Story Content Checklist

Use this checklist to review your draft.

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☐ Did you brainstorm **titles**?	Brainstorm 25 different titles. Nothing? 25 more, etc.
☐ Does the **title** fit the piece?	Titles are weirdly the #1 reason people select books.
☐ Is the **lead** effective and hook the reader? Is the **ending** powerful, believable, and memorable?	The writer's first chance to keep the reader, and the writer's last chance to make a great impression on said reader.
☐ **Internal Conflict** or **External Conflict**: Is there a clear conflict that drives the main character and events that take place in the story? Is there an "inciting incident" that creates the conflict?	**Internal**: The main character struggles about a personal decision or personality flaw. **External**: Protagonist struggles against an antagonist, something in nature, or in society.
☐ **Protagonist**: Is there an obvious main character?	The central character trying to overcome the main conflict who the reader (hopefully!) wants to succeed.
☐ **Antagonist**: Character preventing the success of the protagonist. Is there one in your story?	Does this character create believable obstacles to the main character's goals?
☐ **Minor Characters:** Have three responsibilities.	1. They help provide or demonstrate more about the major characters, like the protagonist or antagonist. 2. The help move or advance the story forward. 3. Minor characters help set the tone for the scenes in which they appear
☐ **Setting** is clear and vividly described.	Time period is communicated through culture, places, and the way people speak.
☐ **Sensory details** add color and depth to story.	How many of the 5 senses did you include?
☐ **Showing**: Vivid details to describe a character's emotions & actions, setting, and plot.	**Telling**: Avoid being too vague or making general statements that lack specific detail.
☐ **Beginning**: the **exposition** of setting and intro of the main character is clear and defined	Main character, conflict, and setting are present.
☐ **Middle**: Scenes of rising action feature main character trying to resolve the conflict in a way that moves the story forward with believable obstacles in the way. Rising action lives here.	Try to avoid coincidences as easy ways of the protagonist achieving goals of overcoming problems. This is the bulk of the story and needs to keep the reader involved and interested.
☐ **Ending**: Do you have a climax where the protagonist either solves (most of the time) or doesn't solve the main problem? This is where we find the climax, falling action, resolution and denouement.	Has the protagonist changed in some way during the story? The conflict should be resolved in a way that makes sense. If not resolved—do we smell sequel?
☐ **Word Choice**: Is the vocabulary appropriate to the narrative and dialogue?	Strong action verbs, specific nouns (names), and unique adjectives add depth and don't distract.

Editor's Review	All Things Considered
☐ **Active Voice:** The subject of the sentence *does the action*. More than any other part of speech, your action verbs provide your reader with a visual image of what is described in the sentence. ☐ Do your **action verbs** help reveal more about the characters' actions, motives, and personality traits?	**Passive Voice**: The subject of the sentence *receives the action*. The following 23 verbs are all passive/show no action. **Linking Verbs**: Links the subject to more info about the subject: **to be:** am•is•are•was•were•be•being•been **Helping Verbs:** Helps the main verb extend meaning, particularly as it relates to past, present, & future time. have•has•had•do•does•did•shall•will•should•can•could•would•may•might•must
☐ **Voice**: The narrative **voice** has a unique identity/style. This is what makes each of your favorite books, short stories, and essays different and individual. **Point of View** (POV) influences the voice of the story.	POV: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or omniscient voice consistent? 1st Person: I•me•my•mine•we•us•our•ours 2nd Person: you•your•yours 3rd Person: she•her•hers•herself•he•him•his•himself•they•them•their•theirs•themselves
☐ **Sentence Fluency**: There is a flow to the story that helps make the reading experience satisfying regardless of genre.	May be a mix of longer and shorter sentences. Beginnings of sentences are consistently different. Punctuation is accurate.
☐ **Pacing**: Do you feel that your writing reflects the proper speed and flow for this piece?	Pacing is both the "speed" at which the narrative moves and it is an approach or manner in which the writer manipulates scenes to keep a reader engaged in the story.
☐ **Adverbs:** Limit your use of them in your writing. Use adverbs sparingly since they tend to be vague such as: *kindly, safely, warmly, very, & really.* Most words ending in *ly* are adverbs—but not all.	You can tell an adverb if the word answers one of these questions: *why, when, where, or how (to what extent).* The sentence or dialogue should be clear enough to make the adverb unnecessary.