

Chapter by Chapter Recap Worksheet

Characters: Is your protagonist and/or antagonist present in this chapter? If not, are the character/characters necessary here? At this point in the story? Are he, she, or they, necessary at all? Do their presence and actions advance your plot?

Recap: What happens in this chapter? Just the bones of it. It's a main idea premise. What happens in this chapter? Just the bones of it. It's a main idea premise. Just get in there, have a look around, take what you need and get out. Pick up only what you need to carry on to the next chapter as concisely and seamlessly as possible.

Objective: Now that you've summarized what happened in this chapter, ask yourself: What did you need to happen in this chapter? Have you met that objective enough to advance to the next chapter? You've come this far, so you already have a loose utilitarian outline already in your mind, you know where you need to go. When you compare the objective to the recap, your answer should be clear.

Pages: Are the number of pages in this chapter proportional to what's happening?

Too many pages? Is there too much backstory, too much info dumping. You've worked tirelessly researching for your story and would like to share that information, but ask yourself: Is it merely interesting, or is it germane to the story? If it interrupts the flow, it has to go. And not necessarily into the recycle bin. If it doesn't add to the story, through it in an odds and ends file for later use with another project. If it is vital, try incorporating it in dialogue, or in the accompanying imagery and description where afforded. Break up the backstory, and dish it out in small, teasing portions throughout the story to maintain the flow and still use the pertinent info you intended to share.

Too few pages? Perhaps your dialogue is lacking the right amount of description and imagery. This is also a good opportunity to incorporate backstory. Example: Your character has a facial scar that resulted from a childhood accident. Maybe your character was the sole survivor, who knows? Have the character pause during an exchange, stroke their scar. Add a few words about how it occurred, what emotional symbolism it holds. Using a device such as this can eliminate paragraphs, if not pages, of backstory.

Chapter by Chapter Recap Worksheet

POV: What POV is this chapter told in? Is the POV in keeping with the desired POV of the entire work? Check for head hopping and inconsistency to avoid jarring the reader. It's all about flow.

Changes: After examining the information you've entered for each of the preceding sections, ask yourself: What changes do I need to make in this chapter? Is there dialogue that needs to be added or removed? POV inconsistency? Are you writing in the correct tense? Are you hitting the milestones of your character arc and plot development? Has enough of the story you've formulated in your mind actually made it to the page? Are there still vital components floating around in your mind cloud? What is that full daylight opinion? Who goes overboard, who stays? And finally, does this chapter transition well into the next; do the scenes seem choppy and disconnected? If this chapter is running on all four wheels, it's time to move on to the next chapter.

Bonus: If you read your recaps straight down, you'll find you've got yourself a nifty proto-synopsis. Alternating timelines and sub-plots demand a bit more tweaking to polish it into a finished product, but this method affords a good start point free of the big picture thinking that can make writing a synopsis so challenging.