

FREE RESOURCE

Self-editing checklist

A one-page guide for working through your own draft. Go from the big picture down to the sentence, and don't fix commas in a scene you might cut.

Before you start

- ☐ Put the draft away for at least a couple of weeks, then read it as a reader, not the author.
- ☐ Print it, or change the font and size, so it looks unfamiliar.
- ☐ Write one or two sentences on what the book is about and what it should leave a reader with.

Structure

- ☐ The opening pages establish a situation or a question that makes a reader want to keep going.
- ☐ Each section or chapter changes something: a situation, a relationship, what we know.
- ☐ The middle builds rather than repeats. Note any chapters doing the same job twice.
- ☐ The ending resolves, or deliberately leaves open, the situation or question the opening established.

Character and point of view

- ☐ I know what my main characters want and what stands in the way.
- ☐ Characters act from their own motives, not because the plot needs them to.
- ☐ Point of view is consistent within each scene, or any shifts are deliberate.

Scenes and pacing

- ☐ Every scene has a purpose I could name in a line.
- ☐ Scenes start late and leave early, without long run-ups.
- ☐ Backstory and explanation arrive when the reader needs them, not all at once.
- ☐ Slow passages add detail that immerses the reader in the story.

Voice and dialogue

- ☐ The voice stays recognisably itself from beginning to end.
- ☐ Dialogue sounds like people talking, and each speaker sounds distinct.
- ☐ Read the dialogue aloud and cut anything that only repeats what we already know.

Line by line

- ☐ Cut filler words (just, really, very, started to, seemed to) where they add nothing.
- ☐ Prefer specific, concrete detail to general description.
- ☐ Check for repeated words, images and sentence shapes on the same page.
- ☐ Spelling, punctuation and style are consistent (choose Australian or another spelling and stick to it).
- ☐ Finally, read the whole thing aloud, slowly, one last time.

Not every point fits every book, especially experimental work. Treat this as a set of questions, not rules. If you break one, break it on purpose.