

When a Manuscript is Really Ready

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/when-a-manuscript-is-really-ready/>

This entry is part 2 of 2 in the series [Manuscript Process](#)

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- When a Manuscript is Really Ready

This is about how to know, as the writer, when your manuscript is really ready to show publishing professionals. It's a tough question, but there are clear and simple steps to this.

As writers, we tend to go one of two ways. We either have the tendency to feel our work is pure shiny brilliance and no edits are needed, or we suffer the constant doubt of wondering if a story will ever be good enough.

“How do I know if my manuscript is really ready to start submitting?” It’s the all-important question every writer should ask. Here’s the answer.

No matter what, one thing is certain: it’s tough, as the author, to know if a manuscript is really ready.

In the writing process, we writers must ask ourselves many, many questions. And we have to answer them all. Who is my protagonist? What does my protagonist face? Why will my readers care? These are the basics, and we just keep going further into the detail, to eye color, speech impediments: the works.

Every story detail – every word choice, in fact - is the result of a decision. It doesn't stop when it's time to rewrite, expand or edit. In fact, if your book gets published well enough to warrant a second edition, you might find yourself making small edits that weren't caught before the first print.

It doesn't end, really. Words are organic, and the stories we write down are as well. Look at any Classic author's work and how these are edited, annotated, amended, repackaged and adapted over time, even

after the author's death, and you know this to be true. No end. (It's pretty cool, really.)

But here's The Big Question:

How do I know when my manuscript is good enough to show an agent or a publisher?

That's a definitive question, and I have a definitive answer and 5 steps.

When you present a manuscript of any kind to any professional, you should feel it's on this particular Tuesday the best writing you've done to date. Period.

What I mean by this – your writing will always be improving so long as you're writing. Practice makes perfect, or at least nearly perfect. So five years from now, your writing will be leaps and bounds away from whatever you're writing today. It really will.

So keep writing, no matter what. But if you feel like your previous story was somehow stronger, then you need to ask yourself why. It's important and absolutely not incidental. Your latest story should always feel like your best, and your favorite story should always be your next one.

Let me just repeat that, to underscore a bit. This is a big deal, but you can miss it because it just sounds so simple.

**Your *latest* story should always feel like your best, and
your personal favorite should always be your *next* one.**

The shiny bauble ahead should of course tease your writer's imagination. That is a given.

Your best work should be whatever you've just finished. So if you feel like it isn't your best, get back to it. But what should you then do with it? Let's nail that down.

When everything seems solid but it just doesn't jive.

Most of the time, when a story seems to feel a little weak, it's because your protagonist isn't fleshed-out enough. It's really important that we care deeply about them – so how do we do that? The big tip-off: we care when they care.

If the character is blasé about everything, then we really won't mind when things go badly for them. In fact, we might even enjoy it. Even the most cynical person cares about something, even if it's something shallow, like Power or Money.

Quick and Awesome Resources

To get a better idea of what I mean here, read about the [Types of Character Archetypes](#).

To get a list of character traits to help get you on the right track with your character profile, [go HERE](#).

It's all about creating characters that feel real, and includes worksheets you can download for free.

Maybe you've created a complete character profile but the character just isn't reaching the page. That means your story needs more characterization. [Here's HOW](#).

Why Bad or Evil Characters Get Loved

Again, if the character cares about something, then we will too – even if that character is evil. This is one of the reasons we so often like (or even love) the bad guys. Most often, we love the bad guys who are Honorable and Loyal.

The protagonist might be a twisted sack of screwy nails, but if they're Honorable and Loyal that might be redeeming, and if written right, downright heroic (or the makings of an antihero).

If the character is Loyal (capped as a primary quality) to family and needs to rescue Sister from a Something-At-All then we will care too - but only if Loyalty is established as a key aspect of the character.

When the Problems are Structural

But what if your story is perhaps lacking in more structural, more basic, aspects of writing? If you are brand new at writing, you might not see structural problems to a story. This is where hiring an editor or going to a writing teacher for help can make a big difference to you.

At the very least, you can try to get other writers to read your manuscript for feedback. Just know that most of them will either be in the same boat as you (so won't see the problems either), or they won't want to give you the kind of feedback you really need.

What Usually Needs Fixing

Once that first draft is really done, let it rest a little before you dive into the first rewrite. The reason I say this: if you've been working steadily on a story, you won't be able to see what's wrong with the words on the page. You'll still be feeling your First Draft Energy pushing you through, word to paragraph to page, until you're simply through it.

That is no way to critically read your own work. So let it rest, get those particular words out of your head. Start working on another story (yes, seriously). Then go back to it with fresh eyes. If you've let it rest long enough, you'll be able to see the problems.

Some of the problems will jump out at you, screaming like a banshee. Some are subtler, like a sneaky vampire sucking the life out of your plot.

The Big Five Fails that can kill a story.

1. A weak plot that either races from scene to scene or that unexpectedly lags (and not to build suspense

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or establish atmosphere) can really kill a story. Make sure your story is well paced to engage readers. Most writers run into difficulty in Act II. [Here's how to overcome Act II issues.](#)

2. A weak character we don't care about will absolutely kill your story. If the character is too weak to carry the plot, go through these 3 steps:

- Define (or redefine) the character archetype. [Here's HOW.](#)
- Create an in-depth character profile. [Here's HOW.](#)
- Use a balance of characterizations to enrich the story with important details. [Here's HOW.](#)

3. Weak dialogue will trip up the story by making the characters sound lame or ludicrous - and can even make readers laugh right out loud at all the wrong moments. It's hard to like a character who has nothing interesting to say.

- So make the dialogue matter. [Here's HOW.](#)
- Writing dialogue as action can help with the story pace. [Here's HOW to do that.](#)

4. Narration is something I generally consider the same way I consider a character, so I give it a lot of thought. There are a TON of options for you here, and sometimes it's difficult to know what sort of narrator to have - and how much narration to use. It's a tough balance.

Narration is SO important and the terms we use can be really confusing. To clear things up and get you on the right track with that, [go HERE.](#)

Sometimes, we tend to connect over-narrating with boring details. But the thing is, we absolutely need details and we absolutely need narration. Just not too much. Here's [how to avoid boring details.](#)

5. Spelling and grammar are so important. I cannot stress this enough. Everyone, from absolutely every corner of the publishing world, all pound out the same message here – because it's true. Keep your spelling and grammar impeccable.

If your story is weakened because of **basic grammar and spelling issues**, you need special tools to help you through that ([go here for some helpful links](#)), and *you must read more*. If you don't read, you will never be a great writer. I promise, if you read what you wish to write (and other stuff too – heck, read anything!), it will expand your writing abilities in ways you couldn't otherwise imagine.

One of the most alarming complaints I hear from [editors](#) others in the publishing industry is that *they feel as though most writers don't actually read*. That just should not be.

You've got to [support the industry you wish to join.](#)

When the manuscript is really ready.

Don't forget to love your story and to care about your characters. After all, you made them. People who don't write fiction are puzzled or even amazed by writers who cry for their characters. But isn't that

exactly how it should be?

To capture the imaginations of others, we need to first capture our own. The trick is to slow down and really get it all on the page, to let little things matter, to strip what doesn't and to let these characters drum up so much emotion that they jump off the page.

What are you writing right now? Write below, let me know – or, as ever, just send me an email. I'd love to hear from you.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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