

7 SIGNS YOUR DRAFT ISN'T READY—AND HOW TO FIX IT



The Self-Publishing Author's Editing Checklist

BY MEGAN JOSEPH

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So... is your book really ready? Let's find out—without the stress.

Hey there, writer friend —

If you've landed here, chances are you've poured your heart, soul, snacks, and a questionable amount of coffee into your book. First of all, congratulations — that's no small thing.

But now you're staring at your draft wondering, Is this actually ready to publish?

Maybe you've tweaked the same paragraph twelve times. Maybe your beta reader said it was "nice" (ouch). Or maybe you're just tired of second-guessing yourself.



This Checklist is for you!

I created it to help self-publishing authors like you:

- Spot common story problems before they tank your reviews
- Make smart, simple revisions with confidence
- Know when it's time to bring in an editor (and what to expect when you do)

As a professional editor who's helped everyone from first-time authors to USA Today and Amazon bestsellers bring their manuscripts to life, I've seen the patterns. And more importantly, I know how to fix them — without stripping away your voice or creativity. We'll walk through the 7 most common signs your draft might still need work — and how to start fixing them. Each one comes with red flags to watch for, examples you'll relate to, and practical next steps you can use right now.

Because here's the truth:

Publishing a book is exciting. But publishing a book you're proud of? That's everything. Let's make sure yours is ready to shine.

Warmly,

Megan Joseph

Editor + Confidence Builder

www.JosephEditorialServices.com



Sign #1

Your Opening Chapter Doesn't Hook the Reader

Translation: If your best friend skimmed the first three pages and politely said, "It's... interesting," we might have a problem.

Your opening chapter sets the tone, stakes, and emotional heartbeat of the entire book. If it's dragging, confusing, or underwhelming, readers won't keep turning the pages.

Red flags to look for:

- The main character isn't likable or relatable
- Too much description, not enough movement
- Dialogue that doesn't serve a purpose
- No emotional anchor or conflict

Self-Edit Challenge:

Highlight the first and last paragraph of your opening chapter. Does the first line spark curiosity? Does the last raise a question or tension? If not, revise for impact.

Pro Tip: Most great openings drop us into a moment of change, decision, or tension. Breathe life into it — not just scenery.

Need help figuring out if your beginning packs a punch? I can tell you in one read.

Sign #2

Your Plot Has a Pulse — But No Backbone

Translation: Stuff is technically happening... but we don't know why, and we don't really care.

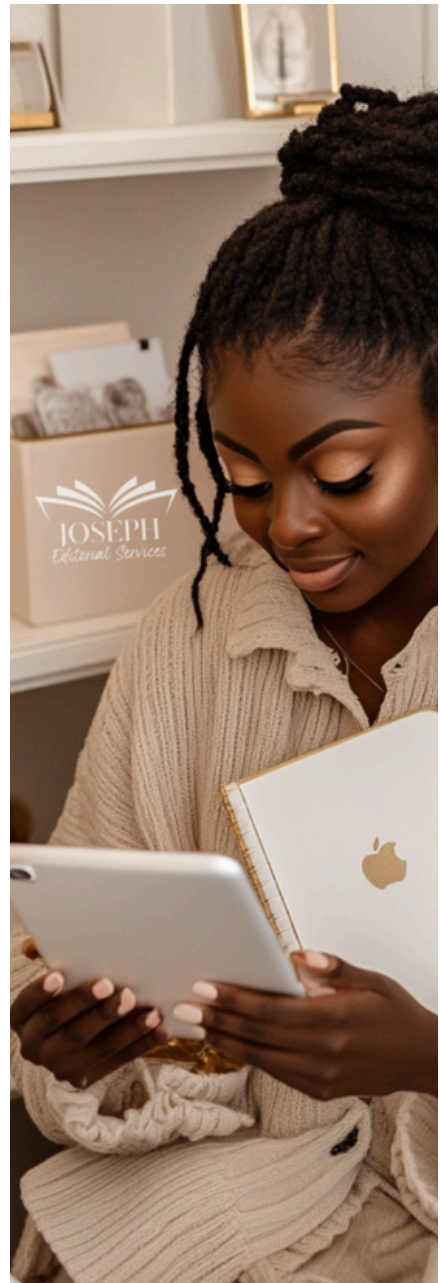
Even strong scenes can fall flat if they don't serve a central goal or conflict. A disconnected plot feels like a road trip with no GPS.

