Narrative Editing Checklist

Story

☐ The first paragraph opens up a story or presents a question readers will want to know the answer to.

☐ The inciting incident upsets the main character's life and sets them on a quest.

☐ Story can't start any later without losing important pieces of it.

☐ Protagonist has a defined, concrete goal they're moving toward.

☐ The protagonist encounters obstacles on the way to the goal.

☐ The protagonist faces increasing risk to pursue their goal.

☐ Story uses the same verb tense (past, present, or future) throughout.

☐ Story has a consistent point of view (first, second, or third person).

☐ Time varies, compressing the parts that can be glossed over and going into detail during the most dramatic moments.

☐ Story has stakes, something important to be gained or lost.

☐ Story shows where appropriate and tells where appropriate.

☐ Ending is not obvious but seems unavoidable.

Characters

☐ The characters' decisions guide the plot of the story.

☐ The characters aren't cliché.

☐ The characters say things only they would say, using words only they would use.

☐ Someone or something is trying to keep the protagonist from reaching their goal.

☐ Each character moves only toward their own goal.

☐ One of the characters is changed by the events in the story.

☐ The protagonist makes a choice that is irreversible, which leads to the outcome.

Words

☐ Did search for *is*, *was*, and *were* to check for passive voice and strengthen the verb.

☐ Did search for *ly* to root out adverbs.

☐ Interrogated every adjective to make sure it's necessary.

☐ Used software to read the story out loud to make sure each word is the intended one.

☐ Deleted all instances of the word *very*.

☐ Replaced or explained any jargon.

☐ Ran a spell-check.

☐ Reviewed the text for problem words (*they're*, *their*, *there*; *your*, *you're*; *its*, *it's*).

☐ Chose words that are concrete instead of vague, inventive instead of cliché, and unusual without being esoteric.

☐ For dialogue tags, used the word *said* except where appropriate.

Senses

☐ Included visuals, constructing a world for the reader to see.

☐ Included touch, such as texture and temperature, as well as tastes, smells, and sounds.

☐ Description is mixed in with action.

Rhythm and Style

☐ Read the story out loud to make sure it has rhythm and edited parts where it didn't.

☐ Used clear transitions.

☐ Varied the length of sentences, layering in longer ones and shorter ones.

☐ Played with the words to find those most appropriate for the tone, dialect, and purpose.