

Story Notes based on Nancy Tunnell's story, "A Quest to See the Pictographs in Petit Jean State Park"

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. **Title length.** Be careful with the length of your titles. Generally, titles should be about five words or fewer and contain strong nouns and verbs. Sometimes, if your title is too long, it tells too much of your story. Don't allow your title to give away the story's punchline, so to speak.
3. **Abbreviations.** Using abbreviations for states, types of roads, etc., is *not* grammatically incorrect, but we are writers, and words are our currency. I strongly encourage you to choose words over abbreviations whenever possible.

I turned onto Sixtieth Street and made it to Jasmine Avenue before I ran out of gas.

I am going to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, on vacation.

4. **Commas after states and countries.** If you reference a city, state, and/or country, you should place a comma after the city, state, and country before you continue with your sentence.

Oia, Santorini, Greece, is my favorite place to visit.

5. **Get, got.** *Get* and *got* are empty words and usually can be replaced by better, less vague verbs. In some cases, *get* and *got* are acceptable, especially in dialogue, but otherwise, try to replace them with better verbs.

I got all Bs on my report card.
I received all Bs on my report card.

6. **Spell out and hyphenate simple fractions.** Spell out and hyphenate simple fractions such as *one-half*, *two-thirds*, etc., when used as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

*Three-fourths of the senior class skipped school on Monday.
She is taller than John by one-quarter inch.*

7. **Compound adjectives.** Combining two or more adjectives to describe a noun creates a compound adjective, and a hyphen is needed to connect the two.
- She wore an orange-red hat to dinner.*

8. **Serial or Oxford comma.** The comma before the conjunction in a list of three or more items is called the serial or Oxford comma. Even though other style guides omit it, in creative writing, it is suggested we use it for clarity.

France's flag is blue, white, and red.

That example would be clear without the serial comma, but what about this one?

I love my parents, Lady Gaga and John F. Kennedy.

How many people does this person love, two or four? Are her parents Lady Gaga and John F. Kennedy, or are they two in addition to her parents?

Be consistent in your choice. Use the Oxford comma always or never. Using it only when needed for clarity may make some readers think you don't know how to use commas properly.

9. **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.*