

AURELIUM PRESS

The 12-Point Manuscript-to-Market Checklist

A practical roadmap from finished draft to professional publication

FOR FICTION AND NONFICTION AUTHORS Use this guide to identify what comes next, ask better questions, and avoid paying for the wrong service at the wrong stage.

WRITING THE BOOK WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING

A strong manuscript deserves an equally strong path to market.

12 sequential stages

From clean manuscript prep through launch — in the order that protects your investment.

Vetting questions

What to ask every editor, designer, and publishing partner before you hire.

Red flags

Warning signs that a provider — or a package — isn't right for your book.

Created by Aurelium Press

Expert editing, publishing strategy, book design, and launch support

How to Use This Checklist

This guide is a decision tool, not a substitute for a professional evaluation of your particular manuscript. Work through the steps in order. A later-stage service cannot reliably repair an earlier-stage problem: proofreading cannot fix plot structure, and beautiful formatting cannot rescue unclear positioning.

THE ORDER MATTERS Developmental or structural work comes before line and copy editing. Proofreading comes after layout. Publishing and launch decisions should be based on a stable, professionally prepared book.

Your 12-Point Roadmap

- ☐ 1. Prepare a clean, industry-standard manuscript
- ☐ 2. Define the book, reader, and publishing objective
- ☐ 3. Assess structural readiness before hiring
- ☐ 4. Find and vet a developmental editor
- ☐ 5. Complete the developmental revision
- ☐ 6. Choose the correct sentence-level edit
- ☐ 7. Find and vet a line or copy editor
- ☐ 8. Lock consistency, facts, permissions, and style
- ☐ 9. Position the book for its market
- ☐ 10. Create professional cover and interior files
- ☐ 11. Proofread the designed book
- ☐ 12. Complete publishing and launch readiness

AURELIUM PERSPECTIVE The right service is determined by the manuscript, not by the label an editor places on a package. Scope, deliverables, expertise, and sequence should be explicit before work begins.

1

Prepare a Clean, Industry-Standard Manuscript

Make the file easy to evaluate, edit, and move into production.

Before requesting quotes, create one clean master file. Always follow a publisher's, agent's, contest's, or editor's stated requirements when they differ from general conventions.

A professional working manuscript

- ☐ Use an editable Word document unless the recipient requests another format.
- ☐ Choose a readable 12-point font, double spacing, one-inch margins, and left-aligned (not justified) text.
- ☐ Use paragraph indents or Word styles consistently; do not align text with repeated spaces or tabs.
- ☐ Start chapters consistently and use clear, hierarchical headings for nonfiction. Use the STYLE function in Word.
- ☐ Insert page breaks between chapters instead of pressing Enter repeatedly.
- ☐ Number pages and use a clear filename with title, author, and version or date.

- ☐ Remove unresolved comments, accidental highlights, duplicate passages, and hidden tracked changes from the submission copy.
- ☐ Keep an untouched backup and a separate working copy.

DO NOT PRE-DESIGN THE MANUSCRIPT An editor needs a clean working file, not a book-like layout. Decorative fonts, forced line breaks, headers, complex spacing, and manual page design can interfere with editing and later formatting.

Before you send it

- Did I follow this professional's specific submission instructions?
- Are all chapters present and in the correct order?
- Can someone navigate the document without asking me how it is organized?

2

Define the Book, Reader, and Publishing Objective

Give every professional enough context to judge the work against the right standard.

An editor can strengthen a manuscript more effectively when the author can articulate what the book is trying to accomplish. Prepare a one-page project brief before interviewing providers.

- ☐ Category and genre, including subgenre where relevant
- ☐ Ideal reader and the problem, experience, or promise the book addresses
- ☐ Comparable books and how yours is meaningfully different
- ☐ Approximate word count and current stage
- ☐ Publishing path: querying, hybrid, assisted self-publishing, or independent publishing
- ☐ Desired publication window and why it matters
- ☐ Known concerns and the kind of feedback you are ready to receive

EXPERT SIGNAL A credible professional will test assumptions about audience, category, scope, and timing. Be cautious when someone promises market success without first understanding the book.

3

Assess Structural Readiness Before Hiring

Determine whether the manuscript needs diagnosis, development, or a full structural edit.

Not every completed draft is ready for copyediting. A manuscript evaluation, editorial assessment, or sample review can identify the correct next level without committing immediately to a full edit.

