

The Manuscript Readiness Checklist

Is Your Manuscript Actually Ready to
Publish?



The Rural Publishing Company

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Introduction

You've written your book.

Maybe you've even typed those two glorious words:

THE END.

So ... is it ready to publish?

Maybe.

Finishing a manuscript and having a manuscript that's ready to enter the professional publishing process aren't necessarily the same thing.

Before you start paying editors, commissioning covers or dreaming about your book launch, take 10 minutes to work through this checklist.

Don't worry about getting a perfect score.

The purpose isn't to tell you whether your book is 'good

enough’.

It's simply to help you identify **what still needs to happen next.**

Grab a pen and let's find out.

Is It Actually Finished?

Let's start with the obvious.

- ☐ My manuscript has a clear beginning, middle and end.
- ☐ There are no unfinished chapters or sections I'm still planning to add.
- ☐ I've completed all the major content I intended to include.
- ☐ I've read the entire manuscript from beginning to end.
- ☐ I've removed notes to myself such as 'FIX THIS LATER' and 'CHECK THIS FACT'.
- ☐ I've checked for accidentally duplicated sections or missing content.

☐ I'm no longer making major changes every time I open the document.

How did you go?

If you're still adding chapters, changing the plot or rewriting large sections, that's okay.

You're probably still in the writing stage.

Give yourself permission to finish the book before worrying about publishing it.

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Have You Stepped Away From It?

This one can make a surprising difference.

- ☐ I've put the manuscript aside for at least a little while before doing my final read-through.
- ☐ I've come back to it with fresh eyes.
- ☐ I've read it as a reader rather than only as the person who wrote it.
- ☐ I've identified sections that feel slow, confusing, repetitive or unnecessary.

When you've been working on a manuscript for months – or years – you know it too well.

Your brain knows what you *meant* to write.

Which means it can happily skip straight over what is actually on the page.

Even a short break can help you see the manuscript differently.

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Have You Self-Edited?

Professional editing doesn't replace self-editing.

Before sending your manuscript to an editor, it's worth doing your own clean-up first.

Have you checked for:

- ☐ Repetition
- ☐ Unnecessary words and sentences
- ☐ Overly long sections
- ☐ Inconsistent names or terminology
- ☐ Changes in tense
- ☐ Point-of-view inconsistencies

- ☐ Unclear sentences
- ☐ Obvious spelling and grammatical errors
- ☐ Formatting inconsistencies
- ☐ Placeholder text
- ☐ Notes or comments that shouldn't be there

Your manuscript doesn't need to be flawless.

That's not the goal.

But cleaning up the things you can identify yourself allows a professional editor to spend more time on the things you can't.

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If You've Written Fiction

Consider the bigger picture.

- ☐ My protagonist has a clear goal, problem or motivation.
- ☐ The story has meaningful conflict or tension.
- ☐ The plot progresses rather than simply being a sequence of events.
- ☐ My characters behave consistently.
- ☐ Important characters have clear roles in the story.
- ☐ The pacing feels appropriate.
- ☐ The middle of the book doesn't sag dramatically.
- ☐ Subplots contribute something worthwhile.

- ☐ The ending resolves the major story questions.
- ☐ I've checked that important details remain consistent throughout the book.
- ☐ Dialogue sounds natural when read aloud.
- ☐ I know what genre my book belongs to.
- ☐ I have an idea of the type of reader who would enjoy it.

A useful question:

If someone asked:

‘What’s your book about?’

Could you explain it clearly in two or three sentences?

If not, you may still need to clarify the central story.

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If You've Written Non-Fiction

Your reader should be able to understand why the book exists and what they'll get from reading it.

- ☐ My book has a clear purpose.
- ☐ I know who the intended reader is.
- ☐ The content delivers on the promise of the book.
- ☐ The chapters are arranged in a logical order.
- ☐ Each chapter has a clear reason for being there.
- ☐ I've removed unnecessary repetition.
- ☐ I've identified gaps in the information.
- ☐ Examples and case studies support the content rather

than distract from it.