Red flags to look for:

- The main character reacts more than they act
- Subplots overshadow the main arc
- There's no clear "want" or central question driving the story

Self-Edit Challenge:

Write your main character's goal on a sticky note and reread your chapters. If a scene doesn't move them toward or away from that goal, cut or reshape it.



Pro Tip: A solid story arc keeps readers invested, even when things get weird. And weird is fine — as long as it has structure.

Not sure your arc is working? Let's map it together in your Draft 2 Done™ evaluation.



Sign #3

Your Characters Are Flat, Forgettable, or Frustrating

Translation: If you can't describe your protagonist without using hair color or moodiness, they might need more development.

Characters are the heart of any story. But without depth, growth, and believable motivations, they're just mannequins in costume.

Red flags to look for:

- Everyone sounds and acts the same
- The "bad guy" is bad... because
- The protagonist learns nothing or changes overnight

Self-Edit Challenge:

Choose one main character. Can you answer:

- What do they want?
- What do they fear?
- How do they grow or fail by the end?

If not, it's time for a development session.

Pro Tip: Give your characters flaws, contradictions, and moments of choice. That's where the magic lives.

Let's bring your characters to life — and keep readers invested every step of the way.

Sign #4

Your Pacing Is Giving Whiplash (or Putting Us to Sleep)

Translation: We're either speed-reading action scenes like a caffeine rush... or wading through paragraphs of backstory with glazed eyes.

Pacing is rhythm. When it's off, the story feels either exhausting or excruciating. Ideally, your scenes vary in tempo to create an emotional rise and fall.

Red flags to look for:

- Endless exposition or flashbacks in early chapters
- Action scenes that resolve too quickly
- Scenes that don't serve a clear purpose

Self-Edit Challenge:

Print a chapter and underline:

- Action or conflict in blue
- Backstory or reflection in yellow

If you're seeing nothing but yellow... it's time to tighten up.

Pro Tip: Fast isn't always better — but forward is. Keep scenes purposeful, and know when to slow down for effect.

Want help smoothing the flow? I can tell you where to cut, slow, and punch up the pace.





Sign #5

Your Dialogue Sounds Like a Robot Wrote It

Translation: If your characters say exactly what they're thinking, in perfect grammar, with no interruptions... you may be writing text-to-speech.

Dialogue should reveal personality, subtext, tension, and relationship dynamics — not read like an HR transcript.

Red flags to look for:

- All characters sound the same
- Dialogue info-dumps or explains things the reader already knows
- No rhythm or natural flow — everyone speaks in full sentences

Self-Edit Challenge:

Read your dialogue out loud. Does it sound like something real people would say? If it makes you cringe or giggle awkwardly, it's time to revise.

Pro Tip: People lie, dodge, deflect, interrupt, and leave things unsaid. That's what makes dialogue sing.

Need help punching up your conversations? Dialogue is my jam — let's elevate yours.

Sign #6

You're Telling More Than You're Showing (Oops)

Translation: If your book reads like a summary of a really great story...but doesn't let us feel anything, that's a sign.

Telling gets the job done. Showing makes it memorable. The key is balance — but most first drafts lean heavy on telling.

Red flags to look for:

- "She was sad." (instead of showing her reaction)
- "He was angry." (instead of action or tone)
- Entire scenes narrated without sensory detail or dialogue

Self-Edit Challenge:

Find a paragraph with emotional weight. Rewrite it using body language, thoughts, environment, and dialogue instead of summary.

Pro Tip: If you're telling us how a character feels — instead of letting us feel it with them — you're robbing the reader of the emotional payoff.

If you're telling us how a character feels — instead of letting us feel it with them — you're robbing the reader of the emotional payoff.





Sign #7

You've Edited the Same Paragraph 47 Times—But Still Don't Know What's Wrong

Translation: You've officially hit the "I hate everything" stage. Congrats. It means you care.

This is the sign that you're too close to the story. You've read it so many times that you can't tell if it's brilliant or broken — and neither can your beta reader (bless them, they tried).

Red flags to look for:

- Constant tweaking with no clear improvement
- You're afraid to move on until "this one part is perfect"
- You've started avoiding the manuscript altogether

Self-Edit Challenge:

Step away for a full week. Then return and ask:

- What am I trying to say here?
- What does this section need to accomplish?
- Could someone else help me see what I can't?

