

# AFTER THE FIRST DRAFT

THE STORY NINJA'S GUIDE TO  
SELF-REVISION



## Step 1: Celebrate

According to a frequently cited statistic, **only 3% of people who start a book ever finish it.** Even though your book is still a work in progress, the fact that you made it to the end of your first draft puts you ahead of 97% of aspiring authors. That deserves some celebration!

Give yourself a high-five or a pat on the back. Better yet, find someone else to celebrate with you. Grab your friends or family and go out for drinks, a nice dinner, or something else to mark this accomplishment.

The revision process can be brutal, so before you begin, take a moment to celebrate what you've done.

## Step 2: Take a break

You have spent so much time with your manuscript recently that everything is a jumbled mess in your head. The plan for what you **meant** to do is there, but does that match what you actually wrote? Before you can dig in and start making changes, you need to take a break. Close the file (or the drawer if you use a typewriter or pen and paper) and walk away. Don't just take a day. Take a week, or better yet, a month.

Once your brain has had time to settle, you are ready to dive back in with a fresh perspective.

### Step 3: Check the Story

In writing, we talk about **story** with a lower-case s, and **Story** with a capital letter. Before you look at your scenes, setting, world building, or anything else, you need to make sure you have a Story. **Here are the pieces to check:**

**Does the Story start with a character who is pursuing high-stakes goal?**

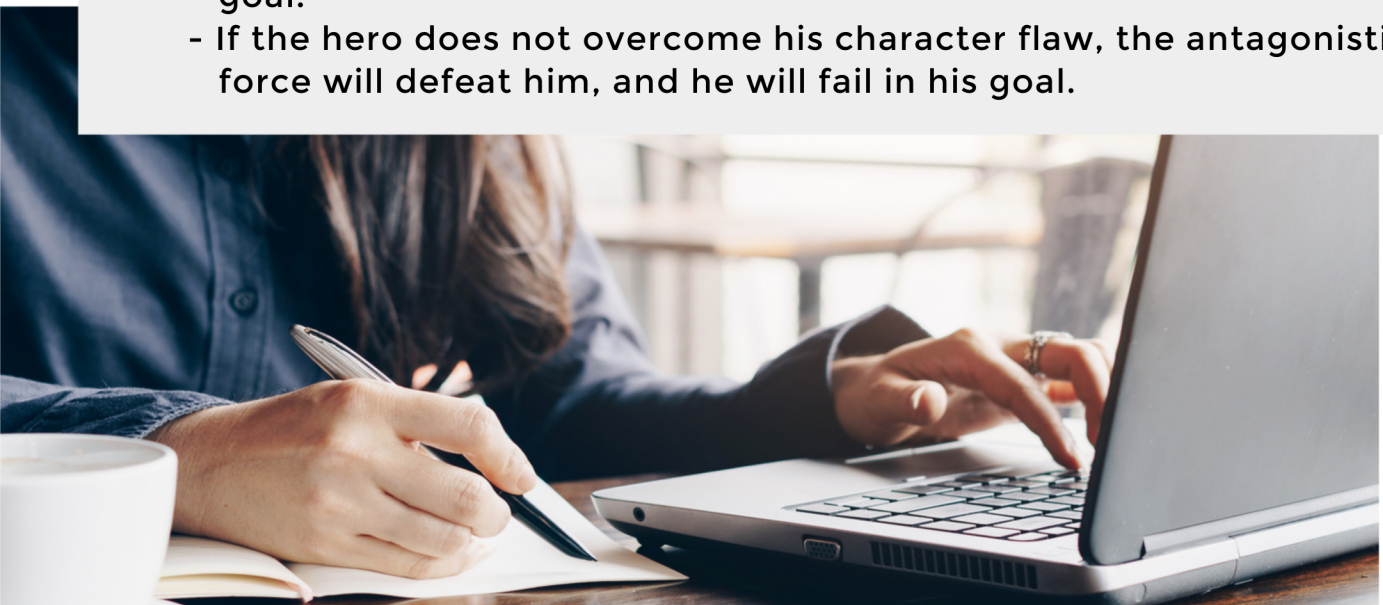
- This person **must** be your protagonist and primary POV character.
- One of the common fatal flaws we see in writing is that authors will tell the story from the perspective of a character who is really just there to tell someone else's Story.
- The character has to want something that is important to him.
- The goal must have stakes.
- The protagonist must have a clear picture of the **good thing he believes will happen if he achieves his goal, and the bad thing that will happen if he fails.**

**During the Story, does the character face obstacles?**

- There should be external obstacles created by a villain or other antagonistic forces.
- There must also be an internal obstacle in the form of a **character flaw**.
- This flaw must be present before the story starts and evident to the reader from page one.
- **Both the internal and external obstacles should not only inconvenience the hero but also actively prevent him from achieving his goal.**

**Does the Story end when the hero succeeds or fails in his goal?**

- **The character's success in defeating the external antagonist depends on his ability to overcome his internal flaw.**
- If the hero overcomes his character flaw, he will defeat the antagonistic force creating the external obstacles and achieve his goal.
- If the hero does not overcome his character flaw, the antagonistic force will defeat him, and he will fail in his goal.





Apply it


**Writing a story that features a protagonist in pursuit of a high-stakes goal who faces external obstacles and succeeds or fails based on his ability (or inability) to overcome his internal character flaw is a make-or-break issue for your novel. With that in mind, use the following worksheet to see if your book is battle-ready.**

**Question 1: Who is your protagonist and primary POV character?**

**Question 2: What is your protagonist's goal?**

**Question 3: What positive outcome does your protagonist believe will come from achieving his goal?**

**Question 4: What negative outcome does your protagonist fear if he fails in his goal?**





**Question 5: What external obstacle is preventing your protagonist from achieving his goal?**

**Question 6: What internal character flaw is preventing your protagonist from achieving his goal?**

**Question 7: Does your protagonist overcome the antagonist to succeed in his goal?**

**Question 8: If so, what closely held-belief (character flaw) did he sacrifice to do so? If not, is it because he refused to let go of his character flaw?**

**Once you've completed the worksheet and made revisions to correct any problems you've identified, you're ready to work with an editor! Keep in mind that most editors have a waiting list of 3–6 months, so you might want to reserve your calendar space when you start your revisions rather than waiting until you finish them.**