

Show, Don't Tell: Fiction Writing Checklist

Use this checklist during your revision process to help bring your fiction to life. Focus on removing distance, highlighting action, and evoking emotion through detail.

- ☐ Have I removed thought verbs like thinks, knows, realizes, remembers, wants, etc.?
- ☐ Have I eliminated filter words like saw, heard, felt, noticed, looked, etc.?
- ☐ Did I show the character's emotion through body language, dialogue, and physical response instead of stating it directly?
- ☐ Did I use concrete sensory details (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) to immerse the reader in the moment?
- ☐ Have I replaced vague emotional statements (e.g., 'she was sad') with specific images or behaviors that convey the emotion?
- ☐ Did I approach each scene like a detective—looking for what the reader would see, not what the character is thinking?
- ☐ Did I write scenes that trust the reader to interpret meaning, rather than explaining everything for them?
- ☐ Have I revised my first-draft 'tells' into second-draft 'shows'?
- ☐ Does each paragraph help the reader feel like they're inside the story—not just reading about it?
- ☐ Are my characters reacting with authenticity through the five senses, not just mental summaries?