Pro Tip: You're not supposed to do this alone. Even editors need editors.

This is exactly where I come in — with Draft 2 Done™, you'll get a fresh, trained perspective that makes the revision process clear and focused.

So... What Happens After the Checklist?

If you found yourself nodding through more than one of these signs, I want you to know: that doesn't mean your book is bad.

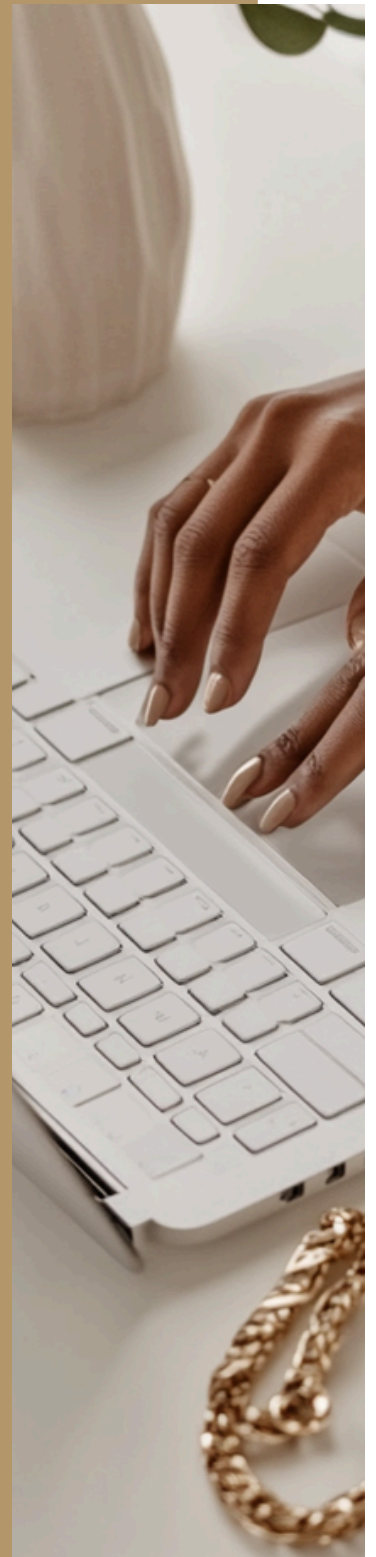
It means it's in progress.

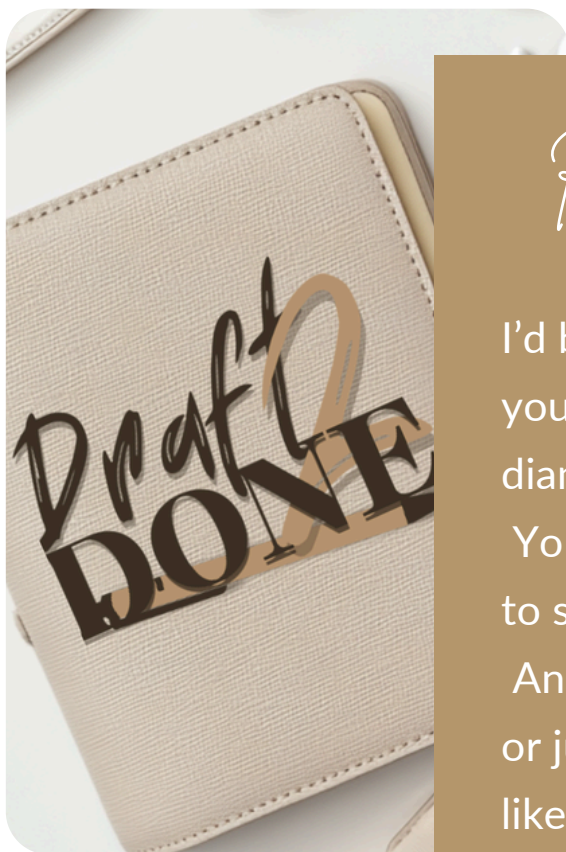
And progress is a beautiful, fixable thing — especially with the right support.

This is exactly why I created Draft 2 Done™ — my signature manuscript evaluation service for authors who want their books to shine without losing their voice, message, or momentum.

