

# Ultimate Self-Editing Checklist – Detailed

Gregg Bridgeman

(suitable for laminating)

- I.** Positive Mental and Spiritual Attitude is Essential
  1. Cope with and overcome negativity
  2. Amplify and focus on positivity
  3. Reset as needed when negativity arises
  
- II.** Planning: Plan out plots, subplots, conflict, and character names.
  1. No first names in the entire book should start with the same letter (James, Joe, John, Jill)
  2. Only family should have surnames that start with the same letter
  3. If possible, avoid any names that end in the letter “s”
  
- III.** Write **first draft** as fast as you can.
  1. **Do not** edit as you go
  2. **Do** write as fast as you can
  3. Just write the story from **once upon a time** all the way to **the end**
  
- IV.** Assemble (write or collect) all **Front & Back** matter.
  1. In order, the **front matter** includes the following:
    - a. Title page — Must Have for both**
    - b. Frontispiece — Optional
    - c. **Accolades (for nonfiction)** — Optional for fiction
    - d. Copyright page, aka “colophon” — Must Have for both**
    - e. Dedication page — Optional
    - f. Table of contents — Must Have for both**
    - g. Epigraph — Optional
    - h. Preface (Written by the author) — Optional
    - i. Foreword (Written by other authority/expert) — Optional
    - j. Introduction (for nonfiction) — Optional
    - k. Prologue (for fiction) — Optional

2. The **body** includes the following:
  - a. **Chapters — Must Have for both**
  - b. Conclusion (for nonfiction) — Optional
  - c. Epilogue (for fiction) — Optional
  - d. Afterword — Optional
  - e. Postscript — Optional
  
3. In order, the **back matter** aka “end matter” includes the following:
  - a. Acknowledgments — Optional
  - b. **About the author — Must Have for both**
  - c. **Copyright permissions — Must Have for both.** May also appear in the front matter.
  - d. Discussion questions — Optional
  - e. Appendix or addendum (for nonfiction) — Optional
  - f. Chronology or timeline — Optional. Sometimes part of the appendix.
  - g. Maps, tables, diagrams — Optional. Sometimes part of the appendix.
  - h. Endnotes — Optional
  - i. Glossary — Optional
  - j. Index — Optional
  - k. **Bibliography/reference list — Must Have for both**

**V. Run Spell Check and a Grammar Check on the entire document.**

1. If possible, use more than a single word processor
2. Use online free checkers
3. Use a premium paid checker (e.g.: Grammarly, ProWritingAid, AutoCrit, etc.)

**VI. Revise “to be” verbs to Active Verbs**

1. **Do** a “Search and Replace” to HIGHLIGHT any of the 8 forms of the “to be” verbs:  
am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been
2. Reword “to be” verbs in the **narrative** as often as possible.
3. **Always** use active verbs instead of “to be” verb + “\_\_\_ing” word.  
E.g.: “was running” = “ran” & “was eating” = “ate”
4. **Always** rewrite entire sentences to use an active verb when not in a “state of being”
5. **Often** reword “to be” verbs in **male** dialogue when it sounds natural
6. **Sometimes** revise them in **female** dialogue as “to be” verbs sound natural in female speech

## VII. Fundamentals:

### 1. Revise weak descriptors.

- a. Any passage using a form of “**seem**” must be used properly
- b. \_\_\_ing words, particularly as the first word of a sentence: Walking; Dashing; Speaking; Thinking; etc.
- c. \_\_\_ly words, particularly:
  - i. Any that form adverbs from adjectives that tell instead of show: gladly; gradually; angrily; etc.
  - ii. Adjectives that tell instead of show: saintly; cowardly; heroically; etc.
- d. Use metaphor, simile, or analogy instead

### 2. Amplify deep POV

- a. name, he, she
- b. gender viewpoint “periwinkle vs light blue”
- c. professional viewpoint “heart attack vs myocardial infarction”

### 3. Fix the dialogue

- a. FAS rule (Feeling, Action, Speech)
- b. Male dialogue
  - i. Terse, few words and lots of active verbs in **logical** order
  - ii. Lots of declaratives
  - iii. Ownership
  - iv. Can silence substitute?
- c. Female dialogue
  - i. Wordier, extra descriptors, lots of “to be” verbs in **chronological** order
  - ii. Lots of interrogatives
  - iii. Victim of circumstance
  - iv. Vocal about relationship issues
- d. Eliminate redundant speech patterns
- e. Every character must sound unique

### 4. Dialogue tags said/asked = the “go to” tags

- a. Eliminate most tags with beats
- b. Use beats to ramp up characterization

### 5. Describe as many of the **Senses** as possible

- |                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Sight                | b. Auditory         |
| c. Smell                | d. Touch (feel)     |
| e. Taste                | f. Vestibular Sense |
| g. Proprioceptive Sense |                     |

6. **Body Language**—How can I do it better?
  - a. Do the male characters do more than grin?
  - b. Do the female characters do more than smile/laugh?
  - c. Amp up emotive conflict
  - d. Romantic tension/undertones
  
7. Verify that Ordering lists follow convention or common usage
  - a. Alphabetical
  - b. Chronological
  - c. Common Usage
  - d. Adjective lists
    - i. Quantity or number
    - ii. Quality or opinion
      - a) Size
      - b) Age
      - c) Shape
      - d) Color
    - iii. Proper Adjective (often nationality, other piece of origin, or material)
    - iv. Purpose of qualifier
  
8. Check for US vs non-US spellings
  - a. Toward, forward, backward
  - b. Gray, ax, plow
  - c. Leaped, and other verbs.
  
9. **Sentence Structure**
  - a. Rewrite “sticky” sentences
  - b. Break up overly complex compound sentences into multiple shorter clearer sentences
  - c. Eliminate sentence fragments wherever possible (insert needed nouns or verbs)
  
10. Vary **Opening** Paragraphs
  - a. Action opening
  - b. Character opening
  - c. Setting opening
  - d. Narrative opening

11. Scene/Chapter **Purpose**

- a. Have you grounded the reader?
- b. WHY is this scene necessary?
- c. WHAT do you want to accomplish?
- d. WHEN in time/season/day and how is it different from the last scene?
- e. WHERE is the scene set?
- f. WHOSE point of view?
- g. Who else there? Why? What do they want?
- h. HOW does this scene advance either the plot or character development?
- i. What happens?

12. Turn of phrase—eloquence/tighten/shape

13. White space—dialogue vs narrative

14. Verify any open research questions

15. Read it out loud one of three ways

- a. Have the computer read it aloud
- b. Have a partner read it aloud
- c. Read it aloud yourself

16. Final read through: Read it two ways:

- a. Read from last to first sentence of the chapter to avoid falling into the story
- b. Read from first to last sentence of the chapter to check for flow, rhythm, voice

**VIII.** Lather, rinse, and repeat with all other chapters