1: 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?
Critique Cheat Sheet

**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.

**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 (Time and Place)**
- 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)?

**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?

**Tone**
- 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

Small-setting, online critique groups.

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