

## HKWC “Coming of Age” Anthology Editorial Guidelines

Dear HKWC Anthology authors,

This year we are introducing a new addition to the Guidelines.

We are calling this “The Common Problem Checklist”. These are not hard rules, but rather flexible guidelines.

The first round of editorial feedback will focus on the following items.

### 1. How to Improve Your Story:

- Every sentence should do something RAD: Reveal theme, Advance plot, or Develop character. Know your story’s theme (what your story is about—the thing that interests you).
- First sentence: strong, enticing, confident. This is the hook that grabs the reader’s attention. Spend a disproportionate amount of time crafting this sentence. Make them want to know more.
- Start as close to the end of the story as possible. Try starting “*in medias res*” (into the middle of things)
- First three paragraphs: Compelling, conflict, character. Expand on the first sentence. Provide context, details of the characters, and highlight the major conflict of the story. If the opening sentence hooks the reader’s attention, the first three paragraphs are where you earn it. Aim for action and emotion.
- Show emotion and tell feelings: Emotion brings the reader closer to the character and increases understanding. Feelings are important contextually. No one wants to read about the long, slow, tiring journey to the breakfast table (unless it’s somehow important).
  - Emotion:  
Don’t say: Eddie was angry.  
Show it: Eddie’s eyes narrowed, his face growing hard and tightlipped. He clenched his fists, raising one threateningly.
  - Feelings:  
Don’t say: Eddie’s eyes drooped, closing before blinking open half-heartedly. He dragged his steps, shuffling towards the breakfast table, his limbs like lead weights.  
Tell it: Eddie felt tired that morning.
- Central conflict sets the story in motion. The conflict must be made clear as close to the first line as possible. Readers need to know the stakes and want to find out what happens. The central conflict provides that, so get it near the top of the first page.
- Tense middle: Is the action rising, suspenseful, and engaging? It’s okay if it rises in swells, as long as the trend is up. Make sure every scene is necessary. Once you’re satisfied, make sure every paragraph is, too. Add or delete sentences to get that tension across.
- A surprising yet fitting ending: The climax must flow logically from the build-up, but then deliver a twist. This is the magic of a great story. It is often the point where we see characters change.

## **2. Common Problems to Avoid**

- Avoid overused words. Search and replace the following when appropriate: suddenly, started to, seems, that, had, just, simply, down, up, got, then.
- Also avoid cliches: heart thudded, eyes flashed, blood pounded, ears screaming, chest heaving, tears streaking, mouth twisting, and the many other similar expressions. Use them when appropriate, but sparingly. We also see a lot of wry smiles, twitching lips, grinning, and gasping. Nobody should ever get up close and personal.
- Shifting tenses pulls the reader out of the story. Be careful to keep one tense throughout.
- Limbs are not distinct entities. We see eyes referred to as “orbs” far too often. On that note...
- Eye color. People don't usually notice it outside of intimate situations, and no one ever thinks about their own unprompted.
- When noting actions, they must either a) advance the plot or b) reveal character/emotion. Example: pinching the bridge of your nose shows frustration and impatience. Quick-stepping into a shadowed alcove is a plot-related action. The character is hiding... will they be seen? Phrases like “stepping forward” or “I walked down the street” do not create tension, advance the plot, reveal character, or show emotion. Always ask if the action description serves a purpose and you will eliminate unnecessary words.
- Avoid long backstory. There is limited space to tell your tale. A strong, action-forward opening scene should not be followed by the character thinking about how it all began when they were a kid. If the second or third paragraph is all backstory, see if you can include the information elsewhere.
- Avoid stories where the character wakes up and doesn't know where they are, or wakes up to a beeping alarm clock and goes to shower/brush their teeth.
- Avoid situations where the character asks themselves questions about what is going on. It only makes it look like the author is also trying to figure it out.
- Stories that chronicle the life of a character. 3500 words is too short for both a history lesson and a story.
- A single tear can be appropriate in movies but comes across as melodramatic in text.

