The Self-Edit

A Free Resource Provided By
studio-marginalia

**Curated for the self-editing author
I hope this resource proves useful**

*A series of actionable questions and tips designed to help
you understand and improve your story.*

Checklist

How To Use This Checklist

1. Answer honestly
No one's judging. The more honest you are, the more useful this becomes.

2. Start with Big-Picture Analysis
Fix plot structure and character motivation before sentence-level polish. A beautiful scene in a broken story is still broken.

3. Focus on one section at a time
 Trying to fix everything at once leads to burnout. Pick your weakest area and focus there for your next revision pass.

4. Use the Notes sections
Write down what's not working and why. These notes become your revision roadmap.

5. Come back after revising
Use this checklist again to verify your changes worked. Did fixing your opening improve your answers? Move to the next section.

6. Use this checklist at different stages
Run through it after your first draft, then again after revisions. Your answers will change—and that's progress.

Big-Picture Story Analysis

This examines your story's foundation:

• Does your plot structure make sense?

• Are your characters motivated and active?

• Does your opening hook and ending satisfy?

• Is your pacing consistent?

Think of this as checking if the house has a solid foundation before decorating the rooms.

Opening (First 3 Chapters)

- Does my opening hook readers immediately?

- Is it clear what kind of story this is (genre, tone)?

- Are my protagonist and stakes established early?

- Would a stranger keep reading past page 5?

Tip: Consider starting closer to the action. Cut backstory and setup that can come later.

NOTES

Plot Structure

- Does my story have a clear beginning, middle, and end?

- Is the main conflict compelling and clear?

- Are there any plot holes or contradictions?

- Does every scene move the plot forward or reveal character?

- Are cause-and-effect relationships clear?

Tip: Outline your plot in 10 bullet points. If you can't, your structure might be muddled.

NOTES

Character Work

- Is my protagonist relatable and active (not passive)?

- Do my characters have clear, believable motivations?

- Do characters change or grow throughout the story?

- Does dialogue sound natural and distinct per character?

- Are relationships emotionally engaging?

Tip: Write a one-sentence motivation for each major character. If it's vague, dig deeper.

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Ending (Final Act)

- Is my ending satisfying and logical?

- Are all major plot threads resolved?

- Does it feel earned based on character arcs?

- Does it leave a lasting impression?

Tip: If unsure, your climax might not have enough setup, or you're resolving too quickly.

NOTES

Setting & Worldbuilding

- Is my world clear and consistent?

- Does the setting feel lived-in, not just described?

- Do characters interact naturally with their environment?

- Does my setting support the plot and characters?

Tip: Draw a map or write a 'day in the life' for your world if unsure.

NOTES

Theme (If Applicable)

- Is there an underlying message or question in my story?

- Does the theme emerge naturally through character

  and plot?

- Is it subtle rather than heavy-handed?

- Does the ending reinforce or complicate the theme?

*Tip: Ask what your story is **really about** beneath the plot.*

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Overall Reader Experience

- Would I keep reading this if I found it in a bookstore?

- Is the tone/mood consistent throughout?

- Did I stay emotionally engaged?

- Would I recommend this to someone in my target

  audience?

Tip: If unsure, your opening might not hook, or your middle might sag. Check pacing and stakes.

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Micro-Level Story Analysis

This examines scene-by-scene execution:

• Is your POV clear and consistent?

• Do chapters hook and maintain tension?

• Does each scene serve a purpose?

• Is your narrative voice strong?

Think of this as making sure each room in your house is well-furnished and functional.

POV & Voice

- Is my POV clear and consistent throughout?

- Does my narrative voice fit the story and character?

- Are perspective shifts intentional and clear?

- Does the voice remain consistent across chapters?

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Pacing & Tension

- Does my story maintain momentum throughout?

- Are any scenes too slow, rushed, or repetitive?

- Are stakes built effectively?

- Is there a balance of action, exposition, and character moments?

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Scene & Chapter Effectiveness

- Does each scene have a purpose? (Advances plot, develops character, builds stakes)

- Are chapters engaging from start to finish?

- Are there redundant or unnecessary scenes?

- Do scenes transition smoothly and logically?

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Opening & Ending at the Scene Level

- Does each chapter open with a hook and close with momentum?

- Does the final act pay off the setup in each chapter?

- Are there weak chapters that slow the story down?

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Congratulations!

You did it!

You worked through this entire checklist.

Now look at your notes. See where you wrote the most? Start there.

Revision is where good stories become great. It's hard work, but it's also where the magic happens.

Find joy in the process.

Your story matters.