

Ten Tests for Your Novel

Techniques readers won't notice ... unless you get them wrong

1. Hook

Attracts reader attention from the first paragraph and on the first page?

Begins with a story – or backstory/explanation?

Key character(s) quickly introduced by showing them engaged in a conflict or action?

Characters likable and distinctive?

2. Characterization

Compelling characters readers care about?

Main character identifiable, yet unique?

Secondary characters substantially different?

Do they add to the story without distracting?

Characters' emotions believable?

Do they provide an understandable motive?

3. Plot

Does the story have good bones?

Central, unforgettable character?

Strong inciting incident?

Goals clear and achievable?

Unexpected complications/twists and a realistic resolution?

4. Conflict

Types of conflict

Sufficient character motivations and conflict to power the novel?

Conflicts appear realistic?

Action begins with a conflict that propels the reader forward?

5. Dialogue

Natural, authentic?

Any empty dialogue?

Characters' voices distinct and right for the setting, time, scenario?

Dialogue's subtext clear?

6. Scenes

Story built with clearly defined scenes, showing characters in action?

Opening lines orient readers to the time, place, and POV character?

Curtain rises and falls at appropriate times?

Each scene advances the story?

Pacing keeps readers interested?

7. Setting

Clearly set in specific time and place?

More than a backdrop but contributes to the story?

Aspects of local culture integrated?

Place developed as a character?

8. Mechanics

Demonstrates a command of grammar, punctuation, spelling?

Standard format?

Presentation professional?

9. Showing vs. Telling

Readers able to enter deeply into the story and its world?

Key actions fully dramatized – or conveyed through narrative summary?

Backstory presented naturally and in small portions – or inserted intrusively?

10. Writing Quality

Engages readers with strong, tight writing?

POV clear and consistent?

Varied sentence structures?

Careful choice of words?

Makes good use of beats/action tags and avoids telling dialogue tags?