Ten Writing Hacks to Improve Your Story

1. Make sure your scenes are joined by "because" and not "and then." You don't want a list of events (this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened). That's not a story. The action in your story should go forward because of what your characters do.

2. Don't wait. Give your character a problem on the very first page.

3. If you are stuck in a scene, go back to the last place the story was working for you and start writing fresh from there.

4. Give each of your characters a secret. It may not even show up on the page, but it will invariably add shading to their characterization.

5. Arrive late and leave early to a scene. Put another way: trim the fat. What are the essential bits you need to include to advance setting, character, plot, and theme? Prune back anything that is repetitive or not necessary.

6. Read the book aloud to identify clunky passages, especially dialogue.

7. If your middle is sagging, add a complication to increase tension. A dead body drops. A surprise pregnancy occurs. A long-lost relative shows up. A bad storm is hits. The spaceship loses radio contact. The wizard temporarily loses his magic.

8. Pay as much attention to the opening line of each chapter as you do the first line of your book. Try to make them as intriguing as possible.

9. End chapters with something unresolved to keep readers interested.

10. Once you have a draft, create a "reverse outline" by writing down a sentence description for each scene in your book. This will reveal any redundancies and give you a bird's eye view of your plot and character developments. You will be able to spot any dropped subplots or characters who need to be trimmed back or beefed up.