**Top 10 “Mistakes” I See as a Critiquer**

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**#1 Inconsistency in Worlds & From Characters - World Building**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Show the opening of your manuscript (or scene) to someone sitting next to you. Don’t tell them anything about your story ahead of time.

• Ask them to describe the story world or rules of the world.

• Is this consistent with your intention?

• Switch manuscripts and do the same for each other.

• If you didn’t bring a scene or manuscript, and you’re working on a new idea, brainstorm a word bubble with all the words that relate to the character and the character’s world in any way.

* Credit for the brainstorming exercise goes to Lisa Wheeler (from a FL SCBWI conference).

**Extra Exercise**

• Sketch a map or write a description of each location for your own reference

**Extra Questions**

• Do the character’s actions make sense for that character?

• What would the character’s prior knowledge be?

**# 2 Not Kid-Friendly (& Category of Book)**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Write why a young reader will care about your story. How will a young reader relate to your story?

**Extra Questions**

• What are the entry points for a child?

• Does the main character have agency in the story? Is the story empowering to a young reader?

• What is the prior knowledge of your reader?

• What are the developmental milestones for the age range of your reader?

**#3 Pacing, Structure & Category of Book - Too fast, too slow, or inconsistent pacing**

**Workshop Exercises**

For picture books,

* Take your picture book and break it into 12-14 scenes.
* Are there a variety of potential settings/looks?
* Something new with each page turn?

For novels,

* Check the ends of chapters and/or scene changes. Do the ends of chapters/scenes build suspense or tension that would make a young reader want to continue reading? Put yourself in your young readers’ shoes.

For all stories,

* Do you think this story is right for the intended age of your audience? For the real-estate available in the book category?

**Extra Questions**

• Does everything happen in one location? (If so, more like a short story or chapter.)

• Are your characters always in the same setting? Could you exchange one setting for a more interesting setting or a variety of settings that still fits the story tone?

**#4 Needs More Emotion**

**The Specific Becomes the Universal**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Where is the heart of your story?

• What is your personal connection?

• Why is this story important to you?

• How can you connect this with specific character details or world details?

**Extra Questions**

• What’s the takeaway?

• I’ve heard editors ask “why does it matter?” “Why should I care?”

• Is there an element of hope?

• What are specific details in your story that connect with the heart of your story?

**#5 Balance of Showing and Telling**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Choose a “telling” sentence or passage from your story. (A hint to find one is to look for words like “was”, “thought”, “looked”.)

• Try transforming that sentence or passage into a “showing” sentence/passage. Do you think that works or doesn’t work for the scene?

**#6 Amp Up the Language**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Pick a line or passage from your work-in-progress and try adding a poetic device to it.

**# 7 Too Many Words/Pages? Too Few Words?**

**Word Count**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Take a scene from your manuscript.

• Which words are not moving the story forward?

• Try omitting some words or lines. (About 2 minutes)

• Choose a partner, show the new version to your partner, with the words crossed out.

• Ask your partner to read it (trying to ignore the crossed out lines) and ask your partner if it makes sense or if they have any questions.

**#8 Needs More Layers or Hooks**

**Workshop Exercise**

• What are some layers or hooks in your story?

• What makes your book unique?

• How is it different or alike from other books with similar characters, settings or themes?

**#9 Balance of Dialogue, Action & Narration**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Read through your story and highlight “dialogue”, “action”, “narration”.

• What are the proportions?

• What do you think the balance is in your overall story? For a specific scene?

• Which of the three feels out of balance? Which could you add more of?

• It’s not a science, but if your scene or story feels like it’s missing something, it might relate to this.

• Try adding more of one to a scene in your novel or to your picture book.

• Does it make it stronger?

**#10 Not Enough Tension or Conflict**

**Workshop Exercise**

• Note on your manuscript when the conflict is revealed.

• Is there tension on every page (or for pbs in every spread)?

• Does there need to be tension on every page?

• How can you increase the tension of a scene? Thoughts?

**Extra Questions**

• What’s the inner conflict and external conflict of your story?

• When is this revealed?

• Is it relatively early in the story? This is often important for young readers.

• Are you continually raising the stakes?

• Does the character change? Remember learning is changing.

**Extra Questions**

Tag me on Twitter @JillDanaBooks

This handout will be available for download, for workshop participants, until January 31, 2023 on [www.JillDanaBooks.com](http://www.jilldanabooks.com/).

**MENTOR TEXTS**

**Books**









