

Early manuscript review form

Opening Scene:

- Does the story begin with an interesting hook, creating a desire to read more?
- Does the manuscript begin in the right place?

Characterisation & Motivation:

- Are the characters compelling, sympathetic or someone you can root for? They say the best character has two of the following three traits: active, competent and sympathetic (meaning we are compelled to like them and root for them). Which two describe the protagonist in this story?
- Do the characters feel real and three-dimensional, with distinct voices, flaws and virtues?
- Are the characters well-rounded and do they enhance the story? Do they have history, motivations and skills?
- Are their goals clear and proactive enough to influence the plot?
- Do their motivations seem believable, with well-drawn and appropriate emotion?
- Was each character unique? Or did any of the characters act like each other?
- Are the relationships between the characters believable and not contrived?
- Does the story stay focused on the main character(s)?
- Does any character act out of character? When and why?

Plot & Conflict:

- Are the internal and external conflicts well defined for each main character?
- Are the internal and external conflicts organic and believable? Do they arise out of characterisation and circumstance rather than feeling contrived or forced?
- Are there enough stakes and/or tension throughout to make it a page turner?
- Does the premise avoid cliché and/or bring a fresh perspective to an old idea?
- Are the plot twists believable yet unexpected?
- Did you notice any major errors in the story? Events that somehow turned into different events? Characters who turned into different characters or disappeared without any resolution?
- Did the story have a convenient solution? At some point, did some character or thing appear out of nowhere and tidy up all the loose ends?
- Do timing issues exist? Events that feel like they happened out of order?
- Did you feel pieces of the story were missing?

Steamy Bits:

- Do any of the love scenes seem overly cliché?
- Were the love scenes too fast, too slow or too frequent?
- Did you have to reread any part of the love scenes to understand who was doing what?
- Did any action in the love scene make you cringe?
- Did it make you hot?

Setting & Worldbuilding:

- Are descriptions vivid and give a clear sense of time and place? Just right? Too much? Too little?
- Do the details enhance rather than distract from the story?
- Can you see every action clearly while reading?
- Were there any specific words or phrases you didn't understand (particularly in fantasy novels/worldbuilding)?
- Did you enjoy the information the author included about the world? Or specific events and interests you may not have been familiar with?



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Pacing:

- Do scenes progress in a realistic, compelling manner and flow with effective transitions? Or did they jump as though something was skipped?
- Does every scene add to and seem important to the story?
- Does the story move along at an appropriate pace, without rushing or dragging?
- Is there a hook at the end of each chapter or scene that makes you want to read more?
- Is the story free from information dumps or backstory that slow the pace of the story? Or did the author reveal information in a non-obtrusive way?
- Did you want to put the book down? When and why?
- Are there parts that you skipped to get to 'the good part'? When and why?

Dialogue:

- Is the dialogue natural and appropriate for the story, not stilted or overly narrative? Did the language flow smoothly?
- Does dialogue move the story forward and reveal the characters?
- Are characters' voices consistent and distinct from one another?
- Is there an appropriate mix of dialogue and narrative?
- Did the author hop heads? Was it confusing to keep up with who was telling the story?
- Are the characters anchored to their surroundings, especially while they talk?

Craft:

- Does the writing 'show' the scene with the senses, using 'telling' only as appropriate?
- Does the writing quality allow the story to shine through and draw the reader in, or are flaws jarring or intrusive?
- Is the tone appropriate and consistent for the story?
- Is the point of view (and any changes) handled appropriately and consistently?
- Did the narrator reveal too much information, or provide too much leading?
- Were you pulled out of the story often? Any particular areas?
- Did the language feel natural? Too wordy? Too flowery? Just enough description?
- Did the author repeat information needlessly? When?

Overall Impression:

- Is the voice unique, fresh or interesting?
- Does the story deliver on the promise of its premise and opening scenes?
- From a reader's point of view, did you enjoy reading this story?

Additional Questions for Comment:

- Are there any confusing sections that should be made clearer? (Mark in the manuscript)
- Is the story a good fit for the stated genre? If not, why?
- Who are your favourite (and least favourite) characters and why?
- What aspects are especially likable or unlikable about the protagonist(s)?
- What three things worked best for you?
- What three things worked least for you?
- Did the story suffer from happy people/happy land syndrome?
- Did the story contain instalove?
- What was your favourite/most memorable scene?
- What was your least favourite scene?
- Did you walk away with unanswered questions?
- Would you read the next story, if this story is part of a series?

