

Checklist for Critiquing a Novel

- Conflict
 - Does your story begin with some sort of conflict—either internal or external?
 - Does the beginning set up the bigger “conflict” of the entire novel, the issue that drives your protagonist toward his/her end goal?
 - Is your protagonist conflicted or is embroiled in some external conflict?
 - Are there too many conflicts going on in the book? Too few?
 - Is there an overarching conflict present in the story that is key to the premise and grows to a climax and resolution?
 - Does your protagonist face one conflict or obstacle after another (each worse than the previous) that force him/her to have to make a tough decision(s)?
 - Does the conflict serve the interest of the story or is it just thrown in the book for excitement?
- Plot
 - Does the overall plot come across clearly in the novel?
 - Is the plot goal for the book laid out from the start and does it resolve at the end of the book satisfactorily?
 - Are there subplots in the book that work with the main plot? Are they also resolved?
 - Are the setting, locale, time of year, date, etc., clearly and consistently developed?
 - Is it easy to follow the passage of time from scene to scene?
 - Are the scenes strung together in a cohesive fashion and drive the plot?
 - Are there scenes in the book that do not serve the plot and don't seem to have a point?
 - Is the plot interesting and engaging? Are the themes and issues touched on in the plot universal elements that readers will relate to?
- Pacing
 - How does the pacing of the story feel? Does the book drag in spots due to excessive narration or from uninteresting scenes?
 - Is the writing over-wordy or vague, slowing down the pace of the scenes?
 - Are sentences too long and/or repetitive?
 - Are the scenes moving at a good clip to keep interest or do they need trimming?
 - In faster action scenes, does the pace speed up with shorter sentences and paragraphs?
- Tension
 - Is tension created at the outset of the book?
 - Is the protagonist compelling enough to heighten tension by the reader caring about him/her?
 - Are scenes adeptly left hanging in order to create tension?

- Are elements/clues/details needed to propel the story presented in a way as to invoke tension (make the reader keep reading)?
- Setting and Locales
 - Does the author portray a believable, interesting setting that draws the reader in?
 - Does the setting seem to fit the mood and serve the plot?
 - Are there too many or not enough (or too repetitive) locations in the book?
 - Are any locations boring or not good choices for the scene?
 - Does the author spend too much time describing the setting? Not enough?
 - Is the setting portrayed through the eyes of the characters or presented in flat narrative?
- Point of View (POV)
 - Is the overall POV of the book consistent?
 - Is there only one POV character in each scene and is their “voice” distinct from all other POVs?
 - Are there any scenes told in a POV that would be better in another POV? (if multiple POVs in the book)
 - Does the author do a good job getting into the head of the character(s) or do they tend to tell rather than show what he/she is thinking or feeling?
- “Voice”
 - Does the writing style seem fresh, original?
 - Does the overall tone and style of the writing work well for the story?
 - Does the author’s voice come across unoriginal or derivative?
 - Does the writing have too many clichés or sound like the author is trying to impress his/her audience with complex words or sentences?
- Characters
 - Is the protagonist clearly presented and the major character in the plot?
 - Is the protagonist sympathetic from the start?
 - Are the characters rich and developed or flat and stereotypic?
 - Do the characters behave and speak consistent with their backgrounds and upbringing?
 - Does each character have depth—a past, a need, a fear, a dream—and are these brought out clearly in the story?
 - Do the secondary characters enhance and enrich the protagonist’s story?
 - Is there too much or not enough description of the characters? Is the description shown from the eyes of other characters and not just “told” by the author to the reader?
 - Are there too many characters or too much time spent on secondary characters that detracts from the main plot of the story and the focus on the protagonist?
 - Does the protagonist have a clear character arc that shows growth/change/decision/resolution to the end of the book?
- Dialogue
 - Does each characters’ speech and style of talking fit their personality?
 - Is there too much or not enough dialogue?
 - Is the dialogue stiff? Uninteresting? Too wordy?

- Are there places where dialogue is unnecessary filler and accomplishes little to reveal character or advance the plot (or reveal back story)?
- Does the dialogue sound natural?
- Are there places where the author uses dialogue to fill the reader in to important information info dump)?
- Overall Impressions
 - Does the book work? Does it hold together overall? Does the premise make sense and is it engaging?
 - Is this a book with enough universal themes or topic that would draw in readers?
 - Is the idea/premise of the book original enough to draw interest?
 - Does the book feel too long or too short? Are there scenes that seem to be missing and what are they?
 - Does the book have a theme or point that is well delivered or does it seem to be missing any point at all?
 - Is the theme worked into the book and brought out in the title and opening and closing chapters?
 - Are all the plot points satisfactorily resolved at the end of the book?
 - Does the reader get a sense of completion and resolution at the end of the book or is the ending vague, confusing, or dissatisfying?
 - Is it clear what audience the author is writing to or are there problems (for example, a book written for young adults that might be too technical or sophisticated for their age group, or too much sex or violence that may be inappropriate)