

Writing Fanfiction

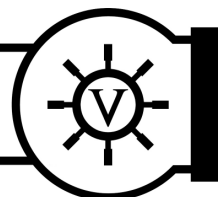
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Patchwork Poltergeist, Donny's Boy, HiddenBrony

Table of Contents

Story Details	2
ROBCakeran53	
Dialogue and Canon Characterization	7
Saddlesoap Opera	
OCs and OC Characterization	10
SleeplessBrony	
Crafting Fanon	13
Patchwork Poltergeist	
Criticism and Rejection	18
Donny's Boy	
Equestria Daily Prereading	21
HiddenBrony	
English Matters	23
RBDash47	

PONY FICTION VAULT



This guide is to help decrease the risk of accidental bodily harm caused by wrongly using details inside of fictional stories about technicolored ponies. In this guide, we will discuss:

- How to use details
- Needed/important details
- Decorative vs. Functional details
- What details are right for *you!* (Details based upon your story type)
- Wiggle room
- Know when enough is *enough!*
- Do your homework (research)
- Canon settings
- The big question: Why?
- Help and guidance

Alright, so let's get started. Be sure to put on your pair of safety goggles, provided with this guide. Also be sure to have a *Webster's Emergency Dictionary and Thesaurus* within reach. This is *vital* to your survival.

Let's begin!

The Basics of Detail

When you think of detail, what do you think of? If less than ten things come to your mind, then you're not ready for this program. If you think of more than ten things, then you're in the right place! Details in a story are important. They are probably more important than the setting, characters, or even the plot! Details of a story help give you the visuals of the world that has been laid out in your mind. They help dive into the mentality and thinking of characters as they interact with other objects.

Believe it or not, there *is* a wrong way to use these details. But what is wrong from right? That's like asking *Why is the sky blue?* Because it can. So can details. Details can be blue, spherical, menacing, or any other lousy adjective you can think up. Details are made up of a lot of adjectives, adverbs, and anything else that we could never learn in our grammar classes. They are important, and you need to be able to use them properly.

The simplest and most basic use of details is to use them to explain/describe an object or pony. "The running pony," "The black book," "The stupid voice that won't stop screaming

in my head." Those are all *basic* details. Now, we're not here for those, 'cause they fall under a different parameter that will be discussed in our future work, *Grammar Nazis and You!* Look for it at your nearest 7/11 or Quick-E-Mart.

The "Other" Side of Details

What we *are* here for, are details that dive into widening the view of a setting or the feeling a character is having. It's quite simple. So simple, I just told you the most basic detail about details in that previous sentence! So, with that out of the way, it leads into the next important aspect of details: What ones are needed, or just extra luggage? Drop that fluffy pink chihuahua dog carrier, because there is no room on this flight for useless garbage like that!

You need to make sure, when adding details, that *most* of them are actually relevant details, and make sense for the story. Why would you talk about how Rainbow Dash's toilet flushes when it's a fic about Twilight reading a book? You wouldn't. Instead, you would want to focus on details of how Twilight's books are organized. What she has to move to access a particular section of books. Things like that which actually affect the character in a logical way, that still stick to the topic.

Of course, there *are* details that are needed which aren't exactly relevant to major plot points or characters. I call those "extra flavor." Saddlesoap calls them "decorative." Call them what you want, they still have a place in your story. I normally use these as thoughts of a character, more than actual objects in the setting. Maybe Twilight notices a book that reminds her of Rainbow Dash, which in turn a memory about toilets. Those can add up, and lead to good character development in the future.

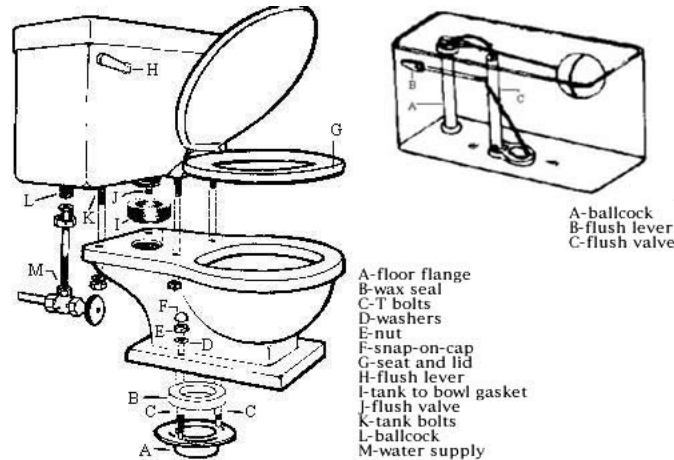
When it comes to adding details to your story, you must also know what kind of pace you are writing at. Is it a dark, adventure fic? Those tend to be slower, more suspenseful and exploding from the brim with details. Now, other story types such as comedy are more fast paced, and don't rely on a lot of details, or for that matter, heavily described ones. You need to establish what pace your story is set at, what type of story it is, so that you know the right amount of details to be placed. Or the kind of details.

This also leads into another important factor about details: Learning when enough is *enough!* Writers can be at both ends of this spectrum. They'll either have not enough details, hindering how the reader perceives the story/settings/character. Or they will have too much detail, flooding the readers mind with useless turds that serve a better place in Dash's toilet than in your story. The hardest thing about details is finding that balance.

Hopefully, from the hints and tips above, you've been able to grasp the sort of details your story needs to be successful. (No refunds on this guide. All sales are final.)

Research and Canon

It's a key thing. Remember when we talked about Rainbow Dash and toilets? Well, what if Rainbow Dash suddenly had to *fix* her toilet? Do *you* know how to fix a toilet? Have fun.



Safety goggles were given for a reason, after all.

You don't actually need real hands-on experience to give proper details about something. So long as the information you *do* give is accurate, then you are okay. In the modern age we live in currently, we don't need to get information at gun point anymore. We have the internet, a wonderful place where nothing bad happens and everyone is friendly and kind. So use it! Do research, find out exactly what it is you need to know for a specific detail to give it more depth.

This also highly applies to our canon settings. When doing anything, giving accurate details are essential! Since we are here to talk about ponies, let's do just that! If you want to write about Twilight's library, then you best have a general understanding about how it is formed. Its shape. How the place looks. Granted, we don't know every minor details because it's a cartoon for little girls. But there *are* things given. Placements of specific objects. The Library is a tree, Fluttershy is not.

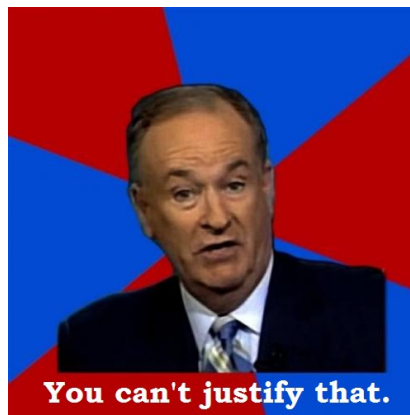


HOWEVER! We are granted a little, as I call it, "wobble room" when it comes to canon settings and details. Because we don't know everything about Twilight's library, we have to make some things up. That is perfectly fine! But you must know what things do and do not fit in a library. If Twilight needed something nice to wear, she wouldn't be walking into a large walk-in closet. No. That would be more along the lines of Rainbow Dash, because everyone knows Rainbow Dash always dresses in style.

