

A BASIC CHECKLIST FOR NOVELISTS

by Anna Jacobs

Writing novels is concerned above all else with story-telling. It doesn't matter what genre you're writing in, you need to tell a good story, one that the reader won't be able to put down, one that will make the reader come back for more of your books, and you need to fill your tale with characters your readers can care about.

When people start writing – and often when they keep getting rejected – a common fault can be that they're not focusing enough on the story and characters, and are fiddling too much with details.

As a reader, do you remember the fancy phrases the author used in the books you read last year? Or do you remember the characters and what happened to them? The latter, surely? Yes, you have to get the words right (eventually) or they'll slow down the story, not reveal it properly, then it will lack pace and appeal. Most of all, however, you have to get the story and characters right. Concentrate on that above all.

Story Checklist:

1. Make sure your story idea is right for your chosen genre by reading widely in that genre *before* you write.
2. Treat the first draft as just the beginning of crafting the story and realise you're going to be able to improve on many parts of it – not the words yet, but the events.
3. Don't be afraid to add events, subsidiary characters or sub-plots to your first draft if it needs more 'pazzaz'.
4. Don't be afraid to cut whole scenes or sub-plots if they don't work.
5. Make sure your story has emotional depth ie will touch your readers' hearts/emotions. If nothing really matters, the whole thing will be flat.
6. Don't start fiddling with details until the whole story is 'right'. Then, and only then, put a lot of effort into the details of word and phrase that will enhance your carefully-crafted tale.