

Story Notes based on Norma Beasley's story, "Born Into Absence"

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. **Read your text aloud.** Doing this catches mistakes you might not otherwise see. Better yet, use the Microsoft Read Aloud function and have your story read back to you. If you want to know more about it, watch this video in Life Writers: [Read Aloud](#).
3. **Which and commas.** A comma is required before *which* when it introduces nonessential information, meaning that the sentence still makes sense without the addition of this phrase. If the sentence is *not* understandable, a comma is not required. So confusing, I know. Here are a couple of examples:

She finally finished the manuscript, which took her ten years to write.
We understand that she finished the manuscript. How long it took her is not essential; therefore, it needs a comma before *which*.

We visited the house which had the blue door.
You would not know *what* house they visited without *the blue door* identifying it. This makes that phrase an essential detail, so it does *not* require a comma before *which*. Oftentimes, editors prefer writers to use *that* instead of *which* when the phrase is essential. A comma is not needed before *that*.

4. **Decades.** Spell out decades like *the fifties* or use four numerals with an s but *without* an apostrophe, as in *the 1950s*. If you write it as *1950's* or *1950s'*, you are making it possessive, belonging to 1950 or the 1950s.
5. **Quotation marks.** When a tagline (*he said*) interrupts a continuous sentence or question, the next word in the quotation is lowercase.

"He never told me," I said, "how the story ended."
"Do you remember," she asked, "why we stopped going there?"

6. **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.

7. **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 commercial fisherman.
His grandfather slept fourteen hours a day.*

8. **Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause.** If you write a sentence that includes an introductory phrase or clause, it must be followed by a comma.

*If you decide to attend, you must submit your payment by March 2, 2025.
After a long work week, Joe treated himself to a movie and popcorn.*

It is grammatically correct to omit the comma *if* the introductory phrase is short. But what is short—two, three, four words? It's a good idea to get used to adding it. Then, you won't have to determine if the phrase is short enough to omit the comma.