You need to keep the setting details in character. Yes, *in character*. That term does not only apply for actual characters of a story. It applies to pretty much anything. A toaster is used for making toast. Not for cooking hamburgers (trust me, I've tried) so you wouldn't use that. It would be *out of character* of the toaster to cook hamburgers. Anyway, settings also must remain in character, but you don't need to be an interior designer to figure out the layout of Twilight's library. That falls, again, under the *Research* part. Look it up. Use both the views given of her actual library in the show, *and* look up how actual libraries are laid out in real life. Though, truthfully, most everything you'd need to know is plain ol' common sense.

Finally, the biggest question when it comes to details: Why? Why do you need this specific detail? What purpose does it serve? You, as the author, need to decide that. I could continue ranting on for days about what sort of details I think work and don't, but it also varies on what the story is aiming towards. So long as you follow the simple steps given, or just use them as simple guidelines, then you should be able to make the right choices on why a detail is needed in a specific part of your story. You must make sure that the details given are justified for a reason.

Are they key to the story? Are they part of the "flavor" to give it more curb appeal? Those are good reasons, but there is a limit, or boundary, that you must realize and not step over. Otherwise your story will be flooded with too many "justified" details. And, well...



Thanks Bill.

Getting Help for Your Problem

Drugs and alcohol can't make all problems go away. Sometimes, if you're unsure about your story, a good thing to do is to find a friend to read it. He/she/it/zerger will be able to help point things out, providing they are approved fanfiction readers capable of proper intellect. If not, then they won't help much. You need the kind of people that can see things you don't, read between the lines. Not just read it and go "it's 'kay." They are useless. More useless than a chihuahua as a guard dog.

They will (hopefully) tell you what bored them. What caught their attention. If they felt something could be left out, or elaborated upon. If they ask questions about a detail, then you need to add more to it without compromising important story plot and giving spoilers. If they feel bored about a detail, then you have too much. Your readers need to be able to use their own mind to fill in gaps. You can't do it, otherwise your story would never end. You'd be going on and on about things that just don't matter, or are common sense that everyone already knows. It all boils down to trial and error. It takes a long time to figure out the right details, and even more to do it consistently. With a lot of practice, and some nimble fingers, you can do it.

Thank you for using this guide on *Story Details and YOU!* We hope that you gained some form of knowledge from this, and will be able to use these tips to further advance your writing capabilities!

Writers and teachers have filled entire books with information about writing good dialogue in stories, and anything I could share on the topic in this relatively limited space would be either redundant or less than useful. So, below I will be focusing specifically on making *fanfiction* dialogue the best it can be. This can be summed up in four Cs: Character, Consistency, Canon, and Clarity. I will discuss each of these, and include a brief *Scene Assignment* at the end of each segment. These assignments are short (perhaps only a paragraph or two) writing tasks that will help you to hone your skills and see the topic discussed in action.

Many of the points below can apply equally well to Original Characters or fleshed out Background Characters, but those are less familiar to the readership at large, so for simplicity's sake I mostly deal with the Mane Six.

Character

Character, in this sense, refers to all the little features that give a character's words their distinctive feel.

Tone of voice itself is certainly part of it, but there is much more to it than that – nuances like dialect, favourite slang and sayings, volume, level of formality/casualness, mannerisms and body language, and typical emotional state all help display the character's unique style.

Characters don't just have randomly assigned voices. They talk the way they do because of *who they are*. Their interests, their upbringing, their Special Talents, their level of education and more all have a logical and understandable influence on how they sound.

Rarity is formal and polite, but quick to throw her emotional weight around; Rainbow Dash is casual and tactless, but shy about showing emotional vulnerability. You would never confuse their dialogue on the show, even if you couldn't see who was speaking. When they are written in-character, the same goes for their fanfiction incarnations.

If the characters' voices are rendered accurately, imaginative readers will *hear* them in their head, as clearly as if the voice talents were reading out loud over their shoulder.

Scene Assignment: Pizza Dude's got Thirty Seconds

Write a short scene showing how Fluttershy would speak to a late food delivery colt. Now do the same for Rainbow Dash.

Consistency

Once Character is pinned down and your canon Ponies "sound" right, keep it that way.

Characters shouldn't randomly start speaking totally differently, or trading accents, or losing accents, or picking up odd new catchphrases, or otherwise displaying multiple personalities. They are who they are.

If characters *do* change (and it isn't a gradual, logical process over a long period of time), it should be noticeable to the reader, significant to the plot, and deliberate by the author. HOWEVER, no matter how much easier it might make your story's plot structure to have a character go way off-base to help resolve a situation or plot point, resist the urge unless that change is supported and explained by the story itself.

Comedy lends a *small* amount of leeway in this respect, but not as much as you might think. Even for the sake of a joke, the show generally keeps characters pretty solidly characterized. Fluttershy might have a freaky knowledge of sewing, but she is hesitant to reveal it and she is apologetic in the aftermath of her info-bomb to Rarity.

Scene Assignment: Let's Never Fight Again

Write a scene where two of the Mane Six disagree about something, argue, feel bad, and then apologize and make up. Maintain their "voices" and personalities throughout all of the emotional shifts.

Canon

Now that the characters are reliably speaking the way they speak, you need to make sure that they don't display any confusion or amnesia about the lives that made them sound like they do.

Refer back to the show often to ensure any references and remembrances are correct. Even if you feel like you've got the whole series memorized, do your research just to be sure – you'd be surprised how often your memory can be a little off.

If the characters sound like they sound, do so reliably, and then use those accurate voices to occasionally discuss things that "really" happened to them, you've got canon character dialogue just about locked down.

Scene Assignment: Obligatory Clip Show

Write a scene with three of the Mane Six sitting indoors while a blizzard rages outside. Enjoying the warm fire in the hearth and some hot beverages, they reminisce about some of the wild adventures they've had. Note: Do NOT just copy-paste episode dialogue.

Clarity

Whether the characters you're writing about are brash or meek, formal or laid-back, educated or ignorant, once you have their characterization and memories nice and reliable, they talk when they talk.

That is, they are supposed to be speaking out loud when you write their dialogue. Poesy and melodramatic turns of phrase are some folks' cup of tea when it comes to the narrative at large, but unless you're going for an alternate setting, the level of formality or casualness of your STORY's wording shouldn't affect the way the characters SPEAK. Again, whether they are in a sweeping verbose epic or a fun, slice-of-life joke-fest, they are who they are.

Similarly, take care to keep your characters' words readable. Speak your dialogue out loud, even if only under your breath. If you can't spit out the lines in a natural fashion, odds are a voice actor couldn't, either – or, for that matter, the Pony in question. Try again.

Scene Assignment: Words in a White Void

Write a scene where any number of canon characters you like have a conversation. Include NOTHING but dialogue – no descriptions, no actions, no scenery. Imply it all only through the words the characters speak, and do so in a way that keep their lines readable and conversational.

**Main (Mane) Characters, Background Ponies, Fandom-Defined Ponies, and OCs, or:
How to Choose the Colors of the Ponies You Put in Your Stories, or:
Yes, Octavia Has a Cello (Bass? I'm Not a Music Kind of Guy) by SleeplessBrony**

Alright, so... characters. One of the central building blocks of any narrative. They can drive a story into a beautiful thing, or they can drive it off the track. Obviously, we're here to talk fanfiction, so you already have an array of wonderful and interesting characters to work with.

But! There will come a time, sooner or later, where you'll need to make a character of your own. That's right, a bona-fide, made from scratch, infamous, lovable, OC!

But what makes an OC, exactly? What distinguishes them from the cast and line up we've all come to know and love? Let's quickly go over a few basic types of characters, as they pertain particularly to the writing of pony fanfiction, to know where we're standing, so to speak.

