

Story Notes based on Lorna Deane's story, "Then and Now: Christmas"

1. **Create a personal editing checklist.** Use these story notes as a basis to build a personal editing checklist. Add other items you often overlook and use these sheets to check your future stories *before* submitting them for review. I included a blank editing checklist you can fill in and add to.
2. **Tense.** Watch your tenses. For the most part, if you start in the past tense, stay with it throughout the story. If you start in the present, return to it whenever you aren't relating an anecdote from the past.
3. **Family members' titles as names.** When writing about a family member *without* attributing a possessive pronoun (*my, your, hers, his, our, their*) or other designation, capitalize Mom, Dad, Grandpa, Aunt Rose, etc. *Grandma Donna is my dad's mom, Uncle Jim's stepmom, and my cousins' and my favorite grandmother.*
4. **Family members' titles as a role or position.** When writing about a family member *with* an attributive possessive pronoun (*my, your, hers, his, our, their*), lowercase *mom, dad, grandpa, aunt, etc.*

My dad was a great fly fisherman.

His grandfather slept fourteen hours a day.

5. **Compound words.** Check compound words to see if they are two separate words, hyphenated, or one word—*backyard, front yard, red-light*. You can type the word(s) in question into an online search engine followed by the words *Merriam-Webster* to see the current status of such words or phrases.
6. **Commas.** Experts say 90% of writers use commas correctly only 75% of the time, and only 1% of writers use commas correctly 99% of the time. Commas are complicated. Here's a [chart on commas](#) my friend ChatGPT put together you can use as a reference. Also, these are two reputable websites where you can learn more about commas. Even if you use Grammarly or some other grammar checker, you still need to know the rules because they can give you incorrect guidance.

[Purdue University Extended Rules for Using Commas](#)

[GFC Global Commas](#)

7. **Semicolon.** I've heard a semicolon called the *love child of a colon and comma*, and it has *only* two uses. It can be used to *replace* a conjunction in a compound sentence.

*I enjoyed the movie, but I loved the dinner afterward.
I enjoyed the movie; I loved the dinner afterward.*

A semicolon is needed for clarity in a complex list where each entry includes explanatory details.

Family members in attendance included Jeff, my brother, Mary, my aunt, and Chris, my cousin. May be six people there.

Family members in attendance included Jeff, my brother; Mary, my aunt; and Chris, my cousin.

This accurately identifies three people there.

8. **Repetition.** We have at least one million words in the English language, so we don't need to repeat words in the same or nearby sentences. Make use of a thesaurus for help.

*I moved to South Florida, and then, I moved to Wisconsin.
I moved to South Florida, and then I relocated to Wisconsin.*

9. **Use of song lyrics and poem verses.** If you have any intention of publishing a story that includes song lyrics or poem verses, you *must* get permission from the copyright owner, which may be the author, songwriter, recording label, etc., as long as the content remains protected by copyright law. In the US, it covers the life of the creator plus seventy years, so just because an artist has died doesn't mean his/her content is free to use. The work of authors who died before 1955 is now in the public domain. Know that copyright law has a lot of wrinkles. Do what needs to be done to make sure you are not infringing on someone's ownership rights.