

Hive Young Writers' Competition

Final edit checklist before you submit

To submit work you feel proud of, here're some final edit checks before submitting...

Shape & tone: After a first draft, ask: *What does this piece want to be? What is it really about?* It might be doing something different from what you first intended. Think about the shape and tone it needs, and whether everything serves that.

Don't rush it, edit it: Make sure your work's the best it can be before you send it. Better to wait and get it right than read it after you've sent it and see a million things you'd change. If you can, leave it for a while before coming back with fresh eyes. Make something that's already good even better.

Be authentic: Simple words, or the right words, are usually more effective than sophisticated ones used for the sake of sounding impressive. Conveying your story or poem in your own voice (even if you're in character) is the most important thing. Don't try to sound like a 'writer' or hide your ideas behind over-complicated sentences or impressive-sounding words.

Show, don't tell: Show when you can, rather than tell. Concrete images and sensory details let the reader experience something rather than simply being told about it. If a person is angry, for example, rather than saying *the woman was angry*, show us something specific: the way she walks or talks, her clenched fists or the way she presses a finger into someone's chest. Now we can feel it. When you edit, check where telling could become showing.

Be specific and selective: Avoid generic, vague or clichéd descriptions. Specific details can tell us much more: it's not just a biscuit, it's a custard cream. Brand names, street names and other details of a particular place and time can bring a whole scene to life and carry their own associations. But be selective. Too much description can overwhelm, so choose details that are unusual, revealing or important to the piece.

Be economical: Make sure every word is pulling its weight. See what you can take out and watch for too many adjectives and adverbs. Make other words work harder: *slam the door* instead of *shut the door hard*. Sometimes less is more. Sometimes that means 'killing your darlings' – good lines, sentences or extra information that belong somewhere else. You can always keep the stuff you don't use.

Be clear with speech (fiction): Make it clear who's speaking. Simple speech tags like *said* are often all you need. You can change it up with *whispered* or *shouted* when needed, but don't go overboard. Watch adverbs too, e.g. *He said happily*. Could the scene or speaker's actions show us how something is being said instead?

Look at your lines (poetry): Think about where and why you break a line or start a new stanza. Read the poem aloud and notice what the line breaks do to its rhythm, meaning and emphasis. Make sure they feel like choices rather than simply where the line ran out of space.

Look for movement: Does something shift or change as the piece unfolds? In a poem this might be a change in emotion, image, thought, tone or perspective. In fiction it might be action, tension, character or understanding. Does the piece move somewhere?

Hear it and see it: Read your work carefully out loud. Even better, record it on your phone and listen back without looking at the text. You'll hear what you've actually written rather than what you think you've written, and whether it sounds and flows right as well as sits right on the page. If you can, try reading it in a different format too – we often spot things differently on paper or when the text looks different.

Look for repetition: Have you repeated a word, image, idea or piece of information without meaning to? Sometimes repetition adds rhythm, emphasis or power; sometimes it just needs cutting.

Some final considerations: Is the title working hard enough and adding something to the piece? The right title can unlock something unexpected or encourage the reader to interpret the piece in a different way. Look closely at your opening and ending. Does the beginning make us want to keep reading? Does the ending feel satisfying without spelling too much out?

Proofread as a final thing: Most writers will tell you that, at some point, they've clicked send only to realise they've spelled something wrong or missed a comma. Check spelling, punctuation and grammar last, when you're happy with the writing itself. If this isn't your strength, ask someone to give it a final once-over.

LAST CHECKS...

POETRY

Does every word earn its place? / Are your images fresh and specific? / Are your line and stanza breaks doing something? / Is there a resonant phrase or image at the heart of the poem? / Does the poem move somewhere? / Does it sound right aloud? / Does the ending land?

FLASH & STORIES

Could your story start later? / Is there too much happening for a short story? / Does every character earn their place? / Is the dialogue doing useful work? / Is there enough specific detail to bring the story to life? / Does something change? / Does the ending satisfy without explaining everything?

SCRIPT-STYLE STORIES

Does every scene earn its place? / Does the dialogue sound natural and do useful work? / Can we follow what's happening and who's talking without unnecessary explanation? / Does something shift or change? / Does the ending land?