Starting Simple: Main Characters

Obviously, these are the main characters of the show. They are well-defined, have personalities, quirks, and voices. No confusion here. Saddlesoap covered this just fine.

Foundations: Supporting Characters

These are side characters – they probably have had a few lines, and bits of personality to build off of, maybe even featured prominently in an episode. We know things about them. Fleshing them out in a story is about building them and filling in gaps, sure, but remember not to stray too far from what we DO know. If you're writing Cheerilee as having a hard-ass biker past, you better go to great lengths to have that make any kind of sense. Another good example would be Spitfire or Soarin' or Big Mac or Mayor Mare – we have frameworks to build off of.

Squint Real Hard: Background Ponies

These are ghosts of characters, maybe nothing more than a color scheme and a cutie mark. Some of them have lines, but maybe their personality changes every time they show up (Bon-Bon, I'm looking at you). There might be hints and clues you can build off of – look at their mark, think of why they have it and what they love to do/are good at. What kind of pony would be named Junebug, anyway? Keep in mind that at this point

you're pretty much just making an OC, even if you're growing them from a seed provided by a background pony.

And Finally... Original Characters

Here we are – you are creating your own character entirely from scratch. There are basic rules here that are applicable whether you're writing fiction for any fandom or your own original work, for instance:

- Flaws. They need some.
- Appearance is hardly ever as important as you think.
- Interaction with other characters – balance in traits. Foils. Look at the mane six, and how balanced they are, in so many ways.
- History, background, and making sure the character fits in the world of the show.

But to me, the most important, THE most central question here, is:

WHY are you including this Original Character in your story?

And the closely linked follow-up question:

Is there a canon character (even if it's just a background character) that could fit the bill?

So... why *are* you making an OC? What role are they filling in your narrative? That, to me, is the central question. We're here writing fanfiction, after all, and people who will see your story will be looking for fanfiction, featuring the characters they've come to know and love.

But there are times when an original character is called for, or even necessary. After all, if everything, all the time, involves the same six characters, things quickly start to feel stale. Closed in. Rote and unimaginative, a world shrinking and stagnating when it should feel as open and real and boundless as the world we live in. Adding new characters, or giving character to ones that have none, can breathe life into a world and fill roles that just couldn't be supplied any other way.

Of course, there are pitfalls. Remember, having a neat character is, on its own, never enough. The *story* is what's important, and all decisions you make should serve that one, central function. If you have a wonderful, brilliant original character, and you shoehorn them into an otherwise-straightforward tale of the mane six... it's probably going to feel

weird. File them away until you're writing a story, and you hit a roadblock – there's a role here, a character that should be, but isn't. That's the time to dust off your favorite OC and throw them into the mix.

Further Reading

Much smarter people than myself have provided much better advice. A good place to start would be Wanderer D's recent blog post at FIMFiction, *How to Write Original Characters*. Scroll down past the comedy to the bits from other writers in the fandom – and remember to follow the oldest, most always-pertinent advice of them all: READ. Read lots of books, all the time.

Special Addendum: Fandom-Defined Characters

Lyra. Vinyl Scratch. Dr. Hooves (Whooves?) These are background characters who, through some magic of the Internet, have vast amounts of characterization in fanon. That last part is key – IN FANON. I'm not saying that's bad (I quite like how some of them have been characterized), I'd just like to point out that it's just that. You don't have to treat it like it's canon, and if you'd like to write a story where Lyra is straight and couldn't care less about Bon-Bon, or having human hands, then be my guest. These are just interpreted background ponies (almost OCs!) that were characterized well, and in a way that became popular. Look up to that example, or try to redefine them your own way – and if you do it well enough, that could become popular, too.

My Little Headcanon: Fanon, Canon, and What to Do
When a Canonball Smashes Your Story by Patchwork Poltergeist

Let's start simple. Canon is the official material. It is the established character personalities, settings, histories, and appearance. The canon is fact; solid and undisputed. The canon can be disregarded, disliked, reinterpreted, or simply ignored altogether, but in the end is still the canon.

Fanon, as the name implies, is the *fan's* canon. Fanon – sometimes also called "head-canon" – is not official material, just an interpretation from within the fandom about a certain element from the show. While the *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* canon comes only from *Friendship Is Magic*, fanon comes from everywhere and everybody in a fandom. It can take the form of fanfiction, but also fanart, comics, music, or any other form of media. Fanon is how you see the elements from canon, and could be shared by millions, or just one person. Nearly all fandoms have a fanon of their own. Fanon's size and liveliness usually depends on the fan base and just how many creative ideas bounce between them.

Needless to say, the fanon for *Friendship is Magic* is gigantic.

A fantastic example of the fanon lies in the interpretations of minor and background characters. FiM's popularity owes a great deal to how dynamic and real the main characters are written, so when the fandom comes across other characters, be they minor, major, or just a mare in the background that says "Hello", we want to know more about them. If the canon tells next to nothing about a pony's personality, the fandom can build one of its own. The less information, the greater the interpretation. The Mane Six, for example, don't have that big of a shared fanon in the fanbase, just a few snippets like Applejack's parents being dead or Scootaloo being an orphan. Popular characters that don't appear often but are still important to the show's universe get a wider, more dynamic fanon.

A lovely example is Princesses Celestia and Princess Luna.

Canon Celestia controls the sun, is over 1000 years old, and is a very powerful winged unicorn. She is wise and respectful, with many responsibilities to uphold. She is a little uncomfortable by the extreme formality she deals with every day, and likes to shake things up now and then.

Fanon Celestia is all of the above, in addition to being: an immortal goddess, a tyrant, a

loving sister, a horribly unloving sister, and her sense of humor can range anywhere from a trickster mentor to just screwing with everypony for the lulz.

(Season One) *Canon* Luna is Celestia's little sister, and her jealousy of her caused the Nightmare Moon incident. That's pretty much it.

Fanon Luna is melancholic, artistic, quirky, misunderstood, loves her abacus, was and perhaps still is victimized by her awful sister, and a political revolutionary.

One of the biggest dividing factors between fanon's relationship with minor characters and background characters is how it reacts to the canon.

Luna, for example, made it through canonization of her personality with practically no drama at all. Many Bronies were anticipating a fandom backlash before the episode even aired, and were already prepared to handle it with grace. The fact that *Nightmare Night* did little to dispute lots of popular fanon didn't hurt either. While Luna wasn't quite the angsting, love-starved artiste oppressed by her big sister, plenty of elements we imagined she had were still there. As in many fan interpretations, Luna ached to make connections, but social awkwardness and a thousand-year dissonance between Luna and Ponyville made that difficult, and yes, due to this Luna was a little sad. The most likely reason, however, why *Nightmare Night* came and went without any drama is the fact that the fandom adores Luna and desperately wanted to see her again. Part of the reason fanon for the Princesses exists at all is simply because we don't know much about them, and build on what we can. Whatever fanon we add to them, the princesses are seen as belonging to someone else and changes to them are easy to accept.

After *Nightmare Night*, Luna's fanon changed and most (if not all) of the weepy, sad Lunas in fanfiction were rarer. Interestingly, as Luna's character got more definition, Celestia's fanon changed as well, and the popularity of Tyrant Celestia has waned. (Molestia and Trollestia's popularity is mostly unchanged.)

