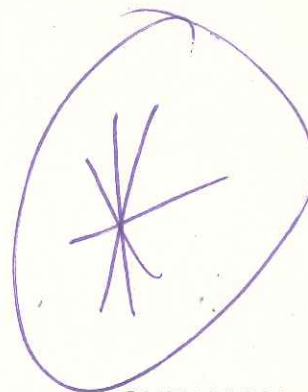


YOUR TURN:

Make a list of ten things that you can do to make writing more of a priority in your life. This can include anything from waking up earlier to hiring a baby-sitter to exercising (to give yourself more energy) to signing up for a writing class. Post this list somewhere, say, above your desk or on the refrigerator. Then really *do* those things, at least some of them. The best way to become a writer is to get serious about being a writer. And the best time to start is right now.

Finally, write. Just lose yourself in the process and let it flow. Writing is the best stimulant in the world. Not when it's going badly, perhaps, but when it's going well . . . oh, baby. Your mood lifts, the Abyss recedes, and your confidence returns. Creative blocks vanish and words flood the page before you. By the very act of writing, you will have accessed your subconscious and tapped into something larger than yourself. You will have become a conduit for the world.



CHEAT SHEET

CHARACTER

- Do your characters have desires?
- Are your characters distinctive enough not to be types?
- Do your characters have contrasting traits that make them complex?
- Are your characters consistent despite their contrasting traits?
- Do your characters have the ability to change?
- Do you know your characters well enough?
- Are the right characters "round" and the right characters "flat"?
- Are you showing your characters more than telling about them?
- Are you utilizing all four methods of showing—action, speech, appearance, thought?
- Do your characters have the right names?

PLOT

- Do you have a major dramatic question?
- Do you have a protagonist with a strong goal and plenty of obstacles?
- Does your protagonist have both external and internal obstacles?
- Do you have a beginning, middle, and end?
- Is your beginning not clogged with too much exposition and not too long?
- Does your conflict escalate in the middle?

- Are the events of your middle linked by cause and effect?
- Do you have crisis, climax, and consequences at the end?
- Is your ending plausible, satisfying, and not too long?

POINT OF VIEW

- Does your story work best in first, second, or third person?
- Does your story work best with a single-vision or multiple-vision POV?
- Is there any reason your story might work best with the omniscient or objective POV?
- If you're using a second- or third-person narrator, how close emotionally is the narrator to the story and characters?
- Are you keeping your POV consistent?

DESCRIPTION

- Are your descriptions utilizing all five senses?
- Are your descriptions specific enough?
- Are you overusing adjectives and adverbs?
- Are you using figurative language and lyrical techniques where appropriate?
- Are your descriptions overdone, choking your story?
- Are you using telling details?
- Are you watching out for such description traps as clichés and mixed metaphors?
- Do your descriptions reflect the consciousness of your POV character or characters?

DIALOGUE

- Are you using dialogue and scenes for the more important points in your story?
- Does your dialogue sound real yet also get to the point quickly?
- Do your tags call too much attention to themselves?
- Are you using stage directions to enhance your dialogue?
- Do your characters sound distinctive from one another and appropriate to who they are?

- Is there anywhere your dialogue can be improved by using subtext?
- Does your dialogue contain clunky exposition or off-putting dialect?

SETTING/PACING

- Have you grounded your story in a specific place, or places?
- Have you grounded your story in a specific time, or times?
- Do the place and time of your story affect the action?
- Are there opportunities to let the setting enhance the atmosphere or mood?
- Do your characters act in a way that reflects either their comfort or discomfort with their setting?
- Are you describing your settings so much that they slow down the action?
- Have you chosen the right places either to expand or to compress time?

VOICE

- Have you picked a voice that works in harmony with your POV choice, the personality of your narrator, and the narrator's emotional distance to the story?
- Do your word, sentence, and paragraph choices support your voice?
- Does your voice remain consistent throughout the story?

THEME

- Have you identified a theme for your story?
- Does your theme surround your story with a light enough touch?
- Do all the elements of your story work to support the theme?

REVISION

- Have you gotten enough distance from your story to begin the revision process?
- Have you considered reenvisioning your story?

- Have you looked through a magnifying glass at all the Big Things in your story?
- Have you looked through a microscope at all the Little Things in your story?
- Have you cut and tweaked as much as you possibly can?