- ☐ I've checked factual claims where appropriate.
- ☐ Sources and references have been recorded where required.
- ☐ I've obtained or identified permissions that may be required for third-party material.
- ☐ The introduction clearly establishes what the reader can expect.
- ☐ The conclusion gives the book a satisfying ending.

Ask yourself:

What should my reader know, feel or be able to do after finishing this book?

If you can answer that clearly, you're in a much stronger position.

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If You've Written a Memoir

Memoir comes with some additional considerations.

- ☐ My memoir has a clear central theme or purpose.
- ☐ I've selected the experiences that contribute to that story.
- ☐ I haven't simply included something because 'that's what happened next'.
- ☐ The reader can follow the timeline.
- ☐ Important people are introduced clearly.
- ☐ I've considered how other real people are portrayed.
- ☐ I've separated what I know from what I assume or

remember.

☐ I've considered whether any claims about other people could create legal concerns.

☐ I've thought carefully about highly personal information involving people other than myself.

☐ I've considered whether permissions may be required for photographs, letters or other material.

Memoir doesn't require you to tell readers every single thing that has ever happened to you.

The strongest memoirs usually make choices.

Your life is the source material. The book still needs a story.

If You've Written a Children's Book

Children's books might contain fewer words, but that doesn't necessarily make them easier to publish.

- ☐ I know the approximate age group I'm writing for.
- ☐ My vocabulary is appropriate for that age group.
- ☐ I've read the story aloud.
- ☐ The text has a natural rhythm when spoken.
- ☐ I've removed words that the illustrations could communicate instead.
- ☐ Every page or scene moves the story forward.
- ☐ The story isn't overly long for its intended format.

- ☐ The child – rather than the adult – is central to the reading experience.
- ☐ The ending feels satisfying.
- ☐ I understand that the illustrator doesn't necessarily need instructions for every tiny visual detail.
- ☐ I've looked at recently published books for the same age group.

Remember:

A children's picture book is a collaboration between **words and pictures**.

The words don't need to describe everything the reader will eventually see.

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Have Other People Read It?

At some point, your manuscript needs to leave the safety of your computer.

- ☐ At least one other person has read the complete manuscript.
- ☐ I've received feedback from someone capable of being constructive.
- ☐ I've listened to feedback without automatically accepting every suggestion.
- ☐ I've looked for patterns where multiple readers identified the same issue.
- ☐ I've made revisions based on feedback where

appropriate.

A word about friends and family

Your mum saying:

‘It’s wonderful, darling!’

is lovely.

It just isn’t necessarily manuscript assessment.

Friends and family can be useful early readers, but consider seeking feedback from people who:

- read your genre
- understand your intended audience
- will be constructive
- aren’t afraid to tell you when something isn’t working.

Have You Checked Your Word Count?

Know approximately how long your book is.

My current word count is:

_____ words

Then research typical expectations for your genre and audience.

Word count isn't an absolute rule.

But a manuscript that's dramatically shorter or longer than readers expect can affect:

- editing costs
- page count

- printing costs
- retail price
- reader expectations
- commercial viability.

If you've written a 200,000-word debut novel, for example, it's worth asking whether every one of those words needs to be there.

Do You Know What You've Written?

This sounds ridiculous.

It isn't.

Complete these sentences:

My book is a:

Its genre/category is:

It is primarily written for:

They will want to read it because:

Books that may appeal to a similar audience include:

Knowing where your book belongs will help with almost everything that comes later:

editing, cover design, metadata, distribution and marketing.

Have You Sorted Out Your Third-Party Material?

Your manuscript may contain material you didn't create.

Check whether you've included:

- ☐ Photographs taken by someone else
- ☐ Illustrations or artwork
- ☐ Song lyrics
- ☐ Poems
- ☐ Long quotations
- ☐ Letters or emails

☐ Newspaper or magazine content

☐ Website content

☐ Maps

☐ Charts or diagrams

☐ Screenshots

☐ Material from another book

☐ Other copyrighted material

If you've ticked anything above, **don't assume that acknowledging the source automatically gives you permission to reproduce it.**

Copyright and permissions can become complicated.

Identify potential issues before the book enters design and production.

If you're unsure, seek appropriate professional advice.

Is Your Manuscript File Under Control?