The background ponies have even less for fans to go on. That is, almost nothing. The majority of popular background ponies' canon can be based on appearance, cutie mark, the setting they were in, and maybe a small background event. The lucky ones might even have a whole sentence. These guys are almost entirely fanon: their personalities, their occupations, their family, their hobbies, their favorite foods. Pretty much everyone with a pony avatar knows who Lyra is. People who aren't even in the fandom know who Derpy is. Their popularity rivals even that of the main characters. No canon supports them, but their fanons are solid. Lyra plays the lyre, is to some degree interested in

humans, and makes up half of what might be the fandom's OTP with Bon-Bon. Derpy Hooves is the wall-eyed mailmare, well-meaning but very clumsy. Octavia is a classy little pony that plays the double bass (or cello) and is familiar with a wild maned DJ by the name of Vinyl Scratch (DJ P0n3 on stage).

With the incredible popularity of these background ponies, something interesting happened. The line between canon and fanon shifted. Characters, to varying extents, were canonized. You can find a Lyra Heartstrings in the toy aisle right next to the fan-favorites collection with DJ P0N3 (if the store hasn't sold out). But of course, the shining example of a pony making the leap from fanon to canon is none other than our own beloved Derpy Hooves.

What started as a simple animation error and snickering on 4chan exploded into a fandom phenomenon. Come season two Bronies could find a little grey pony with bubbles on her butt in every episode, hiding like Waldo somewhere in the background, and her eyes looking two directions at once. There was news of the official Comic Con brushable, complete with muffins on her box. Then, on January 21st 2012, the crème de la crème: a speaking role in *The Last Roundup* and the line heard 'round the fandom: "Now, careful, Derpy!"

Here was something that rarely happens in the fandom/creator dynamic. Shout outs and a little background event here and there is one thing, but this was something else entirely. The fanon had become canon. Not an alternative character interpretation, not an open ended "maybe, maybe not" shout out. Derpy, the clumsy little cross eyed pony was now absolutely, irrevocably, canon.

And therein lies the rub.

Here's the great thing about fanon: it's not canon. You can acknowledge or disregard them as you please. You don't have to run with the brown stallion with the hourglass cutie mark being Doctor Hooves, or have to pair up Lyra and Bon-Bon. He could just be plain old Time Turner, clockmaker with no wacky time travel adventures whatsoever. Lyra and Bon-Bon could just be really close friends, or roommates, or maybe even cousins. See, while fanon can sometimes *feel* like canon in how much of the fandom clutches fiercely to it, it is still *not* canon. The fanon is pliable, it's changeable. You don't have to adhere to it if you don't want to. The worst that could happen is being unpopular, and maybe a few fans will grouse at you in the comments. Who knows, you could contradict a popular fanon idea and people may adore it. After all, if you like your own little headcanon, maybe someone else will too. Maybe you'll get really lucky and your

headcanon might become part of the bigger collective fanon, with the many hordes taking your fanfiction as the new gospel for that character. (Not super likely to happen, but it could. One never knows.)

Clashing fanons and headcanons isn't that much different than a clash of opinions. It's quite possible to compromise peacefully. You can believe that Big Macintosh is a mathematical genius that never speaks because he's so busy calculating the ratio of apple trees to farmland. And also is totally crushing on Fluttershy. Likewise, I can believe that Big Macintosh has basic math skills, and is quiet because some awful trauma he witnessed as a colt shocked him into silence. And is also totally crushing on Cheerilee. Those are two totally different fanons, but that's okay. There's room for more than one, and you can agree to disagree, love and tolerate, let's all hug and have some cake and so forth.

But when fanon starts to make that canonical shift, suddenly things get complicated. If you were one of the hundreds that's accepted Derpy Hooves into your life and she was canonized, then all was well and good. But if you were one of the few that held really tight to the name "Ditzy Doo" or "Bright Eyes", that meant this fanon you disliked, maybe even hated, was suddenly canon and the canon is far harder to disregard. Whether Derpy's name was censored later or not doesn't matter. It still happened, it's still there. It's a flimsier sort of canon, but it's still arguably canon.

Of course, this isn't the only way fanon and canon get awkward. Recall the case of a little lavender unicorn filly named "Dinky". In *Sisterhooves Social*, little Dinky shows up in the three legged race with the unicorn commonly known as "Sparkler". So Sparkler must be Dinky's sister! And Sparkler looks no older than Rarity or Applejack... or Derpy! That means she must be as old as Derpy! But but but Derpy can't also have a daughter old as herself, that's impossible! But then, that... that means... Dinky isn't Derpy's daughter! Derpy ISN'T Dinky's mom! *EVERYPONY PANIC!*

The fanon of Derpy as a single mom who isn't perfect but does the best she can is burning down! Oh, all those poor fanfictions! All those poor heartwarming, heartbreaking fanfictions and fancomics and fanarts gone in a flash. Let us gather together and mourn the untimely passing of *Dinky Doesn't Go to School* and *Today, Tomorrow, and Forever*. Alas, they are all lost to us forever. Absalom, Absalom!

...Except not.

Less than a day after the panic from the canon's blast was already fixed and mended. It's all okay, see? Sparkler is just Derpy's *other* adopted daughter, and Sparkler's a teenage pony! Or Sparkler's just a babysitter temporarily standing in as a big sister so Dinky won't be left out. Or Sparkler's part of the Big Brother, Big Sister program. The fanon was perfectly fine, it just needed a few workarounds and adjustments is all, and *Dinky Doesn't Go to School* is safe once more.

Many, many other fanfictions deal with the same thing. Something you just spent hours writing has suddenly been disputed by the latest episode, and it feels like your whole world fell apart. It's something many writers have to deal with eventually, but you'd be surprised at how many of them can still run forward as originally planned with some rewrites and tweaking.

Of course, there are still those cases where a story's canonicity simply cannot be salvaged. *It's a Dangerous Business, Going Out Your Door*, for example, is more or less trashed after the release of an official map of Equestria. According to the fic, Equestria is landlocked by neighboring countries; the fact that it's actually surrounded by seas is an issue. In fact, most fanfictions that deal heavily with travel outside of Equestria are in similar situations.

Fear not! There is still an option without completely reworking the story. Just explain in the description that your story was written before the release of whatever contradicts your work. You don't always have to adhere super strictly to canon; readers just need some acknowledgement that you're already aware of the conflicting continuity between fanfic and FiM. Alternatively, you could also just label your story as Alternate Universe (though this brings with it other connotations).

If you remember nothing else, remember that canon and fanon aren't always going to work smoothly together. Sometimes they will contradict, sometimes they will coincide. What really matters is us. How we as a fandom, or as individual fans react to it. I know those clashes can be ugly and scary, but that's the beautiful thing about fanon. Fanon is flexible, it can adapt. When the canon comes against it, fanon does not shatter, but bends around it and gets a new shape.

Just try to ultimately remember what's canon and what's not. It'll save you a lot of stress in the end.

**Handling Criticism and Rejection, or:
Please Don't Act Like a Flaming Rage Monster** by Donny's Boy

Any discussion of the criticism and rejection that we receive as fan fiction authors should begin with one core premise: Criticism, on the whole, is a *good* thing.

Not only does criticism provide the potential to help us improve our writing, but it also is evidence that our readership is interested in and cares about our stories. It does not take much time or a deep reading to simply write "Great story!" as a comment on a story, whereas it does to provide several detailed paragraphs of critical analysis. Further, this is exactly why many of us write – to be able to witness readers engaging with our stories, with the emotions our stories invoke, with the ideas and concepts, et cetera.

Not all criticism is equal, of course, nor are all critics. It can actually be counterproductive to internalize every bit of criticism we receive to an equal degree – one critic might say one thing while another says something completely opposite. Fortunately, there are various ways of evaluating the criticism we receive. This does not divide neatly into "people who are mean" and "people who are nice," however. A critic who is nice and flattering is not necessarily a critic who is correct. Likewise, a critic who is harsh and condemnatory is not necessarily a critic who is wrong.

