

Line & Copy Edit Readiness Checklist

Quick Reference for Experienced Authors

This streamlined checklist assumes you understand craft fundamentals and have completed developmental work. Use it to verify your manuscript is clean, consistent, and ready for professional line and copy editing.

Structural Integrity

- ☐ Plot structure is sound with no unresolved holes or logic gaps
- ☐ POV remains consistent within scenes (no mid-scene head-hopping)
Check omniscient narration doesn't slip into limited perspective unintentionally
- ☐ Character voices are distinct in dialogue and internal monologue
- ☐ All placeholder text, TK markers, and research gaps are resolved
- ☐ Timeline is internally consistent (including character ages, travel time, seasons, biological processes)
- ☐ Subplots resolve or have intentional open endings
- ☐ Foreshadowing and payoffs are in place

Prose and Craft

- ☐ Filter words are minimised (saw, heard, felt, thought, wondered, realised, noticed, seemed)
Intentional filters for specific effects are fine. Check for unintentional distance.
- ☐ Showing versus telling is balanced appropriately for pacing
- ☐ Dialogue serves multiple functions (characterisation, plot, tension, or relationship dynamics)
- ☐ Dialogue tags are invisible (primarily 'said' and 'asked') or replaced with action beats
- ☐ Adverbs are purposeful, not compensating for weak verbs
- ☐ Sentence rhythm varies (mix of short, medium, and complex sentences)
- ☐ Information isn't repeated unless for deliberate emphasis or thematic resonance
- ☐ Metaphors and descriptions are fresh, avoiding common clichés
Particularly check: eyes like [gemstones], heart pounding, breath catching, blood running cold.
- ☐ Micro-tension is present in scenes where appropriate
- ☐ Subtext is layered into dialogue and action
- ☐ Sensory details are specific to character perspective

Technical Consistency

Formatting

- ☐ Standard manuscript format: readable font (Times New Roman 12pt or Arial 11pt), double-spaced, one-inch margins
- ☐ Consistent paragraph formatting (first-line indent or block with spacing—never both)
- ☐ Single space after periods throughout
- ☐ Scene breaks clearly marked (centred # or three asterisks)
- ☐ New chapters begin on fresh pages
- ☐ No extra line breaks between paragraphs (unless using block formatting style)

Style Consistency

- ☐ Style guide chosen (Chicago Manual of Style is standard for fiction) and followed
- ☐ Oxford comma usage is consistent
- ☐ Em dash formatting is consistent (spaced or unspaced, chosen and maintained)
Standard in UK publishing: spaced en dashes. Standard in US publishing: unspaced em dashes.
- ☐ Quotation mark style is consistent (single or double)
- ☐ Ellipses formatting is consistent (three dots, spaced or unspaced)
- ☐ Numbers treated consistently (spell out versus numerals per chosen style)
- ☐ Time formatting is consistent (2:00 PM versus 2 p.m. versus 2pm)

Internal Consistency

- ☐ Character names are spelled consistently (including nicknames and titles)
Create a style sheet listing every proper noun with correct spelling and capitalisation.
- ☐ Place names are spelled and capitalised consistently
- ☐ Invented terminology and world-building terms are consistent
- ☐ Character physical descriptions remain consistent
Check: eye colour, hair colour, height, dominant hand, scars, distinguishing features
- ☐ Verb tenses are consistent within narrative layers
Different timelines may use different tenses intentionally. Verify transitions are clear.
- ☐ British versus American spelling is consistent throughout
- ☐ Capitalisation of titles and honorifics follows consistent logic

Final Technical Checks

- ☐ Spell check completed
- ☐ Homophone errors addressed (their/there/they're, your/you're, its/it's, affect/effect)
- ☐ Smart quotes are used consistently (not straight quotes)
- ☐ No stray formatting codes or hidden characters
- ☐ All chapters are present and in correct order
- ☐ Chapter numbering is sequential
- ☐ No duplicated sections or missing scenes
- ☐ Headers and footers contain correct information (if using)
- ☐ Page breaks are intentional, not accidental

Advanced Considerations

- ☐ Narrative distance is consistent and intentional
Close third can slip into distant third—verify you're maintaining the chosen distance.
- ☐ Psychic distance shifts are purposeful
- ☐ Voice remains consistent within POV (particularly in multiple POV narratives)
- ☐ Rhythm and pacing support emotional beats
- ☐ White space on the page is used strategically
- ☐ Power dynamics are clear in dialogue exchanges
- ☐ Thematic elements are woven consistently (without being heavy-handed)
- ☐ Genre conventions are either honoured or deliberately subverted
- ☐ Opening and closing images/motifs create deliberate resonance

Ready for editing? If you've verified every checkpoint, your manuscript is prepared for professional line and copy editing. Your editor can now focus on elevating your prose rather than catching fundamental issues.