

Manuscript Triage and First-Aid Basics								
Diagnosis	Starts in the Wrong Place	Lack of Conflict	No Narrative Drive	No Stakes	Broken Threads	Characters Not Fully Realized	Random Elements	No Resolution
Symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing happens A feeling that the action hasn't started yet Lots of explanation Info-dumping A feeling that the action started well before the story Reader is confused about what's happening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear goals There's nothing the protagonist wants Nothing standing in the protagonist's way It's not clear why the reader should care about the protagonist It's not clear why the reader should care about what's happening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There's no logic to the plot events There's no cause-and-effect trajectory Things just happen; there's no connection between events Reader feels adrift 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no consequences to protagonist's actions The protagonist has nothing to lose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions that go unaddressed Characters that disappear Subplots that get dropped 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No character growth/arc No character goals/motivation Readers are not engaged with characters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple POVs that don't serve the story Extraneous descriptions and words, info dumps Writing feels bloated and self-indulgent Reader feels ungrounded Subplots or secondary characters don't serve the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The end falls flat The story problem does not get resolved There is no emotional payoff
Treatment	<p>Too early: Cut out the ramp-up scenes; consider weaving them in as backstory</p> <p>Too late: Start the story at the moment the action happens.</p>	<p>Do a character sketch of the protagonist, antagonist & key characters.</p> <p>Flesh out the desire and conflict, and then get them on the page.</p>	<p>Make a Two-Tier Story Outline.</p> <p>Edit, insert, or delete scenes to make each one drive the story forward.</p>	<p>Make sure the protagonist's reactions to every event are on the page.</p> <p>Use a Two-Tier Story Outline to isolate the cause-and-effect trajectory of the protagonist's actions.</p>	<p>Delete subplots or flesh out</p> <p>Delete or combine characters</p>	<p>Develop character strengths, weaknesses, beliefs and misbeliefs.</p> <p>Provide reader access into character through viewpoint, interiority and emotion on the page</p>	<p>Consider cutting a subplot, secondary character, or POV.</p> <p>Cut excess description.</p> <p>Develop Setting.</p>	<p>Define the story's arc of change.</p> <p>Identify the beginning and end states for the protagonist where the protagonist has ended up.</p>