So, how might a writer evaluate the criticism being received? One way is by judging through volume. One person with a certain complaint might just be an oddball or a crank, but ten people with the same complaint might just be onto something important. This is an imperfect methodology, of course, as perhaps the story is one more for a niche audience or one likely to attract hatred for reasons unrelated to its writing quality (such as by featuring despised romantic pairings, controversial themes, et cetera.). In addition to judging criticism by *quantity*, writers likely will also want to separate criticism by *quality*.

There are several ways to judge the quality of the criticism we receive. One way is by simply looking at the criticism itself. Do the arguments make sense to you? (If not, perhaps you might want to ask a few politely-worded clarifying questions.) Is the critic's spelling correct? Are the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary usage generally good? Another way is to see if the critics have written any stories of their own. If so, read some of those stories and then ask yourself if you respect the quality of the writing. If the critics have not written their own stories, check to see if they've favorited any stories by others and, if so, ask yourself if you respect the quality of the writing in those other stories.

It's important that we be as objective and fair in this process as possible, of course. It's not useful, to us or to others, to write off all critics' writing or favorited stories as obviously inferior or unworthy simply because we're stung by the criticism we've received.

This brings us to the next point: Though not all criticism necessarily should be weighted equally in our considerations, *all* criticism and rejection should receive polite and respectful responses. This includes even criticism and rejection that is phrased harshly. Critics have taken time from their days to both read our stories and to provide feedback, and these are both valuable gifts to us as writers. They should be treated as such. (If the feedback is less harsh criticism than outright trolling, it's generally best to simply not respond at all. Flame wars are usually a black hole that sucks in all of one's time and energy while giving nothing back.)

Admittedly, this is often easier said than done. Criticism and rejection just plain hurt, and many writers' initial inclination will be to respond defensively or angrily. Even after more than five years in fanfiction writing – and many more years involved in original fiction writing – I find that my very first reaction to criticism or rejection is, all too often, something along the lines of "Clearly you plebeians simply do not understand my consummate genius!" This is, shall we shall, a distinctly unhelpful thought to verbalize – especially as, upon further reflection, I find that I often come to a point of *agreeing* with the criticism I've received.

Therefore, it's often a good idea to wait for a period of time before responding to criticism or rejection to allow time for emotional settling, calm reflection, et cetera. How much time will depend on the person. For some writers, just a few minutes will be enough. For others, a few days might be necessary. I tend to wait a few hours before responding, as that's usually a sufficient cool-down time period for me.

Being polite and respectful to critics does not mean that one has to *agree* with the criticism, however. It is entirely possible to disagree without being disagreeable, as the saying goes. You can give someone's arguments due consideration and respect, carefully think them over, and still reach a different conclusion than the critic. That's perfectly okay. Not all critics will understand this, of course, but at that point, it's their problem and not yours. If you've shown respect and politeness, then you've met your obligations to your reviewers.

The astute among those reading will note that all of this advice basically boils down to: Don't be a flaming rage monster. That's because that is, indeed, what it all boils down to.

Don't be a flaming rage monster. Treat others as you yourself would generally care to be treated. Strike a balance between having a good sense of self-worth and believing you've ascended to omnipotent godhood. If you can do all of that, you should be just fine.

Happy reading and writing!

Equestria Daily simply *is* the biggest site in pony on the internet right now, and I don't think I can even say it's second only to Hasbro. It chugs at a tens of thousands of views per day on the subject of pony alone, and it has become the go-to place for pony news, music, videos, and of course, fanfiction.

Before RDash47's Pony Fiction Archive and long before Knighty's FiMFiction, the only places you could reliably find MLP fanfiction was fanfiction.net and various websites ending in *art*. Even then, you couldn't be assured what you read was of any quality. Cue in the one of the biggest fanblogs on the internet and suddenly all the bronies looking for fan content have one trusted resource for ponyfic. The Equestria Daily spotlight.

Equestria Daily didn't really always have pre-readers, but as the blog grew, that's not something that stayed as fact for very long. The first pre-readers were a simple, primitive folk, fashioning reviews out of sticks, some flint, and enough snark to level a convention center. Way back when *Friendship is Magic* was in its winter months, most pre-readers were accomplished in ponyfic in some way, writing stories that were featured early in the blog's career. Although that isn't to say some of them didn't stumble into the job. Back then, simple nepotism was enough.

Equestria Daily's stance on fanfics hasn't changed much since the beginning: no clop or useless gore. While *Cupcakes* was posted, it was done so with major warning and, with hindsight, regret. Never again will such an action be replicated, not even with such fiction as the pre-reader-acclaimed SleeplessBrony's *Romance Reports*, for it has clop material. Equestria Daily is a site that has ties to Hasbro, and gore and clop cannot be tolerated on the website anymore.

Fiction used to be screened by Sethisto before being sent to the pre-readers. That practice has ended in favor of the Ficbox, which a couple pre-readers have access to for screening. From there it's sent to us, the pre-readers, for a more thorough, case-by-case basis.

It's important to note that each pre-reader is different, and the life of a submitted story is up to the discretion of said pre-reader. A story could be passed on to Equestria by one pre-reader, or it could be sent to the moon (a phrase used by pre-readers to say a story has not passed inspection). This is not to say that it's bad luck your fic didn't go up – on the contrary, if the fic gets mooned, then it is an opportunity for the author to follow the advice of the pre-reader to improve the story and clean it up. Usually this entails

grammar issues, or inconsistencies with canon material when the story claims to be a part of that universe.

Some pre-readers are grammar nazis, who will send your story to the moon if you screw up your 'there/their/they're' or get too happy with comma splices. Some are far more content oriented, willing to let a few blemishes slip by if they feel like it won't harm the greater story.

It is *very* important to note that absolutely no pre-reader will stop a fic from getting the spotlight if we don't agree with the subject matter. Grimdark? We've got a PR for that. Human in Equestria? Yep, those'll get past us if they're good. Shipping between Applejack and Rainbow Dash's son and your pretty OC princess? Ah... well, we're not miracle workers. We're there to quality check your fic and get it ready for the spotlight.

Pre-readers are not editors. If you write a response back to a pre-reader for clarification of their points, don't be surprised if it gets lost in the slog of stories we get, but normally pre-readers are quite receptive to such things and will offer greater insight. However, we aren't there to hold your hand. There are cases where, if a pre-reader really likes a story, they will offer to help, but don't count yourself as the special snowflake out there. Feel free to leave a response if you receive a rejection letter, but please make sure it's thought out.

When all is said and done and a story gets featured on the blog, it's to serve as a community spotlight for a well-done piece of fiction. Writing for Equestria Daily is a style that has waned in recent months, what with the advent of FiMFiction's feature box, but it's still worrying to see so many 'My First Fanfiction's come up in the queue. Equestria Daily is *not* a fanfiction site, and should not be treated as such. You may submit your fanfic to us, but please endeavor to make it your A+ game, even if you're already a well known author, like the other authors on the panel with me.

Lastly, we, the pre-readers, are here to foster growth in the writing community by spotlighting good stories and clever authors. We try to steer towards a path of literacy and simply having a good time. We help where we can, and we take pride in watching the stories we pass into Equestria Daily get praise, and brag to each other on what fics we gave the all-clear to. Everything the other authors included here is important for an aspiring author to take to heart, and if you're looking to get on the blog, you should to. The pre-readers look forward to the next fic we send to the front page. It could be yours.

