

Consistency in Character Traits and Scene Props
and
Avoiding the “Mirror” Effect,
and
Floating Body Parts (FBPs).

By Azalea Dabill

Consistency throughout your writing is vital for a coherent, plausible story. Over the space of three hundred-odd pages the particulars can get muddled. The more complex your story, the more characters, plot layers, and conflicts, the more attention you must pay to getting the details right. This is easily said but not so easily done. It is *easier*, if you start a list of each character’s traits and your scene props at the beginning, when you begin to write.

“Traits” include things like the color of a character’s hair and eyes, a distinctive mannerism or appearance, or a particular way of speaking, shown by each character’s word choice in dialogue.

Every writer soon knows what things he or she has trouble remembering. And writing everything down never hurts. It is a safe-guard.

Avoiding the “mirror” effect is simple. It means, don’t force your character in front of a mirror so your reader can get a description. Show your character through the eyes of others in your story. You can get creative with this.

Another character can see your main character, your main character can remember what someone else said about them in a flashback, or a character can talk about the main character. It can be done in an admiring way, a sad way, or a ridiculing way. You get the point.

Here is an example from my writing:

The rising wind worried at a strand of hair escaping Kyrin’s braided leather circlet, and she curled it around her finger and tugged. Mother said her hair shone with glints of honey in the sun. It was not drab, as Myrna said with a disdainful sniff, “as a draggled wren just in out of the rain.”

FBPs or “floating body parts” means writing in a way so that a limb or other bit of your character’s body appears to act or to move on its own initiative, apart from the rest.

Ex. 1: “Her eyes rolled to heaven.” Taken literally, her eyes are now separated from her head, and are enjoying the golden sea of clear glass.

It is easy to make these mistakes. I catch myself. And no matter how good you are at self-editing, a fresh perspective is invaluable. *In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.*