Developmental editing examines the architecture of the book

- Fiction: premise, plot logic, pacing, character arcs, point of view, stakes, scenes, continuity, and reader expectations.
- Nonfiction: purpose, argument, organization, chapter progression, evidence, reader transformation, repetition, and gaps.
- Both: audience fit, clarity of intent, proportion, structure, and whether the manuscript delivers its central promise.

SCOPE VARIES Some developmental editors diagnose and recommend changes in an editorial letter. Others also comment extensively in the manuscript, propose reordering, outline new material, or make limited structural edits. “Developmental editing” does not guarantee the same deliverables from every provider.

Readiness questions

- Have beta readers identified recurring structural concerns?
- Am I willing to move, cut, or rewrite substantial material?
- Do I need diagnosis, coaching, hands-on restructuring, or a combination?

4

Find and Vet a Developmental Editor

Hire for the manuscript's actual category, complexity, and stage, not personality alone.

Start with professional editorial associations, trusted referrals, acknowledgments pages in comparable books, reputable publishing networks, and specialists whose portfolios show relevant work. A polished website is not evidence by itself.

Ask about expertise

- Which books in my genre or subject area have you edited, and at what level?
- What training, publishing experience, or specialist knowledge informs your work?
- How do you approach voice, reader expectations, and author intent?
- May I see anonymized sample feedback or speak with a recent client?

Ask exactly what the service includes

- Will you provide an editorial letter? Approximately how detailed?
- Will you comment in the manuscript, and how extensively?
- Will you recommend structural changes only, or directly move or rewrite material?
- Will you address plot or argument, pacing, organization, character or reader journey, and market expectations?
- Are follow-up questions, a call, or a second review included?
- What is specifically excluded—line editing, copyediting, fact-checking, rewriting, coaching, or re-review?
- What file format and method will you use to deliver feedback?

Confirm business professionalism

- Is the quote based on the complete manuscript or a representative sample?
- What are the fees, deposit, schedule, cancellation terms, and revision boundaries?
- Is there a written agreement covering scope, confidentiality, deliverables, and ownership?

- How are missed deadlines, scope changes, and disputes handled?

RED FLAGS Pressure to pay immediately; vague scope; no contract; no relevant examples; unwillingness to explain the process; a quote given without asking about length or condition; or praise that never becomes specific.

5

Complete the Developmental Revision

Turn diagnosis into deliberate revision before paying for sentence-level polish.

A developmental edit is valuable *only when the author can translate feedback into a coherent revision*. Do not accept every suggestion automatically, but do look for patterns, underlying reader problems, and recommendations tied to the book's purpose. **NOTE:** If you use AI to write your book, you probably won't have the ability to translate feedback and suggestions into meaningful revisions.

- ☐ Read the full editorial letter before changing the manuscript.
- ☐ Separate high-level structural decisions from sentence-level cleanup.
- ☐ Create a revision plan by chapter, plotline, argument, or reader outcome.
- ☐ Resolve major issues first; local polishing done too early may be discarded.
- ☐ Keep a decision log for changes you accept, adapt, or decline.
- ☐ Ask whether a re-review is needed before moving to line or copy editing.

WHEN EXPERT GUIDANCE HELPS Complex manuscripts may need an editorial strategy call, revision coaching, or a second-pass assessment. The goal is not endless editing; it is confidence that the structure is stable enough for the next investment.

6

Choose the Correct Sentence-Level Edit

Understand the difference between line editing and copyediting, and never assume the labels are universal.

Line editing and copyediting overlap, but they solve different primary problems. Many professionals combine them; others keep them separate. The contract must define the work.

Service	Primary focus	Common work
Line editing	Style, flow, clarity, rhythm, and the reading experience	Sentence structure, word choice, transitions, repetition, tone, and preservation of voice
Copyediting	Correctness, consistency, and adherence to an agreed style	Grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, numbers, consistency, cross-references, and a style sheet

Service	Primary focus	Common work
Proofreading	Errors introduced or remaining after layout	Typos, punctuation, page elements, bad breaks, spacing, headers, page numbers, and visual consistency in the designed proof

IMPORTANT A copyedit is not a substitute for unresolved developmental work. A proofread is not a lighter or cheaper copyedit; it is a separate production-stage review.

7

Find and Vet a Line or Copy Editor

Compare defined scopes and samples, not package names or price alone.