James Nichol once said, "The problem with defending the purity of the English language is that English is about as pure as a cribhouse whore. We don't just borrow words; on occasion, English has pursued other languages down alleyways to beat them unconscious and rifle their pockets for new vocabulary." A language of that attitude needs the strictest supervision, lest it wander off into incomprehensibility, never to return.

Luckily for us writers and readers, there is a stable of tried and true rules, regulations, and guidelines for dealing with this most persnickety of foes, keeping it corralled and manageable. Until one has anything but the most exacting and precise grasp on English's nuances and flexibilities, one would do well to follow these rules. Then and only then, a skilled writer can begin taking liberties and bending the regs to achieve a desired stylistic effect.

Remember: rules are there to make you think, often think very hard, before you break them. You should not break them without just cause. Certainly it's *possible* to drive your car on the sidewalk or do 85 in a 45, but only in the most extraordinary of circumstances and you'd better have a *very* good reason for doing so – "because I felt like it" just won't fly. The vast majority of the time, you would do well to follow those rules, for they have been put in place with very good reason: in the case of the road, to keep you and your surrounding drivers safe; in the case of the story, to keep you and your readers on the same page. Specific issues will be discussed a bit further down; for now, let's talk about the basic generalities of how to write well.

Getting Started

Good writing starts with good reading, or perhaps more accurately, prolific reading. Read whatever you can lay your hands on – whether it's good (say, *Great Expectations*), bad (say, *50 Shades of Gray*), or indifferent (say, a cereal box). Well-written works act as case studies of how to do it right; poorly-written works act as case studies of what *not* to do; cereal boxes do an admirable job of passing the time while you eat breakfast. All reading also acts to exercise the mental muscles associated with manipulating language, and may also inspire you and stretch your imagination. If nothing else, you will grow more and more familiar with this wild, tangled thing we call English. You could think of reading as grinding in your video game of choice, slowly helping you level up your skillset.

Good writing also starts with, well, writing. You aren't an author until you've put pen to

paper (or fingers to keyboard) and actually produced something. Like reading, it doesn't matter what you write, at least at first – keep a journal or a blog, compose free-verse poetry or haiku, draft letters to all your friends about how your day's gone. Whatever you write, however you write it, you're exercising those mental muscles, and getting yourself used to the idea of writing, ideally every day; get in that groove and stick to it. None of the stuff you produce in this mode ever has to see the light of day, of course, but it'll keep you ready and waiting for that big idea to hit so you can hit the ground running.

Time to Shine

So, it's happened – you've struck upon what just might be a solid premise, the beginnings of a plot or an interesting character. It's time to write something you really want other people to see, something you can share with the world. You might want to jot down a few notes, just to make sure you don't forget anything important; this could range from a few bullets on a notecard to a full outline that touches on every major story development. Or, you might just write, putting down what comes naturally. Every author has their own comfort level, their own way of doing things, and none of them is right or wrong in terms of the writing process, as long as it works.

Start at the beginning of your story – no more, no less. In other words, skip all the boring stuff at the beginning and get us to the interesting part. We don't really need three chapters explaining how the events in your story came to be; we want to see the events themselves, and the rest (a.k.a. 'backstory') can be filled in as you go along. A common piece of advice in this vein is to only give your reader as much information as they need to get to the end of the sentence; leave out everything else. The reader doesn't need to know (nor do they care) whether it's a sunny, cloud-free day or a torrential, rain-filled night... unless, of course, the weather is actually important to your story in some way.

Kurt Vonnegut said, "Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water." Everybody has something driving them through their days, even if it isn't something exciting. This is evident in the show itself, as well: Twilight wants to impress Celestia, Dash wants to join the Wonderbolts, Applejack wants to run a successful farm, Rarity wants to get noticed in Canterlot, Fluttershy wants to care for animals, Pinkie Pie wants to make everyone around her happy. These motivations are part of these characters, almost as intrinsic as their names or races, and must be maintained or the believability of your story will be lost; characterization for all characters in your story must be consistent, even if you're using original characters or background characters with no established motivation. Once you decide on your characters' motivations, you have to stick with it.

It is, of course, possible to change or redefine a character's motivation over the course of your story, but for that to be accepted by your readers, it's going to take a lot – a major life event, a crucible of some sort, something powerful enough to take a defining aspect of your character and make it different. This sort of thing is usually a 'bad' event, but it can be something 'good' too – someone important to your character could die, or someone important to your character could be born. There *is* something a little more interesting about the bad events, though; putting a good character in a bad situation really lets you and the reader see what they're made of, see if they maintain their integrity or crack under the strain.

Characterization can also be reinforced by what point of view you're telling your story from, and how your narrator follows your characters. The narrator's descriptions should be colored by your characters' points of view as well; this will help draw in the reader and bring them closer to your characters, which in turn will help them care about your characters. For example, a neutral (i.e. boring) narrator might say: *The sky was blue*. A narrator following Rainbow Dash might say: *The sky was an awesome shade of blue*. A narrator following Rarity might say: *The sky was a simply divine shade of blue*. The characters aren't speaking, but their speech patterns and characterizations can still influence the narrator's.

Editing

After you've completed your masterpiece, be it a one-shot or a single chapter or an entire novel, let it age a little. Put away your notebook or close the document and go do something else for a while. Play that video game you've been meaning to play, read that book you've been meaning to read, write something else you've been meaning to write. Ideally you'd let it sit for a few days or weeks, but if you just can't wait that long, at the very least sleep on it. Giving yourself this break lets you divorce yourself somewhat from the world you've been inhabiting, which makes it easier to identify mistakes or errors.

Having made your first pass back through your writing, catching and reworking the most glaring of errors, go back through it again, but this time, read it out loud to yourself in a steady, measured tone – don't rush it. Quite apart from ensuring your narration and dialogue flows easily and naturally (which it should – rewrite if it doesn't), you'll be shocked at the ridiculous errors you find this way that your brain otherwise 'helpfully' glosses over when you're reading silently to yourself: duplicated words, completely missing words, malformed verb or tense agreements, out of place punctuation... If any of your prose *sounds* wrong, rewrite it. Also keep an eye out for areas where you were a bit

wordier than you needed to be – Strunk & White's old adage "omit needless words" can help tighten up and streamline your work, packing the most punch in the smallest space. This will keep your story's pacing up and keep your readers interested.

Once you're satisfied with the piece, ask a few close, trusted friends to look it over for you. These need to be people who aren't afraid to tell you the truth if they think some portion of your story – or even the whole thing – is no good. If you don't have anyone you can trust for that sort of thing, there are many avenues for you to get objective, impartial feedback online.

Be On The Lookout

There are many common issues that plague many an author; keep watch for these both during your initial composition and when you're editing your work.

In general terms, your spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization all needs to be perfect. Run a spelling/grammar check to catch the most obvious errors, and you should be able to catch the rest on your own, but that's also what your volunteer editors are for, especially if you yourself have some trouble with the more finicky aspects. Your job should be to make it as easy as possible for your readers to enjoy your story, and that includes not leaving your prose riddled with distracting errors. There's a lot of competition out there, a lot of other stories all scrabbling for your readers' time, and you don't want to give them an excuse to close yours and move on to the next.

Think of it another way – if you aren't going to take the time to write well, why should anyone take the time to read it? Take the time to refine your story into the best possible version of itself – your readers will thank you, even if they can't quite put their finger on why.

