

Essential Elements of a Story

Like other forms of fiction, a fantasy story requires you—the author—to create a world that not only invites readers inside, but also *compels them to keep reading!* A challenge of writing fiction is that what we imagine in our heads doesn't always translate perfectly to the page. It's easy to assume that the reader sees a landscape the way we do, or understand the interior of a character, or the roots of the problem at hand. In order to lure in our readers, we must return to the drawing board again and again, asking ourselves if we've covered our bases.

This checklist is not intended to suck the fun out of the creative process. Instead, think of it as a tool to use as you add layers and depth to your story. Just another stage of the writing process...

□ The Beginning

- Have you started your story in the right place? Does the first paragraph hook the reader's attention and make them want to read further? You might consider starting "in medias res" (in the middle of things—in the action) and then back up and provide context.
- A beginning often—but not always—includes a character, a notion of time and place, and an intimation of conflict or problem.

□ The Middle

- Are you building toward something (directly or through foreshadowing)? What problem or conflict or fear is driving the action of your story? Do you give the reader a sense of the stakes involved?
- Do you paint your characters vividly, allowing your reader to understand their internal and external struggles? Can the reader *see* your characters?
- Do you weave in details of setting so that the reader can see, hear, smell, and feel this re-imagined world?
- Do you combine scene with sections of summary? When are you showing your reader vs. telling them something? (Both have their time and place!)

□ The End

- Do you leave questions hanging? Is this intentional?
- What feeling do you want to leave your reader with? How can this be achieved? Imagery, flashback, dialogue, moment of insight, metaphor, imagined scene...
- There are so many wonderful ways to end a story. In addition to those listed above, here are a few more to consider: jump forward in time; revisit the beginning; surprise or twist; shift tone, style, or voice.