It's time to deal with this situation:

Book FINAL.docx

Book FINAL FINAL.docx

Book FINAL USE THIS.docx

Book ACTUAL FINAL.docx

Book FINAL REALLY THIS TIME.docx

We've all been there.

Before your manuscript goes into professional
production:

☐ I know which file is the current manuscript.

- ☐ The entire manuscript is contained in one master document where appropriate.
- ☐ Chapters are in the correct order.
- ☐ I've removed old versions from my working folder or clearly archived them.
- ☐ My manuscript is backed up.
- ☐ File names clearly identify the current version.
- ☐ Track Changes has been accepted or managed appropriately.
- ☐ Old comments have been removed where appropriate.

Good version control becomes particularly important once editors, proofreaders and designers start working on the book.

Are You Ready To Let Go?

This may be the hardest question in the entire checklist.

- ☐ I'm prepared for an editor to suggest changes.
- ☐ I understand that professional feedback isn't criticism of me personally.
- ☐ I'm willing to reconsider sections I love if they aren't serving the book.
- ☐ I'm prepared to make another round of revisions if necessary.
- ☐ I accept that the manuscript may change during editing.
- ☐ I'm ready to move from endlessly writing the book to

actually publishing it.

At some point, every author has to stop tinkering.

There will always be another sentence you *could* change.

The goal isn't perfection.

The goal is to get the manuscript to the strongest version you reasonably can – and then allow the publishing process to begin.

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So ... Is Your Manuscript Ready?

Count how many statements you were confidently able to tick.

Don't get too hung up on the number.

Instead, look at **where your unticked boxes are**.

MOSTLY UNTICKED IN PARTS 1 – 3?

KEEP WRITING

Your manuscript probably needs more development before you spend money on publishing.

That's not bad news.

You've simply identified your next step.

Finish the manuscript, step away from it, then complete another self-edit.

MOSTLY TICKED, BUT UNSURE ABOUT THE STORY OR STRUCTURE?

CONSIDER A MANUSCRIPT ASSESSMENT

You may benefit from professional feedback before committing to a full edit.

An assessment can help identify the bigger issues worth addressing first.

MOSTLY TICKED AND YOU'RE READY FOR PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK?

YOU MAY BE READY FOR EDITING

Your next step could be finding the right editor and beginning the professional publishing process.

ALMOST EVERYTHING TICKED AND YOUR MANUSCRIPT HAS ALREADY BEEN PROFESSIONALLY EDITED?

YOU MAY BE READY FOR PRODUCTION

THE MANUSCRIPT READINESS CHECKLIST

It's probably time to start thinking about proofreading, cover design, internal design, ISBNs, publishing setup and distribution.

You're getting close.

Your Manuscript Readiness Plan

Complete this before you move on.

The three things my manuscript still needs are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The biggest issue I need to resolve is:

The professional help I may need is:

- ☐ Manuscript assessment
- ☐ Structural/developmental editing

THE MANUSCRIPT READINESS CHECKLIST

- ☐ Line/copy editing
- ☐ Proofreading
- ☐ Children's book development
- ☐ Copyright/permissions advice
- ☐ Not sure yet

My next step is:

I want to have this completed by:

Don't Wait For Perfect

There's a difference between a manuscript that's unfinished and one that simply isn't perfect.

No manuscript is perfect.

And that's exactly why professional editors exist.

You don't need to spend another three years moving commas around before anyone else is allowed to see your work.

What you want is a manuscript that is:

Complete.

Considered.

Self-edited.

Ready for feedback.

THE MANUSCRIPT READINESS CHECKLIST

If you've reached that point, you may be much closer to publishing than you think.

What's Next?

Your manuscript is taking shape.

You understand your publishing options.

You've considered your timeline and budget.

Now comes one of the most important decisions you'll make:

Who are you going to trust with your book?

Continue to the next resource in your **Regional Author Starter Kit:**

BEFORE YOU PAY A PUBLISHER

The questions every Australian author should ask before signing a contract or paying for publishing services.

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*The Regional Author Starter Kit is brought to you
by The Rural Publishing Company – helping regional
voices shine, one book at a time.*