

The Go Teen Writers Self-Editing Checklist

Macro Edit

Plot

Is my story problem established early? Why should the reader care? How is the beginning of my story? Have I:

- Shown the main character in his home world?
- Presented my main character with an invitation to go on a journey?
- Made it so he *chooses* to go on the journey? Have I given him a compelling enough reason?
- Established my character's goal?

How is the middle of my story? Have I:

- Given my main character multiple people, places, activities, or objects to love and fight for?
- Presented my characters with multiple obstacles to overcome?
- Designed several big twists in the story?
- Created a big midpoint scene?
- Created a clear disaster that leads to an "all hope is lost" moment for the character?
- Made my other characters (antagonist and secondary) active? Are they living lives of their own?

How is the end of my story? Have I:

- Locked my main character into a final battle of sorts?
- Written a convincing win or loss?
- Written a denouement that fits the story?

Characters

Does my main character ...

- Have an internal and external goal? What does he or she want most in the world?
- Have an inner desire? (Love, respect, honor)
- Believe in a lie?
- Choose to go on the story journey? If not, what would have to happen for him to choose to go?
- Have multiple people, places, or objects he loves?
- Go through grief when he loses something?

Does my antagonist ...

- Have an internal and external goal of his own?
- Actively work to foil the plans of my main character?
- Have a compelling backstory and inner desire?

- Believe in a lie?
- Have anything or anyone he cares about?

Do the other characters in the story ...

- Have different backstories from each other?
- Have problems of their own?
- Have something they want? Does it conflict with what the main character is trying to achieve?
- Oppose or challenge my main character's worldview?

Setting

Have I taken time to consider my main character's feelings about the setting?

What needs to be researched still?

What are the "laws" for my setting or magic and are they consistent with each other?

(Applies mostly to fantasy/sci-fi.)

Theme

Did any themes grow organically when I wrote the story? If so, what are they?

Is there a way I can draw them out further?

Is there a symbol I can use?

Is this a theme my antagonist embraces as well or no?

Micro Edit

Check each scene for use of:

Point of View

Did I do a good job picking my POV character for each scene?

Did I share anything that the POV character wouldn't know?

Do I jump into anyone else's thoughts *or* do I try too hard to broadcast the thoughts and feelings of another character in the scene?

Run a search for the words "they" or "their." Can I replace any of these with words that better reflect my POV character?

How is my balance of inner monologue? Am I letting the reader draw close to the character?

Backstory and Flashbacks

Did I over-explain anything in this scene?

Did I tell the backstory from the POV characters worldview?

If a flashback is used, did I put it at a time that makes sense?

Dialogue

Did I punctuate my dialogue in a way that makes my meanings clear?

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by Stephanie Morrill & Jill Williamson

www.goteenwriters.com

Did my characters use different words and phrases from each other?
Have I considered this conversation from the views of all participants?
Run a search for “said,” “asked,” and other dialogue tags I use often. Is there an action tag or thought beat that would work better?
Why is my character saying this *now*? Why does she feel this is the right/best time?
Are there places where I info dump in my dialogue? Pay close attention to spots where I refer to time. (“Since today is Thursday, your assignment is due in two days.”)
In group conversations, how is the pacing? Is everyone pulling their own weight in the conversation?

Telling and Showing

Run a search for telling words: notice, found, spotted, experienced, looked, feeling, felt, watched, wondered, listened, tried, seemed, and thought. Did I use these words well? Or did I rely on them for telling the story instead of showing it?
Search for telling adverbs. Am I saying “he walked quickly” when I could say “he rushed?”
Run a search for the phrase “with a” and see if I tried to sneak in some telling that way too.

Description

Did I give context for my scenes within the first paragraph (location, characters, time)?
Did I describe things through the eyes of my POV character?
Did I mention any items that may be important later? (If someone throws a vase at the end of the scene, make sure to mention it when describing the room.)
Was I smart about my word choice? Did I pick specific nouns, verbs, and adjectives that help set the mood for my story?
What senses (taste, touch, smell, feel, hear) have I used in each scene? Can I use more or different ones?

Freshening and Tightening Your Writing

Survey the length of sentences. Do I need to vary them?
Can I break up any long paragraphs?
Read the scene for clichés and overused phrases.
Apply the words of George Orwell to every sentence:
1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will best express it?
3. Is there an image or idiom that will make it clear?
4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?
Run a search for the word “it” and see if I can use a more specific word, especially if it’s the start of a sentence.
Are there places I used two words when I could use one instead?
Have I chosen the best possible words? Active, concrete words?
Search for the words: as, when, while, after, and continued to. Make sure those sentences are in a logical order—action, then reaction.
Hunt down passive phrases—search each scene for “was” or “is” depending on the tense of the book.
Check any sentences that begin with —ing words.
Check any sentences that use the phrases “began to” or “started to.”

Have I formatted everything correctly?

Is my title page single spaced and my manuscript double spaced?

Am I using 12-point Times New Roman or Courier font?

Does each chapter begin on a new page?

Do I have one space after punctuation, not two?

Run Spell Check

Double-check for correct punctuation, grammar, and common typos:

Run a search for those tricky words and any others I tend to misspell:

“Chance” when I meant “change”

Its/it’s

Know/now

Loose/lose

Past/passed

They’re/their/there

Thing/think

Though/through/thought

Run a search for my placeholders.

What’s a placeholder?

Many writers, when they come across something they need to research or write in more detail but don’t want to take the time right then, they’ll put in a placeholder word or symbol to mark that they need to come back.

Stephanie uses the word “GIRAFFE” for things she needs to fill in or an asterisk (*) if she’s not happy with a phrase but doesn’t have the brainpower at the moment to fix it. Jill tends to highlight the place that needs a little more love, or she’ll add a comment to remind herself what she needs to come back and finish.

While typically you’ll have fixed them all by the end of the micro edit, always run a check for your placeholders just to be sure!