

Inked VOICES

Critique Cheat Sheet

I: Read the submission as a reader

- How did you feel while reading the piece?
- Did you empathize with the characters?
- What kind of reader would enjoy the work?
- Did you ever get lost, confused or lose interest? If so, where?

II: Read the submission as a writer

PLOT

- Does the main character have a clear problem, goal or desire?
- Is there enough conflict to make things interesting?
 - Is there emotional conflict within the main character?
 - Is there conflict between characters?
 - Are the stakes high enough?
 - Is conflict resolved too easily?
- Subplots
 - Do subplots carry the story forward?
 - Do subplots get resolved?
- Beginnings
 - Does the opening grab readers?
 - Does the story begin in the right place?
 - Does the beginning introduce the key characters and plot right away? Or does it spend too much time setting things up?
- Middles
 - Does the middle include obstacles, complications and conflict that make the main character's goal harder to reach?
- Endings
 - Does the main character solve his or her own problem?
 - Does the ending make sense without being predictable?
 - Is the ending satisfying?

What is working well?

What needs additional work?

- Flow
 - Does the plot progress chapter by chapter or page by page (for short works)?
 - Are transition points clear?
 - Are the right events included at the right level of detail and the right order?
- CHARACTERS
 - Do the characters seem real?
 - Is each character important to the story?
 - Is character revealed by showing thoughts, actions, dialogue and appearance?
 - Character development
 - Do the characters have some complexity? Do they have traits that are both positive and negative?
 - Do the characters change over the course of the story?
 - Are any characters stereotypical or predictable?
 - Are the supporting characters appropriately round or flat?
 - Basics
 - Do the names suit the characters?
 - Do characters act in a way consistent with their age, profession and culture?
 - Did you get a sense of the character's daily life?

DIALOGUE

- Is there an appropriate amount of dialogue?
 - Does the dialogue move the plot forward?
- Is the dialogue realistic and natural? Remember that contractions and imperfect grammar are OK.
- Is the dialogue consistent with each character's personality and voice?
- Is the dialogue focused or does it ramble? Use the pieces of a conversation that reveal a character.
- Is dialogue being used to squeeze in lengthy explanations/background?
- If dialect is used, is there so much dialect that the dialogue is hard to understand?
- Do the dialogue tags get in the way?
 - Tags mark who is talking. Avoid much use of adjectives and adverbs.

POINT OF VIEW

- Does the story use the most effective point of view?
- Does the point of view change? If so, do the changes happen at logical chapter or line breaks?
- Does the POV ever slip unintentionally?

VOICE

- Is there a clear and consistent voice to the story?

DESCRIPTION

- Are descriptions given through the lens of a character?
 - Do descriptions use the five senses?
- Are descriptions specific or vague?
- Are descriptions creative?
- Are there long passages of description that slow down the story? Are any parts over-described?
- Is it clear what is happening?

SETTING

- Is the setting clear?
 - Did you feel like you were there?
- Are the characters, description and dialogue consistent with the chosen setting?
- Are there anachronisms (events out of sync with the time)?

(TIME AND PLACE)

THEME

- Is there an underlying theme or idea to the work?
- Does the piece preach?

PACING

- Did the story move too fast, too slow or just right?
- Are any scenes unnecessary to move the story forward?

ORIGINALITY

- Is the idea fresh or original?

LANGUAGE

- Is the writing clear?
- Are the words strong and specific?
 - Does the word choice enhance the story?
- Is the language creative? Could it be strengthened with simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia or alliteration?
- Is there variety in sentence structure?

TOPE

- Does the tone (attitude) of the piece fit?

GENRE

- What genre is the piece?
- How well does the piece fit in its genre?

WATCH OUT FOR

- Telling (instead of showing)
- Spelling errors
- Grammar malfunctions
- Wordy sections
- Too many adjectives or adverbs
- Passive voice
- Mixed metaphors
- Qualifiers that undercut your language (e.g. really, very, just).
- Clichés