

Hint List for Reviewers

Version 1.6

Don't you hate that moment when the reviewer says "I can't think of anything to criticise"? The author (after a momentary ego boost) thinks "I've wasted my time, I wanted improvement tips." The reviewer feels embarrassed at having nothing to say and the audience shuffles because they were hoping for a fresh insight. Suffer embarrassment no more! Get ideas from this list of more than seventy common problems in writing.

NB Authors may use this as a checklist – but reviewers, please present no more than two of these issues in one review.

Openings

- Does the first line make you want to read on?
- Does the first page make you want to read on?
- Does the first chapter make you want to read on?
- Does the first chapter set the scene for what is to come?
- Does the opening establish the tone and pace of what is to come?
- Does the first chapter contain too much detail or too many characters?

Dialogue

- Is it appropriate to the speakers?
- Can the different voices be distinguished?
- Is it believable? Do people speak like that?
- Is the amount right?
- Does it move the plot forward?
- Does it contribute to characterisation?

Description

- Is it vivid?
- Is the amount right?
- Does it contribute to the mood of the piece?

Characterisation

- Is character made clear from the players' actions? i.e. is it shown, not told?
- Do the characters of the main players develop with the plot?
- Is each player's actions consistent with his character?
- Is it always clear why players act the way they do?

Language

- Does it flow? Does it work when read aloud?
- Does it work "off the page" i.e. ignoring how well it is read aloud.
- Is it appropriate for the era and the subject
- Is it appropriate for the intended audience? e.g. too formal, too informal, too profane, too subtle, too literary, too literal, too abstract, too clever, too patronising, too slow, too racy, too sexy, not sexy enough.
- Does it contain clichés; mixed metaphors; purple passages; unwanted repetition?
- Are tenses wisely chosen? Are they used consistently, appropriately, correctly?
- Is the use of first/third person consistent and appropriate?
- Are words used correctly?
- Is the passive voice overused?
- Can it benefit from tightening or expanding?
- Is it beautiful?
- In formally structured poetry...**
- Does it scan and rhyme correctly?
- Does it meet the constraints of the form?

Research

- "Does my research look big in this?" i.e. are facts introduced naturally into the story rather than delivered as a lecture?
- Are the facts accurate?
- Are the facts necessary to the plot or the readers' understanding?
- Is it authoritative?

Plot (fiction)

Argument (nonfiction)

- Does it move forward?
- Does it make sense?
- Is plot development shown, not told?
- Is it consistent? (Any non sequiturs?)
- Is there any irrelevant content?
- Do the details support the conclusion?
- Is it interesting?
- Is it new?
- Is there a message? What is it?
- Is the plot too simple or too complex for the intended audience?
- How well paced is it?
- Do all subplots contribute to the overall piece?
- Is players' plot knowledge consistent with their point of view?
- Is reader's plot knowledge consistent with narrative point of view?

Closings

- Is the end satisfying?
- Are there any unintended loose ends?
- If there is a twist, is it too obvious or too "tricky"?
- Does the conclusion follow from the content?

General

- Is the point of view consistent and appropriate?
- Is it funny? Is it meant to be?
- Is there a market for it?
- Will it appeal to the intended audience?
- Are there any unnecessary players?
- Are names sufficiently distinct to avoid confusion?
- Is it the right length?



Hog's Back Writers

Please email additions to this list to napoleon@tesspub.com

Guide to reviewing and latest version of this list at www.hbw.org.uk