

Revising your Manuscript: Fourteen Questions to Ask Yourself

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1) Can you summarize the story in about two sentences?

Example:

Three daughters try desperately to save their father from his conniving new wife.

A cop has to fight a losing battle with the bottle and discover the identity of a serial killer.

2) Have you checked spelling, grammar and formatting?

Make the editor's job easy and you'll be ahead of the game.

3) Is your hero/heroine interesting or someone readers will be interested in?

The reader has to care about what happens to this character.

4) Does the story start with a hook, an interesting question that will draw the reader in?

Read the first sentence of many of your favorite books. How did the authors draw you into their worlds? Also please remember the type of story you are telling. Don't write a beginning sentence just for shock value; make sure it fulfills the promise of the story.

5) Did one or more of your characters change throughout the story? If not, was that on purpose? People usually like to see a character arc, someone achieving their goal or reaching enlightenment.

Stories are usually about a person and a problem. Once the problem is solved (or unsolved) how does that affect the character? Good or bad the reader wants to know.

6) Have you mastered point of view?

If you get confused, you're in trouble.

7) Does your dialogue move the story along? Does everyone sound like themselves or could readers interchange them?

8) Is there tension throughout the story?

Every story has moments of low tension, but if you have a four-page description of how a character brushed his teeth you had better be one heck of a stylist and stick with writing literary fiction. Popular fiction readers will likely set your book aside with a quick flick of the wrist.

9) Is there unanswered conflict until the end?

Leave the reader curious about something whether it is the first name of a key character or the resolution of a subplot.

10) Does every scene matter?

Again the teeth brusher.

11) Does everyone have a motive that counts?

Whether it is the hero, villain or sidekick, it helps the story if the reader is able to understand the actions of each character. If everyone has a viable motive, it also heightens the tension.

12) Does each chapter drive the story forward offering more information?

13) Does the ending do what it's supposed to?

Mystery writer Mickey Spillane said, "The first page sells the books, the last page sells the next book."

14) Do you like your story?

I hope so because in the world of publishing you need to be your book's greatest champion.

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