Whether you've written fiction or nonfiction, memoir or YA, spiritual inspiration or swoon-worthy romance — this service gives you:

- A detailed breakdown of what's working (and what's not)
- Clear, actionable feedback across developmental, line, and copyediting levels
- Encouragement, not ego-crushing
- A free second-round review after revisions





Ready to take the next step?

I'd be honored to come alongside you as you turn that literary gem into a dazzling diamond.

Your words matter. Your story deserves to shine.

And if you ever feel stuck, overwhelmed, or just tired of talking to your manuscript like it's a houseplant... I'm here to help. Let's polish that brilliance together.

Book a full Draft 2 Done™ evaluation:

[Draft 2 Done | Manuscript Evaluation](#)

A deep-dive manuscript evaluation designed to turn your rough draft into a publish-ready powerhouse. You'll get detailed, actionable feedback across developmental, line, and copyediting levels—plus a free second-round review after revisions.

Not quite ready? Start with a free sample edit:

[Request Sample Edit | Megan Joseph, Editor](#)

Not sure what to expect? Submit 500–1,000 words of your manuscript (as a Word doc or Google Doc), and I'll return it with in-document notes and a brief SWOT-style analysis. Get a feel for my editing style—no pressure, just clarity.

"I was at a real low point in my life before picking up writing after taking a year off and cranked out a book in a summer. I submitted my first draft to her for a manuscript review, and she really worked through it with me and helped me transform it to the best writing it could be. I love her kindness, availability, and openness. "

Janee Thompson

Real Results from Real Writers

"Megan didn't just edit my book—she gave it a heartbeat. She's a powerhouse every writer needs in their literary arsenal."

— Kashmire Kay

"This was my first novel, and I was nervous about finding someone who would keep my voice intact. Megan not only edited my book, but she coached me through the entire process. Seamless and amazing."

— Nikita Nicole

"You taught me how to write. I could barely string together a complete thought, let alone understand dialogue tags, action tags, or showing vs. telling. You're more than an editor, you're a woman of God, a teacher, a friend, and the GOAT of editing."

— Delicia McIntyre



The “Is My Draft Ready?” Self-Assessment Checklist

Use this printable page to reflect honestly on your draft and decide where to revise — and where to ask for help.

For each of the 7 signs, check the box if it applies to your manuscript. Then jot down notes or questions in the space provided.

1. My opening chapter doesn't really hook the reader.

- My character feels flat, unlikable, or unclear
- The first scene is mostly description or setup
- There's no emotion, tension, or momentum

Notes: _____

2. My plot lacks structure or direction.

- The main character reacts more than they act
- I can't clearly identify the stakes or turning points
- Subplots feel more interesting than the main one

Notes: _____

3. My characters feel one-dimensional or inconsistent.

- They don't grow or change over the course of the story
- I don't know what they truly want or fear
- Their relationships lack tension or progression

Notes: _____

4. My pacing is off — either too slow or too rushed.

- There's too much backstory or internal reflection
- Action scenes feel rushed or chaotic
- Some chapters feel like filler

Notes: _____

5. My dialogue doesn't sound natural or purposeful.

- Everyone sounds the same
- Dialogue explains things the reader already knows
- There's no subtext or emotional undercurrent

Notes: _____

Want help making those improvements?

Start with a free sample edit or get comprehensive feedback through Draft 2 Done™.

6. I'm telling, not showing.

- I often use emotion labels (e.g., "She was sad")
- Scenes feel summarized instead of experienced
- There's little sensory detail or character movement

Notes: _____

7. I've revised the same pages over and over without making real progress.

- I feel stuck and unsure what's "wrong"
- I've lost confidence or feel burned out
- I'm too close to see the manuscript clearly

Notes: _____

Your Total Checkmarks: _____ / 7

If you checked 2 or more boxes, your story likely needs more development before it's ready to publish — and that's okay!

What's Next

- ✓ Print the checklist worksheet and assess your draft
- ✓ Book your sample edit or full evaluation
- ✓ Watch your confidence (and manuscript) transform

✉ Questions? I'd love to hear from you:
Megan@JosephEditorialServices.com

You've got the story. I'll help you tell it beautifully.



Thank you!

Thank you so much for downloading this guide.

I'm truly honored to be part of your writing journey. Whether you're polishing your first draft or putting final touches on your next masterpiece, know that you don't have to do it alone. I'm cheering you on—and when you're ready, I'd love to help you take your manuscript to the next level.

Your words matter. Let's make them unforgettable.

— Megan Joseph

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