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.