



Book Editing Checklist

Follow these steps to get your manuscript shining bright like a diamond.

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Part 1 – The “Big Picture” Stage

In which you identify and fix macro problems relating to plot, character development, narrative arc, and theme.

1.1. THEME AND IDEA

- Is a compelling dramatic question present throughout the book?
- Is there a clear theme? Is it well-developed and engaging?
- Can you recap your story or argument in this single sentence? “[**Character**] must [**do something**] to achieve [**goal**] or [**reason why the audience should care**]”
- Is there a clear central conflict? Is it resolved by the end of the book?



Strengthen your central idea

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1.2. STRUCTURE

FICTION AND MEMOIR

- Is there a strong beginning, middle, end?
- Does your exposition effectively set the story? Introduce the cast of characters? Impart backstory?

- Is your rising action triggered by a compelling inciting incident? Does it escalate the conflict and raise the tension?
- Is the pace of each act in the narrative arc appropriate?
- Does the plot maintain forward movement in each chapter? Do subplots support that momentum?
- Are all major plot threads and subplots resolved by the denouement?
- Do the plot points sync with the narrative arc and theme that you want to convey?
- Do the plot twists make sense? Are there plot holes in the story?



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NONFICTION

- Does the first chapter of your book introduce your central question and explain why it's important to answer?
- Does your exposition adequately introduce readers to your topic? Does it provide enough context for them to understand your main argument?
- Does each chapter or section build on the information that comes beforehand?
- Is the length and pace of each chapter appropriate?
- Does each chapter contain an appropriate mixture of fact and anecdote?
- Is your structure engaging and easy to follow?

Does your book contain any extra information that distracts or detracts from the main argument?

Are there any holes or gaps in your argument?

1.3. CHARACTERS

PROTAGONIST

Does the protagonist have strengths and weaknesses? Do these interact with the story appropriately?

Does the protagonist grow and change?

Does the protagonist have defining mannerisms? Clear character traits?

Does the protagonist have external and internal goals? Are they visible throughout the story?

Does the protagonist act believably in each scene? Is the protagonist's behavior consistent?

Chart the protagonist's character arc over the course of the story. Is it clearly and compellingly conveyed in the story?

ANTAGONIST

Does the antagonist have story motivation?

Does the antagonist have a believable backstory?

Is the relationship between the protagonist and the antagonist clearly defined?

SUPPORTING CAST

- Is the supporting cast fleshed out?
- Do the secondary characters have a reason to be there? Do they:
 - Reveal key details?
 - Advance the plot?
 - Motivate the protagonist?
 - Help define the setting?
- Are interactions between the secondary character and the protagonist believable and well-placed?
- Do the secondary characters have distinguishing characteristics or mannerisms?



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SETTING

- Does the setting make sense for the purposes of the story? Does it matter to the plot?
- Are descriptions of the setting rendered effectively and appropriately?
- Does each scene convey a clear sense of place and time?
- Is the worldbuilding fully realized? Logically consistent?
- Fact-check each scene in relation to the setting. Are objects, props, mannerisms, and behaviors native to the time and place of the story?

Part 2 – The “Scene-Level” Stage

In which you strengthen specific elements within individual scenes.

2.1. SCENES AND CHAPTERS

- Is the opening scene effective?
 - Does it start in the right place?
 - Does it have a hook? Is the hook immediately gripping?
- Are the scenes appropriately paced to grab the readers’ attention? Are the chapter lengths effective?
- Does each scene serve a purpose in the story?
- Is each scene oriented in terms of time and place?
- Are scene transitions smooth?

2.2. DIALOGUE

- Does the dialogue serve a purpose in each scene? Does it:
 - Provide information?
 - Advance the plot?
 - Help the pace?
- Does each character have a distinct voice?
- Is the dialogue believable for the time and place of the story? Is the word choice reflective of the time period?
- Does the dialogue use action beats to control the pace of the scene?

2.3. COMPOSITION

VOICE AND POINT OF VIEW

- Is the narrator's voice consistent?
- Is the voice appropriate given the context of the book and its story or argument?
- Is foreshadowing used effectively, if applicable? Metaphors? Similes?
- Is the viewpoint character always clear? Is it consistent between scenes?
- Is the point of view suitable for each scene? Is there a better alternative for a viewpoint character in any given scene?

PROSE

- Is the backstory of the world or characters efficiently woven into the story?
- Does each sentence contribute something to the story?
- Do you "show, don't tell" with your dialogue, characters, and setting?



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2.4. QUOTES AND REFERENCES

- Are quotes and references used to support the argument?
- Are all of your sources reliable?
- Do quotes help aid the narrative progression, or do they interrupt it?

- Have you paraphrased where possible?
- Are there appropriate transitions before and after references?
- Are all quotations accurate?
- Have you chosen a citation style?
- Have you cited all references according to that style?

Part 3 – The “Line-Edit” Stage

In which you ensure the text is objectively correct. This covers everything from typos and grammar to continuity and syntax.

3.1. PUNCTUATION AND DIALOGUE

- Limit the use of adverbs in your dialogue tags. (Show, don't tell!)
 - ✗ “Why did you eat my turkey sandwich?” said Harry angrily.
 - ✓ Harry upended the table. “Why did you eat my turkey sandwich?”
- Check for the use of other dialogue tags and replace them with “said” and “asked,” unless other emphasis is absolutely necessary.
 - ✗ “Did you just stab me with this thimble?” queried Amber.
 - ✓ “Did you just stab me with this thimble?” asked Amber.
- Check that all of the dialogue is formatted correctly.
 - ✗ “I love you.” Said Pam.
 - ✓ “I love you,” said Pam.

3.2. VOICE

Limit the use of weak verbs and adverbs in general.

✗ Leonard ran quickly to school.

✓ Leonard sprinted to school.

Replace all “hidden” verbs.

✗ Offer an explanation

✓ Explain

Check for the use of passive voice and replace with active voice, whenever appropriate.

✗ The ball was kicked.

✓ She kicked the ball.

Use “telling” words such as “felt,” “saw,” “knew,” and “seemed” sparingly.

✗ His head felt awful.

✓ His head throbbed.

3.3. LANGUAGE

Delete vague and subjective words.

✗ Could, might, maybe, more, poor, good, excellent, bad, some, multiple, really, literally, suddenly, simply, just, a little, almost, etc

Delete all instances of cliches in the text.

✗ It was a dark and stormy night.

Check for excessive repetition in the text.

✗ Go to [do something]

Check for instances of overly complicated language.

✗ In close proximity

✓ Near



Congratulations! **You've made it to the end... of this checklist**

To ensure your book is ready to hit the presses (or the eBook store), work with professional editors who can spot the errors and inconsistencies you miss.



Get the support you need at every stage of the editing process from the professional book editors on Reedsy.

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