

The Author's Manuscript Readiness Checklist

70 practical checks to help you look at your manuscript before sending it to a beta reader or editor.

How to use this: This is not a test of whether your writing is “good.” Mark each item **Yes**, **Maybe** or **Needs attention**. The point is to notice where you have a clear answer and where you may want another pair of eyes.

One useful rule: Do not try to fix everything at once. If several concerns point to the same underlying problem, start there.

1. Opening and first chapters

✓ Does the opening give the reader a reason to keep going beyond simply introducing the setting or character?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Can the reader tell what situation they are entering without needing a page of explanation first?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the first chapter create a question, problem, desire or tension that carries forward?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ After the opening hook, does the story keep moving rather than stopping for background information?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the main character do something that gives the reader a sense of who they are?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are the important details introduced close enough to the moment when the reader needs them?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ If you removed the first chapter, would the story lose something important beyond information the reader could receive elsewhere?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

2. Character and motivation

✓ Can the reader understand what the main character wants at this point in the story?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ When a character makes an important choice, does the reader have enough information to understand why?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Do the character's actions create consequences rather than simply reacting to events?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are emotional changes shown clearly enough for the reader to follow?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

✓ Do characters have wants, fears, habits or priorities that make their choices feel like their own?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Could two major characters make the same choice in the same situation, or would their differences matter?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are there places where you understand a character's motivation only because you know the author's intention?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

3. Pacing and momentum

✓ When a chapter feels slow, can you identify what is causing the slowdown rather than assuming the scene needs cutting?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does each major scene change something, reveal something important or create a new problem?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are the same emotional or informational beats repeated without adding something new?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Do consequences arrive soon enough for the reader to feel that earlier choices matter?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are there stretches where characters discuss, explain or think about the same issue for too long?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the story slow down at moments where the reader is expecting movement, discovery or consequence?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Can you point to places where the story could move faster without simply removing material that matters?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

4. Dialogue and relationships

✓ Do characters sound different from one another without relying on gimmicky accents or repeated catchphrases?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does dialogue feel like something these characters would actually say in this situation?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are characters telling each other things they already know mainly for the reader's benefit?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does a conversation change the situation, reveal a relationship or create a new question?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are greetings, small talk and filler used when they add something rather than by default?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

✓ Can you tell who is speaking when dialogue tags are removed for a few lines?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Do characters sometimes avoid saying exactly what they mean when their relationship or situation would make that natural?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

5. Worldbuilding, exposition and clarity

✓ Are unfamiliar names, places, systems or terms introduced at a pace the reader can follow?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the reader get the context they need before an important piece of information becomes necessary?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are explanations placed where they help the scene rather than stopping the scene?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Could a reader understand the basic rules of the world without memorising a glossary?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are there places where you explain something the reader has already understood from the scene?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are important details missing because you know the world so well that they feel obvious to you?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ When the story deliberately withholds information, is the reader still given enough to stay oriented?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

6. Point of view and reader understanding

✓ Is it clear whose experience the reader is following in each scene?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the narration stay close enough to the viewpoint character to make the scene feel grounded?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are viewpoint changes clear rather than accidental?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the narration include knowledge the viewpoint character could not reasonably have?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are emotional reactions and observations consistent with the character's knowledge and personality?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are there moments when the reader knows something important but does not know why the character is acting on it?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

✓ Can the reader follow where people are, what they are doing and what has changed from one scene to the next?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
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7. Prose, voice and readability

✓ Does the prose help the reader stay inside the scene rather than drawing attention to itself?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are sentence patterns varied enough that the writing does not begin to sound repetitive?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are descriptions specific enough to give the reader something concrete to picture?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are abstract statements used where a concrete detail or action would communicate more clearly?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Do repeated words, phrases or explanations stand out during a close read?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the prose sound like it belongs to the story and viewpoint rather than to a generic narrator?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ If the prose feels flat, can you identify whether the cause is sentence-level, scene-level or story-level?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

8. Structure, setup and payoff

✓ Do major events follow from earlier choices, information or promises?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are important later events prepared for without making the outcome obvious?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the middle build on what came before instead of feeling like a separate sequence of events?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the story introduce questions that it eventually answers or intentionally leaves open?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are subplots connected to the main story strongly enough to justify their space?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the ending resolve the promises the story has made to the reader?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ After revising a major section, have you checked the scenes and payoffs that depend on it?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

9. Emotional effect and reader expectations

✓ Does the page create the feeling you intended, or does the reader experience something different?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are emotional moments given enough setup for the reader to care about them?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are important reactions allowed enough space, or do they move past too quickly?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the story tell the reader how to feel when the scene could show enough for the reader to arrive there themselves?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are there places where the reader is likely to care more or less than you expected?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Does the genre promise made by the opening match what the rest of the book delivers?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ If the manuscript deliberately breaks a genre expectation, does the story give the reader a reason to accept that choice?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

10. Revision and feedback readiness

✓ Do you know the main question you want a beta reader or editor to answer?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Can you separate a reader's preference from a problem that may affect many readers?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ When two readers disagree, can you identify what each reader actually experienced rather than simply counting votes?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Do your current feedback notes tell you what happened on the page, or only that someone liked or disliked something?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Have you grouped repeated comments so you can see larger patterns?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ After a revision, have you reread the affected scenes in context rather than only checking the changed paragraphs?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention
✓ Are you asking for another round of feedback because the manuscript is ready for it, or because you are unsure what to do next?	Yes / Maybe / Needs attention

Before you send the manuscript

If you are asking for beta reading, decide what you most want to learn from a reader. “Tell me what you think” can work, but a more specific question usually gives you more useful feedback.

If you are asking for developmental editing, be clear about what you already know is not working. If you do not know, a diagnostic or sample read may be a better starting point.

If you are asking for line or copy editing, make sure the larger story decisions are settled enough that sentence-level work will not have to be redone after another structural revision.

If you are asking whether a revision worked, keep the earlier concerns or feedback nearby. It gives the second read something concrete to test.

If you are not sure what you need, that is fine. You do not have to diagnose the manuscript yourself.

A useful second opinion should do more than say “I liked it” or “the pacing is slow.” It should help you understand what happened during the read, where it happened, why it may matter and what you might consider doing next. The final decision is still yours.

Second Pair Editorial · The second pair of eyes your manuscript needs.