Paragraphing

When to start a new paragraph is something you'll usually intuit on your own; there's a natural flow and pacing to paragraphing that comes naturally. A paragraph break is a subtle spot for a reader to pause and 'catch their breath'. You absolutely do not want a wall of text, with no paragraph breaks for pages. A good rule of thumb is to start a new paragraph when changing location or focus within the story, i.e. move to a new paragraph when your story moves forward, but there's some flexibility there.

An inviolable rule concerning paragraphing that brooks no discussion: each new speaker gets their own paragraph, no matter how little they say.

"Who's there?" said Twilight. "Just me," said Fluttershy.

"Who's there?" said Twilight.

"Just me," said Fluttershy.

Giving each speaker their own paragraph helps the reader keep track of who is speaking at any given time.

Adverbs

Adverbs are adjectives (or adjective phrases) that modify verbs (actions) instead of nouns (things). When doing your re-reading and editing passes, take a long, hard look at any adverbs you run across; more often than not, they don't tell the reader anything they don't already know from context. They are often used as a crutch to prop up otherwise weak writing; if you feel a line doesn't convey your meaning without using an adverb, there is most likely the opportunity for a rewrite there that *does* convey your meaning, and in a more impactful way.

Dialogue Attribution Verbs

A dialogue attribution verb is the verb used to connect a line of dialogue to its speaker's description by the narrator. The most common of these is 'said' or 'says', and it should definitely be the most common. More florid choices are simply distracting, and like adverbs, can be an 'easy out' for writers who are afraid their true meaning isn't being imparted. A character's word choice, and how you punctuate the dialogue (see below), should be everything you need to convey that character's tone of voice. Deviate from the standard of 'said/'says' sparingly.

Dialogue Attribution Punctuation

This is probably the single most difficult area for aspiring authors to get consistently correct, and with good reason – they can be intricate and confusing.

There are two parts to sentences containing dialogue: the dialogue itself and the dialogue attribution phrase (the narrator's description of the speaker, along with the dialogue attribution verb), which lets the reader know who is saying the dialogue. For example:

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike.

Here, "*I miss Canterlot,*" is the dialogue, and *said Spike* is the attribution phrase. In sentences following this format, the dialogue will always end in a comma, exclamation point, or question mark.

~~"I miss Canterlot," said Spike.~~

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike. *or* "I miss Canterlot!" said Spike. *or* "Do you miss Canterlot?" said Spike.

If the attribution phrase comes before the dialogue, a comma should be used to separate them. No other punctuation is acceptable.

~~Spike said "I miss Canterlot!" *or* Spike said. "I miss Canterlot!"~~

Spike said, "I miss Canterlot!"

Sometimes, attribution phrases can be dropped in the middle of a sentence of dialogue. In this case, commas should be used to separate the dialogue from the attribution.

~~"I miss Canterlot" said Spike "but I like Ponyville too."~~

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike, "but I like Ponyville too."

If the attribution phrase is separating two independent sentences of dialogue, it should be attached to the first sentence with a comma, and separated from the second by a period.

~~"I miss Canterlot," said Spike, "What about you, Twilight?"~~

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike. "What about you, Twilight?"

Capitalization is also important when it comes to sentences with dialogue. The attribution phrase should never be capitalized, unless it comes before the dialogue.

~~"I miss Canterlot!" Said Spike.~~

"I miss Canterlot!" said Spike.

If the attribution phrase splits a sentence of dialogue, the second half of the dialogue sentence should not be capitalized.

~~"I miss Canterlot," said Spike, "But I like Ponyville too."~~

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike, "but I like Ponyville too."

However, if the attribution phrase is separating two sentences of dialogue, both sentences of dialogue should be capitalized.

~~"I miss Canterlot," said Spike. "what about you, Twilight?"~~

"I miss Canterlot," said Spike. "What about you, Twilight?"

Sometimes, there is no attribution phrase directly tied to dialogue, but we can infer who is speaking based on context. In these cases, if the dialogue comes before the context sentence(s), it can end in a period, exclamation point, or question mark, but not a comma.

~~"I haven't seen that book in ages," Twilight scanned the library shelves.~~

"I haven't seen that book in ages." Twilight scanned the library shelves.

Likewise, if the context sentence(s) come before the dialogue, it can end in a period, exclamation point, or question mark, but not a comma.

~~Twilight scanned the library shelves, "I haven't seen that book in ages."~~

Twilight scanned the library shelves. "I haven't seen that book in ages."

When a new character begins speaking, both their dialogue and associated attribution phrases and/or context sentences must go in a new paragraph.

~~Twilight scanned the library shelves. "I haven't seen that book in ages." Pinkie Pie smiled. "That's okay, I don't need it that badly!"~~

Twilight scanned the library shelves. "I haven't seen that book in ages."

Pinkie Pie smiled. "That's okay, I don't need it that badly!"

Do not separate dialogue and associated attribution phrases and/or context sentences.

~~Twilight scanned the library shelves. "I haven't seen that book in ages." Pinkie Pie smiled.~~

~~"That's okay, I don't need it that badly!"~~

Twilight scanned the library shelves. "I haven't seen that book in ages."

Pinkie Pie smiled. "That's okay, I don't need it that badly!"

Inner Dialogue Punctuation (i.e. 'Thoughts')

If the narrator is omniscient and we can directly hear characters' thoughts, the same rules apply as with spoken dialogue punctuation as detailed above. However, instead of using the double quotation marks to open and close a line of dialogue, use italics.

~~"I wish I could find that book for Pinkie," thought Twilight to herself.~~

I wish I could find that book for Pinkie, thought Twilight to herself.

Don't use italics in conjunction with single or double quotation marks; this will simply confuse your readers, making it unclear whether you are attempting to portray a line of dialogue being spoken with emphasis, or a private thought.

If a word in italicized text would normally be italicized in standard dialogue, for example a ship's name or something spoken with emphasis, don't italicize it. Bolding, underlining, or otherwise calling out the word or phrase is unnecessary and distracting.

~~*I can't **believe** I can't find that book for Pinkie,* thought Twilight to herself.~~

I can't believe I can't find that book for Pinkie, thought Twilight to herself.

Accents

When rendering accents, don't lay it on too thickly; a hint here and there is enough for your readers to get the hint that we're dealing with a particular mode of speech. Too much and you risk turning a pleasant journey into an unpleasant slog through a thick burr, trying to decipher what a character's saying.

~~"Ah jus' don' know what mah pappch'd think'a wha' y'all're doin' fer us," said Applejack.~~

"Ah just don't know what mah pappy'd think of what y'all are doing for us," said Applejack.

When rendering a word phonetically, only use an apostrophe as a substitute for a dropped letter (or letters).

~~"Ah'm gonna' hit the hay here pretty soon, li'l sis'," said Applejack.~~

"Ah'm gonna hit the hay here pretty soon, li'l sis," said Applejack.

On a more specific note, it's *y'all* – a contraction of *you all* – not *ya'll*.

Comma vs. Semicolon vs. Colon

Each of these punctuation marks serves a distinct purpose in your prose, with clearly-defined rules that leave very little open to interpretation.

A comma is used to separate items in a list or insert a brief pause between connected phrases. A semicolon is used to connect two related complete sentences where the conjunction has been omitted or two related complete sentences which contain commas joined by a conjunction or separate lists whose items contain commas. A colon is used to begin a list, to denote that a second complete sentence directly explains the preceding complete sentence, or to emphasize a name or description immediately following a complete sentence. None of these punctuation marks can be used interchangeably.

A comma is the most common of the three; the other two may be used rarely or not at all in your prose, depending on your writing style. A safe rule of thumb would be to use a comma if your particular case doesn't fall into the cases described above for semicolons or colons. Here are a few examples:

~~Twilight Sparkle knew that book was here somewhere, she'd find it.~~

Twilight Sparkle knew that book was here somewhere; she'd find it.