Provide the editor with the manuscript, word count, genre, audience, publishing path, prior editing completed, deadline, and any style requirements. Request a paid or clearly bounded sample when appropriate; evaluate the reasoning and communication, not simply the number of changes.

Ask a line editor

- Will you address voice, rhythm, flow, clarity, transitions, repetition, dialogue, and paragraph structure?
- Will you rewrite sentences directly, offer options, or flag problems for me to solve?
- How do you distinguish necessary intervention from personal preference?
- Will you also correct grammar and consistency, or is a separate copyedit required?
- What will you not address—structure, fact-checking, citations, permissions, or proofreading?

Ask a copyeditor

- Which style guide and dictionary will govern the edit, and will you create a project style sheet?
- What level of copyedit are you quoting—light, medium, or heavy—and how do you define it?
- Will you check internal consistency, timelines, character or place details, cross-references, notes, tables, and citations?
- Is basic fact-checking included, limited, or excluded? How will questionable claims be flagged?
- Will you query unclear passages or revise them? What changes require author approval?
- Are permissions, references, indexing, or a post-layout proofread separate services?

Evaluate the sample

- Do changes improve clarity without flattening the author's voice?
- Are queries specific, respectful, and useful?
- Can the editor explain choices with reference to audience, style, or consistency?
- Does the sample reveal both appropriate restraint and careful attention?

RED FLAGS An editor who “fixes everything” without defining scope; treats preference as a rule; cannot name a style guide; refuses Track Changes or an equivalent transparent method; or promises a final, error-free book before layout and proofreading.

8

Lock Consistency, Facts, Permissions, and Style

Protect the book from preventable credibility and legal-risk problems.

By the end of copyediting, the editor MAY create a working style sheet that records project-specific decisions if you don't have one, but not always. This allows the author, formatter, proofreader, and future editions to work from the same standard. Consider having a stylesheet for your editor.

- ☐ Names, capitalization, spelling variants, hyphenation, and special terminology
- ☐ Character details, timeline, locations, numbers, units, and recurring facts
- ☐ Heading hierarchy, lists, tables, notes, citations, and reference treatment
- ☐ Preferred style guide, dictionary, and intentional departures
- ☐ Permissions status for quotations, lyrics, images, tables, and other third-party material
- ☐ Items requiring specialist review, legal review, sensitivity reading, or technical fact-checking

AUTHOR RESPONSIBILITY Editors may flag claims, inconsistencies, and permissions concerns, but the author remains responsible for the accuracy, originality, rights, and defensibility of the work unless the contract assigns additional verification.

9

Position the Book for Its Market

Translate the manuscript's value into reader-facing language.

A professionally edited book can still underperform if readers cannot quickly understand who it is for and why it matters. Positioning should connect the book's promise, category, packaging, metadata, and launch message.

- ☐ Confirm category, genre, subgenre, and primary reader.
- ☐ Refine the title and subtitle for clarity, fit, and distinctiveness.
- ☐ Study comparable books for reader expectations, not to imitate them.
- ☐ Draft the book description around stakes, transformation, or reading experience.
- ☐ Identify credible keywords and categories for discovery.
- ☐ Align cover direction, description, author bio, and launch messaging.

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST DOES NOT REPLACE Competitive research, metadata selection, pricing, category strategy, and launch planning should be tailored to the actual book. Generic keyword lists and copied competitor positioning rarely create a durable advantage.

10

Create Professional Cover and Interior Files*Turn the edited manuscript into a book that meets platform and reader expectations.*

Cover design and interior formatting are production disciplines, not cosmetic afterthoughts. Provide the designer or formatter with final text, trim size, format plans, platform specifications, image files, and the project style sheet.

- ☐ Confirm print, hardcover, and eBook formats and their separate file requirements.
- ☐ Choose trim size, paper, bleed, and color settings before final cover dimensions.
- ☐ Use a clear typographic hierarchy and readable body text appropriate to the category.
- ☐ Check front matter, chapter openings, running heads, page numbering, and back matter.
- ☐ Ensure tables, images, captions, footnotes, links, and accessibility needs are handled intentionally.
- ☐ Retain source files as well as print-ready PDF and validated eBook files.

