Real or made-up, what does your reader *need to know* about this world? Make a checklist.

### Pacing

- How quickly or slowly does the plot move along? How many points get you from the beginning of the story to the end?
- Are there any scenes that feel like they drag? Are there any that feel rushed?
- How does the pacing affect the story? (Action stories are typically faster paced, whereas romances go for a slower, relaxed pace.)
- Does each chapter have a purpose? Do they each fulfill that purpose?
- How much time are you spending on each of the characters and/or plot points? Is there anyone that has more/less than they should?

## Writing Quality

- Can you recognize your own writing style? Is it brief or wordy? What do you focus on when giving descriptions? What is your narrative or dialogue ratio? How carefully do you choose your words?
- Read the story out loud (or use the Read Aloud function on your word processor). How do the sentences sound out loud? Are they clunky, or do they flow?
- Gauge the length of your sentences. Are they varied or are they all short? All long? Do the length and complexity of the sentences match the tone of the scene (ie. tense, relaxed, excited, joyful, etc.)?

See Tigerpetal Press's Services page for Editing and Design work

See the blog for more writing tips

Last updated: December 13, 2023