

Story Writing Tips

1. Always have the following parts:
 1. setting – describes the place/world, introduces the main character/s and important relationships
 2. rising action – call to action for the character, other helping/hindering characters introduced, all action that leads us to the main conflict or turning point
 3. climax – main conflict or turning point
 4. falling action – all action that results due to the climax (how new alliances or enemies react, how the bounty is used, adventures on the return home, etc)
 5. resolution – the final moment of the story where we see the results of the actions in the story and how life has changed or stayed the same (may wrap up all conflicts or perhaps introduce/hint at a new one to leave the reader waiting for a continuation)
2. Use ALL SIX senses when describing: look, sound, smell, taste, touch, feeling (emotion, mood)
Show, not Tell. All of the following can be revealed through dialogue and action, rather than outright telling. While it is okay to list some of them to give the reader a starting picture, most should be revealed by showing.:
 1. names
 2. personality traits
 3. appearance
 4. emotions
 5. relationships
 6. socio-economic status (personal and regional wealth)
 7. race/ethnicity
 8. origin
 9. social group (clique)
 10. age
3. Give each character individual voice and personality. Some characters might have different vocabularies, accents, or manners of speaking. By using different voices, a writer can reveal age, origin, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, social group, etc.
4. There should be a natural and clear cause-and-effect in your story. One event should cause the next or other future events.
5. Each new person who speaks or acts and each new location/idea should have its own paragraph.
6. Try not to rely solely on elementary words that indicate speaking such as: said and asked
7. Use dialogue to tell us what each person said back-and-forth. Do not just summarize what was said.

Example: They discussed eggs. → Correction: who spoke first? What did he/she say?
How did the other person respond? etc.
8. Write out action so that it is play-by-play. Do not just summarize everything.

Example: They had a huge brawl. → Correction: describe what happened from point A to point Z in the brawl.

General Writing Tips

(applies to all types of writing)

1. Do not use contractions (unless it is in dialogue and it is appropriate for the character).
2. Do not repeat ideas or words.
3. Avoid elementary words (unless it is in dialogue and it is appropriate for the character) such as: get (and all forms of it), make (and all forms of it), do (and all forms of it), good, bad, ugly, pretty, tall, short, happy, sad, mad, stuff, thing, etc.
4. Look for Unknown Pronouns. Technically, a pronoun always references the last noun that matches it. If you have more than one noun a pronoun could match, your pronoun reference becomes fuzzy.
Example: The old man and the boy walked his dog, and he waved. (To whom does the dog belong? Who or what waved?)
5. Do not end a sentence in a preposition (to, on, under, etc)
Example: We talked to the man he was with. → Correction: We talked to man who accompanied him.
6. Be careful with tense. If you are not changing from something told in the past to something in the present or future, the tense should not change.
7. Watch subject/verb agreement.
Example: He run down the street → Corrected: He runs down the street.
8. Write out numbers that are less than twenty-five as words. Numbers larger than twenty five can be written as a number (ex: 52).
9. Be careful with homophones. Know and employ the correct use of: to/too/two, there/their/they're, your/you're, it's/its and other homophones.
10. Be sure to properly use plurals vs. possessives. Plurals generally do not use an 's. Possessives (when something belongs to someone) generally use an 's (with the exception of its, her/hers, his, their, theirs, your/yours).
11. Vary your sentence length. Don't make all of your sentences very short with single clauses or all of them very long with multiple clauses.
12. Always read your paper out loud to someone else and ask them to summarize your story/paper back to you. This will help you to check for missing/incorrect words and for awkward/unclear explanations.

Punctuation

(applies to all types of writing)

1. If there is a dependent clause followed by an independent clause with NO conjunction in between, there should be a comma between the clauses.
Example: Without thinking, she ran down the street.
2. If there is an independent clause followed by an independent clause with a conjunction in between, there should be a comma between the clauses.
Example: He is smart, and he also eats apples.
3. If there is an independent clause followed by a dependent clause with NO conjunction in between, there should be a comma between the clauses.
Example: She ran down the street, waving at people as she went.
4. If there is a transition word followed by an independent clause, there should be a comma between the transition and the independent clause.
Example: However, she was at a loss for words.
5. If there is a greeting word followed by the person who is addressed with that greeting, there should be a comma between the greeting and the person's name.
Example: Hello, Joe.
Exception: "Dear" - "Dear" is an adjective when used in cases such as "Dear John"
6. If there is a list of nouns, adjectives, etc., there should be a comma between each item on the list.
Example: I wrote a paper with many nouns, adjectives, and verbs.
7. If there is an independent clause followed by a dependent clause with a conjunction in between, there should NOT be a comma between the clauses.
Example: He is smart and eats apples.
8. If two clauses are joined by a preposition, there should NOT be a comma between the clauses.
Example: He thought for a long time with a smile on his face.
9. If a sentence has more than two independent clauses, it is usually a RUN-ON. Separate your ideas into different sentences with periods so that you do not have more than two independent clauses per sentence.
Example: He ran around, and she followed him, and he decided to stop.
→ Correction: He ran around. She followed him, so he decided to stop.
10. If there are two independent clauses with NO conjunction between, this is a RUN-ON. Make these two independent clauses into two separate sentences with a period or add a conjunction between the clauses.
Example: He is smart, he eats apples. → Correction: He is smart. He eats apples.
→ Correction: He is smart, and he eats apples.
11. If there is a dependent clause by itself, this is a FRAGMENT. Add at least one independent clause to the fragment to make a complete sentence.
Example: Without considering his options. → Correction: Without considering his options, he ate the apples.

Quoting

(applies to all types of writing)

1. If something is said as a statement that would end in a period, a comma is used at the end of the dialogue.
Example: "I will not," he said.
2. If something is asked as a question, a question mark is used at the end of the dialogue.
Example: "Where are you?" she asked.
3. If something is exclaimed, an exclamation mark is used at the end of the dialogue.
Example: "You are evil!" I shouted.
4. If you are quoting something that is already in quotes, it should be quoted as follows:
Example: "She ran through the forest and said, 'I am so happy!' "
5. If something is in quotes in one paragraph and then next paragraph is a continuation of the same quote, there should be no end-quote at the end of the first paragraph:
Example:
"Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.
"You and the girls will go..."