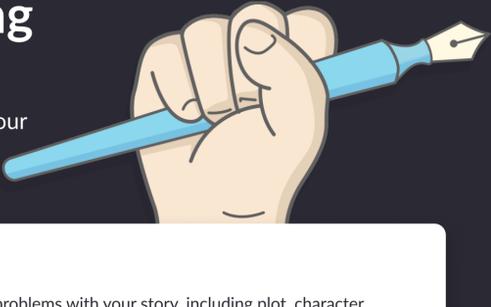


Novel Editing Checklist

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



1. The "Big Picture" Stage

In which you identify and fix macro problems with your story, including plot, character development, narrative arc, and theme.

Editing Checklist for: Story

Theme and conflict

- Is a compelling dramatic question present throughout the book?
- Is the theme well-developed? Clear and compelling?
- Can you sufficiently state your story in a single sentence: [Character] must [do something] to achieve [story goal] or else [reason why the audience should care]?
- Is the central conflict clear? Is it resolved by the time the denouement comes around?
- Is the theme well-developed? Clear and compelling?
- Does the conflict escalate over the course of the book?

Story arc

- Do you have a strong beginning, middle, end?
- Does your exposition effectively set the story? Introduce the cast of characters? Impart enough backstory?
- Is your rising action triggered by a compelling inciting incident? Does it escalate the conflict and raise the tension?
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- Does the denouement wrap everything up?
- Is the story structure clear and effective?
- Is the pace of each act in the narrative arc appropriate?

Editing Checklist for: Plot

- Is the plot engaging? Believable?
- Does the plot maintain forward movement in each chapter?
- Are all major plot threads resolved by the denouement?
- Are all subplots resolved by the denouement?
- Are there too many subplots? Do the subplots make sense in the context of the story or do they distract from the main plotline?
- Do the plot points flow?
- 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?
- Does the plot match the conventions of your genre?

Editing Checklist for: Characters

Protagonist

- Does the protagonist have strengths and weaknesses? Does this interact with the story appropriately?
- Does the protagonist grow and change?
- Does the protagonist have defining mannerisms? Clear character traits?
- Do the plot points sync with the narrative arc and theme that you want to convey?
- Does the protagonist have story motivation?
- Does the protagonist have external and internal story goals? Are they visible throughout the story?
- Are the stakes for the protagonist clear and substantial?
- 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?

Editing Checklist for: 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?
- Is a clear sense of place and time conveyed in each scene?
- Is the worldbuilding fully realized? Logically consistent?
- Does the setting impact the conflict and plot?
- Fact-check each scene in relation to the setting. Are objects, props, mannerisms, and behaviors native to the time and place of the story?

2. The "Scene Level" Stage

In which you strengthen specific story elements within individual scenes.

Editing Checklist for: 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 there are a sufficient number of scenes?
- 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?

Editing Checklist for: Dialogue

- Does the dialogue serve a purpose in each scene? Does it provide information? Advance the plot? Help the pace of the story?
- 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?
- Are there excess dialogue tags? Excess adverbs in the tags?
- Search for words other than "said" and "asked" in your manuscript. Is their use absolutely necessary?

Editing Checklist for: Composition

Voice and Point of View

- Is the narrator's voice consistent?
- Is the voice appropriate for the story?
- 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 purple prose present in your story?
- Does each sentence contribute something to the story?
- Is the backstory of the world or characters efficiently woven into the story?
- Do you "show, don't tell" your dialogue, characters, and setting?

3. The "Line-Edit" Stage

In which you ensure the text is objectively correct. This covers typos, grammar, continuity, and syntax, among other things.

Editing Checklist for: Scenes and Chapters

- Check for the use of passive voice and replace with active voice, whenever appropriate.
 - ✗ The ball was kicked.
 - ✓ She kicked the ball.
- 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?"
- Limit the use of weak verbs + adverbs in general.
 - ✗ Leonard ran quickly to school.
 - ✓ Leonard sprinted to school.
- Delete vague and subjective words.
 - ✗ "could," "might," "maybe," "more," "poor," "good," "excellent," "bad," "some," "multiple," etc.
- Delete crutch words.
 - ✗ "really," "literally," "suddenly," "simply," "just," "a little," "almost," etc.
- Check for the use of other dialogue tags and replace with "said" and "asked," unless absolutely necessary.
 - ✗ "Did you just stab me with this thimble?" asserted Amber.
 - ✓ "Did you just stab me with this thimble?" asked Amber.
- Replace all "hidden" verbs.
 - ✗ Offer an explanation
 - ✓ Explain
- Use "telling" words such as "felt," "saw," "knew," "was," and "seemed" sparingly.
 - ✗ His head was in pain.
 - ✓ His head throbbed.
- Delete all instances of clichés in the text.
 - ✗ It was a dark and stormy night.
- Check for excessive repetition (like so) in the text.
 - ✗ Go to [do something]
- Check for instances of overly complicated language.
 - ✗ In close proximity
 - ✓ Near
- Check that all of your dialogue is formatted correctly.
 - ✗ "I love you." Said Pam.
 - ✓ "I love you," said Pam.

Thanks for reading!

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