

# Self-Editing Checklist

## An Incomplete List of Compiled Questions to Ask Your Manuscript

### Prose

Locate and minimize “crutch” words (words you use often in your writing)	Keep a running list of words you tend to overuse to comb through each new manuscript. Be aware that a crutch “word” may actually be a phrase.
Scrutinize each adverb. They can be helpful, don’t feel the need to eliminate them all, but they often point to the fact that there is a stronger verb/adjective/adverb that could be used.	Most adverbs end in -ly, so you can use the search function to easily find your adverbs.
Assess your filter words, words like felt, looked, knew, hear, etc. that are telling instead of showing.	
Get rid of cliches. If you’re writing contemporary books, perhaps there can be a few you keep, but these tend to date your writing and rely on trite expressions instead of developing your creative voice.	
Look at your sentence variety.	Highlight sentences in different colors according to their length - short in purple, long in red for example - to get an overview of where you may need to mix up the sentence length.
Reconsider your verbs. As they the most effective? Is there something stronger or more compelling you could use?	Specifically, look out for the passive voice (was) and switch to the active voice when possible.
Be specific! Make sure each word is as specific as it can be, instead of red consider what specific shade you could use instead.	Not every word has to be overly specific, but introducing more direct imagery is helpful.
Eliminate filler words, words like “really” or “like.”	
Affirm the Point of View is consistent throughout.	If you’ve chosen First POV, make sure it stays that way. Also, confirm there is no head-hopping (when the story shifts to a perspective the POV should not be able to know).

	Vary Dialogue Tags / Beats. Tags: “asked,” “said,” and so on. Beats: “I am fine.” he smiled. Both are effective, and I would argue that both should be intermixed in your writing.	Be aware of using too few and too many dialogue tags/beats.
	Delete redundancies.	They can be sneaky, such as saying “he wanted his own bed.” Do you want to emphasize that it was his “own” bed over something else? Maybe, and that’s valid. Or did you add “own” just because?
<b>Plot</b>		
	Is the theme consistent throughout?	Highlight anywhere where the theme is brought up in the book.
	Are motifs brought consistently throughout the manuscript?	Keep a log of all the motifs, what characters are involved, and where they appear in the book.
	Is the beginning compelling?	
	Does the end address the theme/message of the book?	
	Is the pacing effective?	Mark out the first 50 pages, the mid-point, and the last 50 pages. Are there incidences in each that would keep the pace moving forward? Does the story begin where it needs to, or could some of the introduction be trimmed?
	As questions of everything to catch any plot holes.	
	Kill your darlings.	If you are keeping something just because you like it, but it adds nothing to the overall story, then don’t be afraid to edit or delete it.
	Are all plots (main and sub) tied together at the end?	
<b>Characters</b>		
	Are the character voices unique?	
	Are the character descriptions consistent?	

	Do the character arcs flow smoothly?	Sometimes it's helpful to have a simple "tell" to mark character changes. It's ok to have your character acknowledge a change within themselves and can be a helpful marker for the reader.
	Are the character motivations and decisions clear and logical?	

**Tips to help you self-edit:**

- Change the format of the book
- Give yourself time away
- Focus on one specific part during each edit (prose, character arcs, etc.)
- Read aloud
- Have an electronic source read your manuscript aloud
- Run spellcheck in a few different software
- Act out dialogue/actions

**Finally**, give it to beta readers. These readers are especially helpful in noting issues with the plot/characters because their minds think differently than yours.

**Enjoy the process!** Editing is the majority of writing, so don't feel rushed in the process or feel intimidated when you're on draft 8 and still feel like you have a lot of work to do.