

Would You Keep Reading?

A “First Five Pages” Diagnostic

Use this tool to determine if your first five pages are earning readers’ trust and inviting them to turn the page.

THE TRUST CHECKLIST

By the end of the first five pages, readers should be able to answer YES to most of these questions.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
1 I understand whose story I’m reading. The main character (or narrator) is clear.	☐	☐	☐
2 I understand what the character wants. Their goal, need, or desire is hinted at or stated.	☐	☐	☐
3 Something is disrupting normal life. Conflict, tension, or a problem is introduced.	☐	☐	☐
4 I have a sense of the story’s world. The setting, tone, and atmosphere are coming through.	☐	☐	☐
5 The type of story is clear. The opening delivers on the promise of the genre.	☐	☐	☐
6 I care about what happens next. There’s a reason to keep reading.	☐	☐	☐
7 I have at least one compelling question. Curiosity has been created.	☐	☐	☐
8 The pacing invites me forward. The opening moves, builds, or raises stakes.	☐	☐	☐
9 The writing voice feels confident and appropriate. The tone and style match the story you’re telling.	☐	☐	☐
10 I trust the author. Overall, the opening makes me believe this will be a worthwhile read.	☐	☐	☐

Your Score: Tally up your “YES” responses

Add up your “YES” responses.

____ / 10

9-10 YES: STRONG START

Your opening is doing the full job! Readers are getting the information and invitation they need. Keep it up!

6-8 YES: SOLID FOUNDATION

You're on the right track. Look for ways to strengthen the areas with more “No” or “Not Sure” answers.

0-5 YES: NEEDS ATTENTION

Your opening may not be earning readers' trust yet. Focus on the areas with the most “No” or “Not Sure” answers.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Trust = Turn the Page

Readers keep reading when they trust you to take them somewhere interesting.

Clarity Creates Confidence

When readers understand the basics, they relax and lean in.

Curiosity Drives Engagement

A good unanswered question is one of your most powerful tools.

Connection Makes It Personal

Make readers care about your character as early as possible.

Before you revise, ask yourself:

WHAT PROMISE AM I MAKING?

What kind of story experience should readers expect?

DOES MY OPENING DELIVER THAT PROMISE?

Are the first five pages aligning with what readers came for?

HAVE I EARNED THE NEXT PAGE?

Why should readers trust me enough to keep going?

Would You Keep Reading?

The first five pages aren't trying to convince readers your novel is brilliant. They're simply asking for permission to tell the rest of the story.



TECHNICA
EDITORIAL SERVICES

Take your insight and turn it into action.



Readers don't know whose story they're reading

- ☐ *POV is unclear or shifts too quickly.*
- ☐ *Protagonist is introduced late.*
- ☐ *Another character dominates the opening.*
- ☐ *Narrator's voice is hard to connect with.*

TRY THIS:

- *Introduce your main character early.*
- *Stay in their point of view.*
- *Let readers experience the story through them.*



Readers don't know what the character wants

- ☐ *Goal isn't stated or hinted at.*
- ☐ *It's too vague or confusing.*
- ☐ *Readers can't tell why it matters.*

ASK YOURSELF:

- *What does the character want?*
- *What will happen if they don't get it?*
- *Can I state it in one sentence?*



Readers aren't curious ... yet

- ☐ *Too much explanation or backstory.*
- ☐ *Opening starts before the interesting part.*
- ☐ *No compelling question is raised.*
- ☐ *The stakes feel too low.*

CREATE CURIOSITY:

- *Introduce conflict quickly.*
- *Reveal small pieces, not everything at once.*
- *Leave something unanswered.*



The pacing feels slow or static

- ☐ *Too much summary or description.*
- ☐ *More telling than showing.*
- ☐ *The character isn't making choices.*
- ☐ *No sense of change or movement.*

BUILD MOMENTUM:

- *Start as close to the inciting moment as possible.*
- *Show action, decisions, and reaction.*
- *Make something shift.*



The type of story isn't coming through

- ☐ *Tone doesn't match the genre.*
- ☐ *Promised experience is unclear.*
- ☐ *The opening feels like another genre.*

CHECK YOUR PROMISE:

- *What kind of experience should readers expect?*
- *Does the opening deliver on this?*



Readers aren't connecting

- ☐ *Character feels distant or vague.*
- ☐ *Emotion is missing.*
- ☐ *Readers don't know what's at stake for the character.*

BUILD CONNECTION:

- *Show the character's personality.*
- *Reveal a desire, fear, or conflict.*
- *Hint at what they stand to lose.*

Small changes in the beginning can create BIG IMPACT through your entire novel

