

THE BETA READER PREP KIT



Everything to set up before you send your manuscript to beta readers, with a questionnaire you can copy & send

The Beta Reader Prep Kit

Beta reading relies on goodwill and clear expectations and really good communication. Nothing else.

Somebody is about to spend eight to fifteen hours of their life on your unpublished draft, usually for free. So cool! But the single biggest predictor of whether that goes well isn't how good your book is—it's how clearly you set things up before they open your file.

Every guideline in this kit can be considered the default, but you and your reader can agree to something different. Talk about it first, and most of what typically goes wrong will never happen.

Guidepost: if you'd be annoyed to discover a particular behavior halfway through this process, it belonged in the conversation before you sent your manuscript.



SECTION 1: Before You Send Anything

Is the manuscript actually ready?

Beta readers are not your spellcheck and should not receive your first draft. Sending something half-baked burns goodwill that's very hard to get back.

- The draft is complete: beginning, middle, and end are all written.
- I've done at least one full revision pass of my own.
- There are no [BRACKETED NOTES] or placeholder scenes left.
- I've run spellcheck and fixed the obvious typos.
- Chapters are in the order I actually intend.
- I know what this book is about in one sentence (hook).

if you can't check these yet, you're not ready for betas. You're ready for another revision pass.

Do you know what you're actually asking for?

"Let me know what you think!" is a terrible brief. It produces vague feedback because it is a vague ask.

- I've identified 3-5 specific things I need or want feedback on.
- I know which things I am NOT looking for feedback on.
- I've decided whether I want line-level notes or big-pictures only.
- I've written my questions down to send with my manuscript.

Three to five focused questions will get more usable feedback than twenty scattered ones. Pick the things you're genuinely uncertain about.

SECTION 1, continued

Have you agreed on logistics?

- Deadline is confirmed and agreed to by both parties (2-8 weeks is standard for a full manuscript).
- Format is confirmed: Word, PDF, ePub, Google Doc, print.
- We've agreed on feedback delivery: in-line comments, Word/Google document, voice note, etc.
- They know the genre, heat level, and content warnings beforehand.
- We've agreed to a swap or not and timing of swap.
- We've agreed to no AI usage.
- We've agreed the manuscript stays private and unshared.
- We've agreed they will NOT publicly review the book.

Set your own expectations too

- I've picked readers who actually read my genre.
- I have more than one beta (3-5 gives you patters instead of opinions)
- I'm prepared to hear something I don't want to hear.
- I've decided in advanct that I will not argue with feedback.

You are allowed to disagree with a note and ignore it. Silently. Explaining why a reader is wrong teaches them never to be honest with you again. And possibly makes them never want to work with you again.



SECTION 2: The Questionnaire

Copy this, delete what doesn't apply, add your own, and send it along with your manuscript. Aim to send 8-12 questions total—choose from the general questions below plus 3-5 that are specific to your book.

Big Picture

1. Did you finish it? If you stopped, where? What made you stop?
2. In one or two sentences, what do you think this book is about?
3. Did the ending feel earned? Why or why not?
4. Would you recommend this to someone who loves this genre? Be honest.

What worked—don't skip this section

Authors need to know what to KEEP. If you only flag problems, I'll revise the good parts away too.

5. What was your favorite scene, and what made it land?
6. Which character did you connect with most? What made you care?
7. Was there a line, moment, or image that stuck with you after you put the book down?
8. What made you want to keep turning pages?

Where it hung you up

9. Where did you get bored, skim, or check how many pages were left?
10. Where did you get confused or have to reread?
11. Was there anything you didn't believe (a choice, a reaction, a relationship?)
12. Did any character feel flat, unnecessary, or hard to tell apart from another?
13. Did the pacing sag anywhere? Where?

Emotional Check

14. Where did you feel something? Name the moment.
15. Was there a moment that was supposed to hit but didn't?
16. How did you feel when you closed the book?

SECTION 2, continued

Your 3-5 specific questions

This is the most valuable part of the whole questionnaire. Ask about the things you're genuinely uncertain about: the subplot you almost cut, the twist you're not sure lands, the character you suspect characters will hate.

SECTION 3: The Etiquette Agreement

Send this alongside your manuscript, or paste it into your email. It takes thirty seconds to read and prevents almost every problem that might come up between authors and beta readers.

What I'm asking of you

- Deliver by the date we agreed on. If life explodes, just tell me. Silence makes me assume the worst.
- Answer the questions I asked. If I asked for big-picture reactions, you don't need to fix my commas.
- Be honest. I'd rather hear it now than in a review after publication.
- Tell me what worked, not only what didn't.
- React to the book, not to me. "This scene didn't land" is useful. "You clearly don't understand people" is not.
- Please don't share, forward, quote, or screenshot the manuscript. It's unpublished and private.
- Please do not run any part of the manuscript through AI.
- Please don't publicly review this book—not on Goodreads, Amazon, or some other group or page. You're here to help me improve it, not to judge it publicly. Reviews should only be left on completed books, not incomplete manuscripts/drafts.

What you can expect from me

- A finished, self-revised manuscript.
- A clear deadline and clear questions, up front.
- Content warnings and genre expectations before you start.
- An acknowledgement that you spent real hours on this, and a spot in my acknowledgements.
- If we're swapping, my read of your manuscript on time and with the same care you gave mine.

Agreed Terms

Manuscript: _____

Genre/heat level: _____

Approximate word count: _____

Feedback due by: _____

Format sent: _____

How feedback will be delivered: _____

Is this a swap? If yes, my read is due by: _____



One Last Thing

The writing community is small. Everyone remembers who flaked, who was gracious, and who left a two-star review on an unfinished manuscript they got to read for free.

Be the kind of author people want to help. Set clear expectations, respect their time, and thank them like they did you a favor—because they did.

Now go get that feedback!

Need help getting the manuscript beta-ready first? *FIX THE RIGHT THING FIRST* is a big-to-small revision system for authors of all kinds. It walks you through how to self revise your manuscript like a pro. Available wherever books are sold!

© A3W Editorial

@a3w_editorial

For your personal use—please don't redistribute.