

Seamlessly Integrating Backstory: An Editor's Checklist

Manuscript Title: _____

Author: _____

Chapter/Scene #: _____

1. Scene Purpose: Does the Backstory Serve What's Happening Now?

- I can clearly state this scene's goal or central conflict.
- The backstory supports that goal or conflict.
- The backstory clarifies why this moment matters to the character.
- The backstory increases tension or emotional weight.
- Removing this backstory weakens the scene.

Notes / Revisions:

2. Timing: Is This the Right Moment to Reveal This Information?

- I'm not dumping backstory too early.
- I reveal only what's needed for this scene.
- Deeper history is saved for stronger emotional moments.
- The reveal answers a question readers already have.
- Some questions are intentionally left open.

Notes / Revisions:

3. Show vs. Tell: Is the Backstory Integrated Through Action or Emotion?

- Backstory is triggered by something in the present.
- I use physical/emotional reactions to hint at the past.

- I avoid long info-dump paragraphs.
- Behavior implies history when possible.
- Any direct explanation is brief and relevant.

Notes / Revisions:

4. Flow: Does the Narrative Move Smoothly Between Present and Past?

- Clear transition into the backstory.
- Clear transition back to the scene.
- Reader always knows what is past vs. present.
- Backstory doesn't stall pacing.
- No overload of names or timeline jumps.

Notes / Revisions:

5. Focus: Is the Backstory Centered on Character?

- Tied to the character's current fear/desire/motivation.
- Focuses on one emotional moment, not full biography.
- Past event affects the present scene.
- Avoids unrelated details.
- Reader can connect past wound to present behavior.

Notes / Revisions:

6. Theme: Does the Backstory Support the Story's Themes?

- Backstory reflects or contrasts a core theme.
- I can identify its thematic connection.
- It resonates with the character's arc.
- Theme is shown, not overexplained.
- Past event echoes or foreshadows future choices.

Notes / Revisions:

7. Balance: Is the Amount of Backstory Appropriate?

- No long blocks of backstory.
- Backstory is spaced out, not clumped.
- I avoid repeating the same information.
- Each beat clarifies or deepens emotion.
- Unnecessary backstory is removed or relocated.

Notes / Revisions:

8. Clarity: Is It Always Clear What's Past vs. Present?

- Clear time markers when shifting to past.
- Consistent verb tenses.
- No confusion about when events occur.
- Flashbacks have clear start and end.
- Timeline is easy to follow.

Notes / Revisions:

Scene Summary:

- Backstory is seamless and strengthens the scene.
- Some elements need revision.
- Backstory should be moved, rewritten, or removed.

Final Notes: