

Checklist: Revising a Manuscript

From big to small: it pays to work in separate passes and focus on only one level in each.

Preparation

- ☐ First draft saved as its own version
- ☐ Started with enough distance or a different reading format
- ☐ Manuscript read once in one go, only notes made

1. Structure

Does the story work as a whole?

- ☐ Chapter overview with one sentence each created
- ☐ Turning points follow from one another, the middle holds up
- ☐ Subplots resolved or deliberately left open, ending follows from the story

2. Characters

Do the characters act believably, and do they develop?

- ☐ The protagonist's drive and character arc are convincing
- ☐ Characters act for their own reasons
- ☐ Names, details and ways of speaking consistent

3. Scenes

Does every scene have a goal and change something?

- ☐ Every scene changes something
- ☐ Entered late, left early
- ☐ Point of view and intended switches easy to follow

4. Language

Does the text read clearly, vividly and at the right pace?

- ☐ Read aloud
- ☐ Filler words and repetition checked
- ☐ Varied sentence rhythm

5. Proofreading

Are spelling, punctuation and consistency right?

- ☐ Spelling list created and checked against the text
- ☐ Spelling and punctuation checked
- ☐ Formatting consistent

Questions for the structure pass

- ☐ Is it clear what the story is about, and does that become clear early enough?
- ☐ Do the major turning points follow from one another, or do things just happen one after the other?
- ☐ Does the middle hold up, or do situations repeat there?
- ☐ Is every subplot resolved or recognizably left open on purpose, and are the gaps between its appearances sensible?
- ☐ Does the ending follow from what came before?

Questions for the character pass

- ☐ What does the protagonist want, and can readers see it at every stage?
- ☐ Is their attitude put to the test? If they change, is the change convincing; if they stay steady, does that have visible consequences?
- ☐ Do characters act for their own reasons, or only because the plot needs them to?
- ☐ Do names, ages, appearance and ways of speaking stay the same throughout the book?
- ☐ Are there supporting characters who do the same job and could be merged?

Questions for the scene pass

What is different at the end of the scene compared with the beginning?

- ☐ What does the point-of-view character want in this scene, and what stands in the way?
- ☐ Does the scene start as late and end as early as possible?
- ☐ Is the pacing right: are important moments played out and minor ones summarized?
- ☐ Does the point of view stay stable within the scene?
- ☐ Does the dialogue carry weight, or does it repeat what is already clear?

Questions for the language pass

Read aloud for this.

- ☐ Filler words such as “just,” “really,” “very” or “somewhat”: do they add anything?
- ☐ Do you repeat words, sentence openings or favorite images?
- ☐ Where would shown emotions be stronger, and where is it better to name them briefly?
- ☐ Do short and long sentences alternate, or do all paragraphs sound the same?
- ☐ Are images and comparisons consistent, or do several mixed metaphors follow one another?