

Fifty things to make your manuscript shine

www.help4writers.com

1. Spell check. It sounds obvious, but it flies under the radar more than you might think.
2. Review where your novel begins. If you have a prologue, consider if it's truly necessary or if it's just extra information. Do readers get to the meat of the story quickly enough?
3. Ask yourself if your characters stand out. Are they memorable, or flat and one-dimensional?
4. Review your dialogue. Do your characters speak differently from each other? Use "said" to carry dialogue, and use adverbs sparingly.
5. Consider whether enough beta readers have reviewed your book. Other eyes are essential to improve your manuscript.
6. After you've completed step five, self-edit your manuscript if you haven't done so already.
7. If submitting printed pages to an editor or agent, remove staples or binding (other than a single clip or rubber band) from your manuscript.
8. Ensure your manuscript is the right length. Young-adult novels should be at least 50,000 words. Adult fiction should be closer to 80,000 or 100,000 words.
9. Double check that your manuscript includes page numbers.
10. Craft a title page for your manuscript that contains all your relevant information: name, address, email, phone, etc.
11. Double-space your manuscript.
12. Ensure you're using a standard font. Do not try to "prettify" your manuscript with a script font.
13. Make sure track changes are turned off.

14. Fact-check. If you have a character with cancer, run your text by an expert who can help provide accurate details. The web can only do so much.
15. Check for stereotypes. Are all the cheerleaders mean? Is the old guy next door creepy, but then he turns out to just be lonely?
16. Ensure your name and the book's name is on every page of the manuscript in a formatted header.
17. If querying an agent, ensure your query letter is personalized and that the agent's name is spelled correctly.
18. If querying an agent, ensure you've tailored your submission based on each agent's individual guidelines.
19. More on query letters: Make certain your query specifies the genre for which you're writing.
20. Highlight in your query why you specifically are qualified to write this book.
21. Ensure your query gets into the meat of the character's growth and focuses on the story – not on the other characters and the world they inhabit.
22. Research which books the agent/editor you're submitting to represents that are like yours. Reference them in your query.
23. Research more broadly whether there are other works like yours on the market. Know them. Refer to them in your query.
24. More homework: Research whether your manuscript is part of a trend. If so, find out if the trend is on its way in or out.
25. Craft a spreadsheet or a way to keep track of which agents you've submitted to and who has expressed interest or passed. With more than a couple queries, it gets confusing fast.
26. Make a note of the approximate timeframe in which an editor or agent says they will get back to you. Have a follow-up email at the ready. Something like: "Thanks for taking the time to review my manuscript [insert title here]. I haven't heard from you, but am looking forward to your feedback." Keep it short.

27. Tone down any references to a book series in your query. It can be in there, but sell them on this book first.
28. Don't quit your day job. Writing can pay the bills, but usually not until you're a few books into the process.
29. Put away the paranoia. A publisher is not going to steal your book idea.
30. If you don't already have a website, think about getting one. They're great promotional tools and an easy way for people to find you.
31. Ask if e-publishing might be right for you. Would you be happy selling 100 copies of your book for \$0.99 each on Amazon?
32. Think about which project you'll work on next while you wait for agents and editors get back to you.
33. As you think about what you'll write next, continue to read.
34. Accept that if your book gets a contract with a publisher, it will change. The title, the text, even that glossy cover you've envisioned.
35. Put good vibes into the universe. Believe in yourself. You can do this.
36. Think about whether you will publish under your real name or a pseudonym. If your book is controversial and/or you want a higher level of privacy, a pseudonym might be right for you.
37. Review whether your character names are appropriate for the time period. Blanche and Vera should not be characters in a contemporary young-adult novel, for example.
38. Review your manuscript for repetitive phrasing. For example, do your characters say "Oh!" on every other page?
39. If you land an agent, ensure you have defined expectations about what that agent will or won't do. They should sell your manuscript; they won't be your best friend.
40. Understand your agent may further edit your manuscript before they pitch it to an editor at a publishing house.
41. Decide beforehand how many rejections you'll get before you either shelve your manuscript, or dig out a red pen and begin editing afresh.
42. Publishing is slow. Prepare to be patient.

43. Determine you will be polite and have spotless manners in any interaction you have with an agent or editor.
44. Decide that you will learn and grow from this process as much as you can.
45. Find people who can encourage you in this process. Surround yourself with people who believe in you and can help you hang in there.
46. Know beforehand that any offer is good news. It might not be a two-book deal at \$100k per book, but any interest by editors or agents is a wonderful step in the right direction.
47. Beware of scammers. Don't accept representation that requires you to pony up money at the outset.
48. Check whether your editor/agent wants to see a book exclusively. If they are asking for an exclusive review, respect the request and hold off on other submissions.
49. Put the phone away. Do not call a publishing house or agency to check on your book.
50. Remember that you don't need money or connections to get published. All you need is a darn good book.