

Novel Revision Final Checklist

(Pulled together from various sources—classes, seminars, internet, magazines, books, etc. *)

Beginning

Did I

- jump into problem;
- start as close as possible to ending;
- start with moment that leads into "the abyss" for the character (use dialogue and tone—not always thought);
- do my job as author: keep the reader up all night;
- make the first sentence (one read by the most people) terrific;
- plant the seeds of the end; and
- engage reader's mind?

Middle (The complication; not a transition)

Did I

- intensify established conflicts for character; create additional ones; "break the other leg;" make life more and more difficult (Character arc sags as character fails again and again);
- make this a time for growth and change;
- move toward resolution or a recognition of self or someone else;
- move plot upward in tension; draw reader more and more into the story, make him/her more tense (Plot arc rises as action and tension increase);
- fully develop the theme;
- fully develop character's yearning;
- draw every thread of the story (placed in the beginning) through to the end; and
- make the critical connection between mind and heart?

End

Did I

- resolve the story, and create the climax here—in a way that is major, of great consequence;
- make story strong—by accompanying with character's or reader's understanding, realization (usually internal. "No place like home," to Dorothy in Kansas);
- circle back to (reflect) the beginning; and
- engage reader's heart?

Did I:

1. as soon as possible, place the reader into the action, space, and time of the story;
2. tell the reader:
 - who the story is about,
 - what that character is doing,
 - where he/she is doing it, and
 - when it's happening;
3. observe something in this story that will strike the reader as fresh;
4. bring something to this story that is uniquely my own (stories are clichés if there's nothing new in writer's treatment—they're good fiction if writer's energy and unique insight give them life);
5. think of my novel as being like a movie (both move from one scene to the next to the next, over time);
6. "underwrite a scene," (it's "slight"); or did I "write into the scene," see the scene vividly, use patience, slow the scene down);
7. use specificity of detail to give significance to characters;
8. in action scenes, use short and/or partial sentences, and sharp, quick verbs (because character doesn't have time, especially if danger involved, to think in complete, long sentences); and
9. write tight-by eliminating:
 - there is/are,
 - it seemed that,
 - forms of verb, to be—"is, are, was, were, have been, has had, will be," etc,
 - just, very, so, suddenly,
 - "that, who, which," followed by "is, are, was, have, will, etc.,"
 - words that end in, "-ing," "-ion," "-ment,"
 - passive verbs,
 - in action scenes—"could, should, must,"
 - excess prepositions, e.g., editor of the newspaper,

- teacher of the class, etc.,
- “made a/an—, e.g., suggestion choice, addition, donation,” etc., and instead use, suggest, choose, add, donate,” etc.,
 - verb-nouns, e.g., “gave a speech, reached a decision, came to a conclusion, etc. instead, use verbs, e.g., spoke, decided, concluded, etc., and
 - clichés, e.g., “eyes grew round,” “heart pounded,” “shivers up spine,” “wind-whipped branches,” etc.?

Review ideas from E. M. Forster (make necessary changes):

“Treat characters as you do when you meet someone—no one immediately reveals that their second marriage is on the rocks. But the person might drop a subtle hint. Characters grow from flat to round.”

“Minor characters are extraordinarily important. They are remembered (by reader); if filled with life, they enrich the texture of the narrative.”

“Establish minor characters strongly and clearly; give them distinctive, recognizable traits and distinguishing features.”

“About physical description of character—flesh has heft, takes up space, feels through the skin. A fat thigh or a bony arm makes a person more vivid than eye color.”

Review ideas from Anton Chekhov (make necessary changes):

“When you depict sad/unhappy people, and want to touch people’s hearts, be colder—it gives their grief a background against which it stands in sharper relief.”

“Suffer with your characters so that the reader doesn’t notice. The more objective the writer, the stronger will be the effect.”

“All explanations involve the particular; one cannot render (draw a picture) without being specific.”