Ask a designer or formatter

- Which deliverable files and source files will I receive?
- How many revision rounds are included?
- Who owns licensed fonts, artwork, and stock assets?
- Will files be tested against my selected platform's current specifications?
- Is eBook conversion included, and how is it quality-checked?

SCOPE TRAP A beautiful front cover is not automatically a complete print cover. Spine width, back cover, barcode area, trim, and bleed depend on the final specifications and page count.

11

Proofread the Designed Book*Review the actual reader experience after formatting, not the old Word manuscript.*

Proofreading belongs near the end because layout can introduce new errors. Review both the print-ready PDF and eBook output; they fail in different ways.

- ☐ Typos, dropped words, punctuation, and last-stage inconsistencies
- ☐ Widows, orphans, bad word breaks, crowded pages, and awkward spacing
- ☐ Chapter openings, headings, running heads, page numbers, and table of contents
- ☐ Images, captions, tables, footnotes, hyperlinks, and cross-references
- ☐ Front and back matter, ISBN and copyright details, calls to action, and author links
- ☐ eBook navigation, reflow, device previews, and accessibility behavior

CONTROL LATE CHANGES Every correction made in proof can create another error. Record corrections clearly, limit nonessential rewriting, and verify that each requested change was implemented without disturbing adjacent text.

12

Complete Publishing and Launch Readiness

Release a controlled, verified product, not merely an uploaded file.

Publishing readiness combines account ownership, metadata, files, proof approval, distribution decisions, and a realistic launch plan. No ethical professional can guarantee reviews, media coverage, or sales. Check that:

- ☐ You, as the author, own and control publishing accounts, source files, identifiers, and payment information.
- ☐ Final title, contributor names, ISBN details, imprint, description, keywords, and categories agree everywhere.
- ☐ Print proof and eBook previews have been reviewed and approved.
- ☐ Pricing, territories, distribution, publication date, and preorder choices are intentional.
- ☐ Advance reader, review, publicity, and launch activities comply with platform and disclosure rules.
- ☐ The plan includes post-launch visibility, updates, and measurement, not only launch-day activity.

FINAL DECISION GATE Before publication, ask: Is the content stable? Are the files professional? Is the metadata accurate? Do I control my accounts and assets? Can I explain the book's audience and value in one clear sentence?

Your Readiness Snapshot

Check the statement that best describes the project today.

- ☐ My manuscript still needs structural diagnosis or developmental revision.
- ☐ The structure is stable, but the prose needs line editing or copyediting.
- ☐ The edited manuscript is ready for design and formatting.
- ☐ The designed files need professional proofreading.
- ☐ The book is production-ready, but positioning or launch strategy is unclear.
- ☐ I am not sure which stage I am in, and I want an expert assessment before investing further.

The Questions That Protect Your Investment

Use these seven questions with every publishing professional you consider.

- 1** What exact problem are you being hired to solve?
- 2** What is included, and specifically excluded?
- 3** What will I receive, in what format, and by what date?
- 4** What relevant experience can you demonstrate?
- 5** How will changes, feedback, and approvals be communicated?
- 6** Who owns the source files, accounts, licenses, and final work?
- 7** What should happen before and after this service?

A PROFESSIONAL ANSWER IS SPECIFIC Look for defined deliverables, boundaries, rationale, and a sequence that makes sense for your manuscript. Expertise sounds clear; it does not need to sound absolute.

A Clear Next Step

If this checklist revealed uncertainty, that is useful information. The most expensive publishing mistake is often purchasing a good service at the wrong time or hiring a provider whose scope does not match the manuscript's needs.

A manuscript evaluation can help you:

- Identify the manuscript's actual stage and the highest-priority risk.
- Distinguish structural, stylistic, mechanical, and production needs.
- Sequence services so you do not pay to polish material that will later change.
- Build a realistic path from the current draft to a professional release.

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We help fiction and nonfiction authors identify the right next step, refine manuscripts while preserving the author's voice, and coordinate professional editing, design, publishing, and launch preparation. Request a consultation or manuscript evaluation at aureliumpress.com.

Professional Reference Points

This guide reflects widely recognized distinctions among manuscript preparation, substantive or developmental editing, mechanical or copyediting, and proofreading. For further reading, consult the current Chicago Manual of Style and professional editorial associations such as the Editorial Freelancers Association and Editors Canada.

Educational information only. Services and terminology vary by provider; confirm scope in writing. This guide is not legal, tax, financial, or guaranteed-results advice.