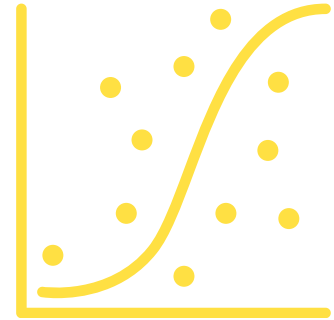


## A CHECKLIST FOR STRENGTHENING THE MIDDLE OF YOUR STORY

Use these checklists to diagnose what's happening in your manuscript and make targeted adjustments to help you restore momentum.



**You don't need  
to rewrite the  
whole book.**



**You just need to  
apply pressure in  
the right places.**

## Five Tips for Underwriting (Rather than Overwriting) Emotion



**Get Underneath the Obvious**



**Use Restraint for Power**



**Let the Reader Do Some of the Work**



**Anchor Emotions in Specifics**



**Let Emotion Change the Scene**

# Diagnose the Problem: Why the Middle Feels Stuck

Before you fix anything, identify what's actually happening.  
Check all that apply.



## Momentum Check

- Scenes feel repetitive
- Characters talk about the problem but don't act
- The story feels slow or stalled
- The character's goal hasn't changed in a long time
- The stakes feel flat or unclear
- Nothing significant has gone wrong recently
- The character is reacting instead of making decisions
- You're unsure what should happen next



## Scene Change Check

*At the end of each scene, something should shift.*

*For your recent chapters, ask:*

- Does something new happen?
- Does the situation get harder?
- Does the character gain or lose something?
- Does new information change the direction?
- Does a relationship shift?



## Stakes Check

*Readers stay engaged when something matters.*

*Ask:*

- Does the character risk losing something meaningful?
- Are consequences clear if they fail?
- Are those consequences increasing?
- Do the stakes feel more serious than they did earlier?



## Repetition Check

*Look for patterns that signal filler.*

- The character revisits the same problem repeatedly
- Scenes repeat similar emotions
- Conversations restate information
- The plan stays the same for too long
- The story circles instead of moving forward



# Diagnose the Problem: Why the Middle Feels Stuck

Before you fix anything...



...identify what's actually happening.

Check all that apply.

## Quick Diagnosis



*If your middle feels slow, it usually comes down to one of these:*

- Not enough change
- Not enough pressure
- Not enough consequences
- Not enough decisions

## Next Steps



Now that you've diagnosed the problems, it's time to move on to the revision or fix-it stage.

Use the following checklists to help you address the items you identified in the diagnosis section.

# FIX THE PROBLEMS



## Add a Complication Checklist

Introduce something that makes success harder.

Choose at least one:

- A plan fails
- A secret is revealed
- A new obstacle appears
- An ally becomes unreliable
- A misunderstanding creates tension
- Resources disappear
- The timeline shortens
- A new rival or threat emerges

Ask yourself: What can go wrong right now?



## Raise the Stakes Checklist

Make the consequences matter more.

Choose one or more:

- Increase emotional consequences
- Introduce time pressure
- Risk losing something valuable
- Add financial, relational, or personal cost
- Make failure visible
- Expand the impact beyond the main character

Ask yourself:

What happens if the character fails this time?



## Midpoint Shift Checklist

The midpoint should change the direction of the story.

Your midpoint should:

- *Introduce a major event or realization*
- *Shift the character's understanding*
- *Change the plan or strategy*
- *Increase urgency*
- *Move the character from reacting to acting*

*If none of these happen, the story may still be building instead of turning.*



## Escalation Checklist

Each new challenge should feel harder than the last.

Check for progression:

- *Problems are becoming more difficult*
- *Decisions carry greater risk*
- *Consequences are more serious*
- *Stakes are rising*
- *Pressure is increasing*
- *The character is running out of options*

*If challenges feel equal in intensity, escalation may be missing.*





## Decision Pressure Checklist

*Stories move when characters choose.*

*Add pressure by forcing a decision:*

- *Choose between two good options*
- *Choose between two bad options*
- *Act before having full information*
- *Risk something important*
- *Break a promise*
- *Reveal the truth*

*Ask yourself:*

*What decision would make this moment harder—but more meaningful?*



## Final Check

*Your middle is strong when:*

- *The character faces increasing challenges*
- *Stakes continue to rise*
- *Plans evolve*
- *Consequences unfold*
- *Decisions become harder*
- *The story moves steadily toward the ending*

## BIG TAKEAWAY



**The middle of a story isn't supposed to feel comfortable. It's where pressure builds, characters struggle, and transformation begins.**

**Don't play it safe here! When you introduce complications, raise stakes, and force decisions, momentum naturally follows.**