### 3. Proof-reading

It can be hard to spot your own mistakes. You know what the text is supposed to say, so that is what you see. The spelling and grammar checks in each word processor have their own shortcomings and may not pick up everything. We suggest the following methods of grooming your work:

- Copy and paste your work into another word processor. If you write in MS Word, see what Google Docs can find. You'll be surprised what you missed.
- Print out your work and read the hard copy.
- Use the read-aloud function in your word processor and listen to your own story. Things sound different outside your own head.

### 4. Formatting

**Please use the following format for your final submissions.**

- Top left of the first page in the body of text: Author's name, exactly as you want it to appear.
- Please append a brief biography to the end, as you wish it to appear in the anthology.
- Authors are welcome to have their pieces published anonymously or under a pseudonym of their choice.

### Convert to Word Files

If you are **not working** in MS Word, please open your final version in MS Word and perform your final proofreading in that program prior to sending it in (including Clear All Tabs as below). All of the crazy formatting issues we experience have been from documents produced in Pages or a PDF word processor and then saved as .docx. If you are unable to do this please let us know.

No header, footer, or page numbers.

Page setup: Size A4

Font: Arial 11 pt

**No tabs of any kind.** In MS Word do the following:

1. Go to Home and select the Paragraph dialog launcher (the little arrow in bottom right corner).
2. Select Tabs (bottom left).
3. Select Clear All to remove all tab stops.
4. Select OK.

**For poets –**

Please enter whatever line spacing (single, double, etc.) you wish for the final publication.

Lateral white space should be made by means of the space bar NOT TABS.

**For everyone else –**

In MS word:

1. Go to Home and select the Paragraph dialog launcher (the little arrow in bottom right corner).
2. Use the following settings:

Alignment: Justified

Indentation: .5 inch

Line Spacing: 1.5 line spacing, 0 pt before and after; no extra lines separating paragraphs.

Then Go to Layout:

Set Margins: 1 inch, on all sides

Other Formatting:

- Offset large quote blocks in page format; don't tab each line.
- Don't put the whole opening word(s) in uppercase (i.e. nothing special).
- Section breaks (deliberate extra blank lines between sections) are to be place-marked with '%'. These will appear as an empty line in the final document.
- Emphasized section breaks may contain '\*\*\*' only if needed stylistically to distinguish from other existing section breaks. This punctuation WILL be centered and remain in the final text.
- Place comma or full stop within quote marks before return to speech markings or narration.
- Foreign words including Putonghua but excluding Cantonese are italicized.
- Cantonese transliteration is unaccented plain text or Yale accenting.
- Use words for numbers up to (and including) one hundred and for large round numbers ('twenty' not '20' and 'thousand' not '1,000').
- Cash value may be numerical (\$20 or twenty dollars), please check for consistency.
- UK spelling.
- Time is formatted as 'three a.m.' not 'three am' or '3:00 a.m.'.

- Diegetic written text (email, SMS, or words written on paper) may be quote-marked or italic, please check for clarity and consistency.
- Single quote marks / inverted commas for speech and (if used) quotation. ('X' not "X")
- Double quote marks for quotes within quotes.
- Smart quotes. “ ”, “ ” not " "
- No period after 'Dr', 'Mr', 'Mrs', etc.
- 'Okay' not 'OK'
- Oxford comma before 'and/or' in a list of items (A, B, and C)
- Ellipses (...): No space before or after ('...or else? But you...seriously, I can't...'). They stand alone without a full stop / period, but may be followed by ? or !.
- En dash ( – ) for dash-breaks, one space on either side. (I can't say – really I can't – why she did that.). Word will automatically change a spaced hyphen between two words into an en dash; sometimes you will need to press an extra space after the second word and then remove it – the en dash will stay in place. Alternatively, the usual command for en dash is *control -* .
- Hyphenate noun-adjective, double-adjective, and adverb-adjective/verb combinations without “-ly” if they precede the noun they modify directly or, as above, in a list. (“I repaired your machine gun,” said the machine-gun repairman between the tightly grouped bursts of his rapid-fire demonstration. Using Chicago-style hyphenation keeps the hyphenation Chicago style.)

If you have any questions, please reach out to [hkwc.anthology21@gmail.com](mailto:hkwc.anthology21@gmail.com)

Yours faithfully,

Jay & Julian

The Anthology Editors