



Ultimate First Draft Checklist

For Creating A Bestselling
Novel

*Ask yourself these 40 questions after
you've finished your first draft.*



The Ultimate Checklist For Creating A Bestselling Novel

1. Does the story begin with an interesting hook, creating a desire to read more?

2. Does the manuscript begin in the right place?

3. Will the reader get a good grasp of the setting and the main character(s) in the first chapter?

4. Are the characters compelling, sympathetic, and/or someone you can root for?

5. Do they seem real and three-dimensional, with distinct voices, flaws, and virtues?

6. Is the dialogue natural and appropriate for the story (i.e. *the time, place, and world you've created*)?

7. Is there an appropriate mix of dialogue and narrative?

8. Are their goals clear and proactive enough to influence the plot (*not passive*)?

9. Do their motivations seem believable, with well-drawn and appropriate emotion?

10. Are the secondary characters well rounded and enhance the story rather than overwhelming it or seeming like they should be cut?



The Ultimate Checklist For Creating A Bestselling Novel

11. Does the story begin with an interesting hook, creating a desire to read more?

12. Are the relationships between the characters believable and not contrived? If they're not believable, why?

13. If there are romantic elements, did you want the appropriate characters to end up together?

14. If there were any erotic elements, did it flow well or did it seem cheesy?

15. Do the characters act or react to events in a plausible, realistic or believable way?

16. Are the internal and external conflicts well defined for each main character?

17. Are the conflicts organic and believable (i.e. *arising out of characterization and circumstance rather than feeling forced*)?

18. If there are any fight scenes (*or something similar, like chase scenes*), did you find them easy to follow?

19. Did the reason for the physical altercation seem logical? Did anything seem cheesy or awkward about the scene(s)?

20. Are there enough stakes and/or tension throughout to make it a page-turner?



The Ultimate Checklist For Creating A Bestselling Novel

21. Does the premise avoid cliché and/or bring a fresh perspective to an old idea?

22. Are the plot twists believable yet unexpected? If not, where could they be improved?

23. Were there any plot holes or dropped threads? If so, what are they and how can you fix them?

24. If this story contains elements of mystery, are there too many clues that give away the answer?

25. Were there enough clues to keep the reader guessing?

26. Do scenes progress in a realistic, compelling manner and flow with effective transitions?

27. Does the story move along at an appropriate pace, without rushing or dragging?

28. Does every scene add to and seem important to the story? Did you think any scenes could be cut?

29. Is there a hook at the end of each chapter or scene that makes you want to read more?

30. Is the story free from information dumps or backstory that slow the pace of the story?



The Ultimate Checklist For Creating A Bestselling Novel

31. Are descriptions vivid and give a clear sense of time and place?

32. Is there too much or too little description?

33. Do the details enhance rather than distract from the story?

34. Does the writing *show* the scene with the senses, using *telling* only when appropriate?

35. Were there enough clues to keep the reader guessing?

36. Does the writing quality allow the story to shine through and draw the reader in, or are flaws jarring or intrusive?

37. Would your writing benefit from an editor or writing coach?

38. Is the point of view handled appropriately and consistently?
Did you notice any head-hopping?

39. Is the tone appropriate and consistent for the story?

40. Was there any offensive material that does not seem to serve the plot?



Need Some Help? Let's Brainstorm!

Have any questions about this checklist? Or stuck on any part of your story? Send me a direct message on Facebook or Instagram and I'll provide you some personal feedback and advice.

BROCKWAY GATEHOUSE

Fiction Editor & Proofreader

www.brockwaygatehouse.co.uk [@BrockwayGatehouse](https://www.facebook.com/BrockwayGatehouse)

Kim@brockwaygatehouse.co.uk [@kim.fictionedit](https://www.instagram.com/kim.fictionedit)

[Kim Brockway](https://www.linkedin.com/in/KimBrockway) [@KimProofreader](https://www.tumblr.com/KimProofreader)