Twilight Sparkle knew that book was here somewhere, and she'd find it.

~~Twilight Sparkle knew that book was here somewhere, despite being unable to find it just yet, and she was determined to locate it, no matter what.~~

Twilight Sparkle knew that book was here somewhere, despite being unable to find it just yet; and she was determined to locate it, no matter what.

~~Celestia knew diplomats were coming from Flankfurt, Germaneigh, Mareseilles, Prance, Thatchholm, Gildedale, and Dromedor, Camelu.~~

Celestia knew diplomats were coming from Flankfurt, Germaneigh; Mareseilles, Prance; Thatchholm, Gildedale; and Dromedor, Camelu.

~~Celestia knew diplomats were coming from all over the world, Germaneigh, Prance, Gildedale, and Camelu.~~

Celestia knew diplomats were coming from all over the world: Germaneigh, Prance, Gildedale, and Camelu.

~~Rainbow Dash knew the state of the town hall could only mean one thing, Derpy Hooves was at it again.~~

Rainbow Dash knew the state of the town hall could only mean one thing: Derpy Hooves was at it again.

~~There was only one mare that could save them now. Rainbow Dash.~~

There was only one mare that could save them now: Rainbow Dash.

Exclamation and Question Marks

Exclamation marks are used to denote excitement or emphasis; question marks are used, naturally, to denote a question. Never, ever, ever use more than one at a time – you're composing prose, not texting a teenager. Like adverbs, these are an extremely weak way out of a situation where context should give us a sufficient idea of characters' tone.

"Five exclamation marks, the sure sign of an insane mind."

Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man*

It is much more acceptable to use a slightly more intense dialogue attribution verb than multiple marks. For example:

~~"There's nothing you can do???" asked Rarity.~~

"There's nothing you can do?" shrieked Rarity.

You could also use a combination of an exclamation mark and a question mark; this formulation is called an interrobang.

~~"There's nothing you can do???" asked Rarity.~~

"There's nothing you can do!?" asked Rarity.

The exclamation mark and question mark can come in either order, though ?! is the most common method; whichever method you choose, you must ensure you're consistent throughout your story – don't switch back and forth between ?! and !? in different sections.

The only exception to this rule may be made if it's in character; for example, an overexcited Pinkie Pie, someone who won't care about correct composition, may very well write a note that ends in **!!!!**

Ellipses

An ellipsis (plural *ellipses*) is used to indicate a trailing off of narration or dialogue, if used at the end of a sentence, or an extended pause if used in the middle of one. A true ellipsis is not the same thing as three periods together, but has some space between each mark: ... vs ... However, a true ellipsis is a special character for many websites and software, and may not render correctly, so three periods with no spaces between serves as an acceptable substitute.

Similar to the restriction of using a single exclamation point or question mark, an ellipsis is specifically three dots, no more and no less. Using more than three dots in an attempt to indicate a longer pause is not acceptable.

When used to end a sentence, the ellipsis replaces the usual punctuation. For example:

~~Twilight hesitated. "I suppose...."~~

Twilight hesitated. "I suppose..."

~~"I suppose that would be all right....," Twilight mused.~~

"I suppose that would be all right..." Twilight mused.

Hyphen vs. En Dash vs. Em Dash

These are the three most common punctuation lines, with the hyphen serving a completely different purpose than the dashes. The dashes, in turn, are functionally equivalent to each other but not interchangeable; i.e. you must choose one or the other and use it consistently throughout your story.

Hyphens are used join words or to separate syllables of a single word, for example if a character stutters.

Rainbow Dash felt sorry for her ground-bound friends.

"Are you s-s-sure that's okay?" asked Fluttershy.

Dashes are used to introduce abrupt pauses or breaks in narration or dialogue. An en dash is shorter, traditionally the width of an 'n' character, while an em dash is about twice as long, traditionally the width of an 'm' character, though that can vary from font to font. The most common and readable formulations are to use an en dash set between spaces (though the space is omitted if the dash is interrupting a word), or an em dash without spaces. For example:

Rainbow stared at the shocking apparition – she had never seen anything like it.

Rainbow stared at the shocking apparition—she had never seen anything like it.

Rarity started to open the do– *No*, she thought. *Too dangerous.*

Rarity started to open the do— *No*, she thought. *Too dangerous.*

Pinkie Pie shouted over the raging wind, "What the buck was th—"

Pinkie Pie shouted over the raging wind, "What the buck was th—"

Twilight stared; there was just no way –

Twilight stared; there was just no way—

Dashes are also used to offset an unrelated interruption to dialogue.

"I'm afraid I can't simply just" – a crack of thunder rolled through the town –
"drop everything because of a little bad weather!"

"I'm afraid I can't simply just"—a crack of thunder rolled through the town—
"drop everything because of a little bad weather!"

Parentheses

Parenthetical statements (that is to say, asides set off by parentheses) do not have a place in narrative prose, only in technical documents, textbooks, and the like. Use dashes – or possibly commas, depending on the particular circumstances – to set off the would-be parenthetical statement instead.

~~Twilight sighed (she was getting tired of explaining herself) and tried again.~~

Twilight sighed – she was getting tired of explaining herself – and tried again.

Contractions

The two most common contraction mixups are the bane of many an internet Grammar Nazi: *your/you're* and *its/it's*. And with good reason, for each means a specific thing.

Your is possessive; it indicates something belongs to 'you'. *You're*, on the other hand, is a contraction of *you are*, which is a declarative statement.

~~Your a beautiful mare.~~

You're a beautiful mare.

~~You're apples are delicious.~~

Your apples are delicious.

Similarly, *its* is possessive, indicating something belongs to 'it'. *It's* is a contraction of *it is*, another declarative statement.

~~Its a beautiful day in Ponyville.~~

It's a beautiful day Ponyville.

~~The picture fell off it's desk.~~

The picture fell off its desk.

There's a simple way to make sure you're using the correct one: substitute the expanded form of the contraction, and see if the sentence still sounds correct.

The picture fell off it is desk.

You are apples are delicious.

Tildes (~)

Some authors have taken to using tildes as an alternative punctuation mark, usually indicating a 'sing-song' trailing off.

"Just a minute~" trilled Rarity as she moved to open the door.

This use is not accepted or considered standard by any style guide, and therefore generally comes off as unprofessional or amateurish. An exclamation mark or ellipsis would be acceptable in these cases.

Action Asterisks

Some authors have taken to inserting brief actions inside a line of dialogue, offset by asterisks, as one might do in a chatroom or instant message session.

"There's no way *gasp* we can reach them *gasp* in time!" panted Twilight.

Again, this use is not acceptable, appears unprofessional, and ruins the flow of the story. Some correct alternatives:

"There's no way... we can reach them... in time!" panted Twilight.

"There's no way" – a gasp – "we can reach them" – another gasp – "in time!"

"There's no way," Twilight gasped, "we can reach them," she gasped again, "in time!"

In Conclusion

As with anything else in life, your writing skills and abilities will improve with practice, and the more you read, the more you'll pick up the rules of the road by simple osmosis.

If you enjoy writing, and enjoy the work you're producing, don't let anyone convince you to stop. I can't sing or cook by any objective measure, but that doesn't stop me from belting it out in the shower or burning my dinner on the stove – and having a good time doing it. Write purely for your own enjoyment and it won't matter one whit what commenters and prereaders think, and if you end up with fans who like and appreciate your work for what it is, then so much the better.