

The 30-Minute First Chapter Checklist:

How to Take Your First Chapter From Good to Great



BOOK TITLE

1. **Curiosity** - Does it pique your reader's interest and draw them in?

2. **Memorable** - Does it paint a picture? Stick in the mind?

3. **Genre** - Does it point to your book's genre or are you leading your reader astray?

4. **Rhythm** - Does it roll off the tongue? Is it fun to say? Is there some sizzle?

5. **Originality** - Has someone already used your title? Do your homework, and if it's in the same genre, find another.

FIRST SENTENCE

6. **Authority** - Do you speak with authority starting on page one? Is it clear you are in *charge* of this book? Readers want to know they are in confident hands.

7. **Clarity** - Are you 100% clear whose story it is (in fiction/memoir) or exactly who you are speaking to (in nonfiction)?

8. **Point** - What is the point you are trying to make? Are you saying something specific about human nature? About how the world works? You need to know what you're trying to say from the very start.

9. **Structure** - Are you starting in the right place? You want to open your story at the moment your protagonist can no longer ignore the ticking clock (in fiction/memoir) or at the moment your readers know they must make a change (in nonfiction). For any story, you need to drive toward a resolution.

10. **Narrative Drive** - Are you telling a single, focused story (in fiction/memoir) or making a single, focused argument (in nonfiction) and cutting out anything that doesn't serve that story/argument?

OPENING PARAGRAPH

11. **Voice** - Is the narrative voice consistent throughout, and suitable to the genre?

12. **Tense** - Is your tense clear and consistent? Check to make sure you don't hop from present to past and back again.

13. **POV** - Have you established a clear point of view and made an unwavering effort to stick to it?

14. **Curiosity** - Does the book open with a question, a problem or scenario that immediately piques a reader's interest and draws them in?

15. **Emotion** - Do we know what the protagonist is feeling (in fiction/memoir) or what the reader's problem or pain point is (in nonfiction) at every turn? This is the true meaning of "show, don't tell." Show us what each detail means and why it matters.

16. **Discernment** - Have you axed out any redundancies or words you don't need? Are any sentences or sections convoluted or confusing?

17. **Rules** - Grammar matters. Get it right. For a thorough list of common grammar and sentence structure mistakes, see Alexis Grant's [Revision Checklist](#).

BODY PARAGRAPHS

18. **Scene** - Are you writing actual scenes set in one time and one place? Are you letting each scene unfold before our eyes? For nonfiction writers, each anecdote should adhere to these same rules.

19. **Continuity** - Do we always know where we are in time and space? If you fail to tell us, you might lose us.

20. **Stay in one head** - For fiction told in the third-person omniscient, stay in one character's head per scene. Remember that in first person (in fiction/memoir) and third-person close (fiction), the narrator cannot know what other people are thinking.

21. **Momentum** - Does the writing move along at a snappy pace? Is everything there for a reason? Long passages of description may be fun to write but they can be boring to read.

DIALOGUE

22. **Essential** - Does the dialogue need to be there? Does it tell us something essential? Show us something critical?

23. **Subtext** - In real life, people can't help but lie, fudge and complicate things every time they open their mouth. Is this reality captured in the dialogue? Let us see what people aren't saying.

24. **Body Language** - Is there body language to reveal the emotion of what's going on?

25. **One Speaker, One Paragraph** - Do you start a new paragraph every time a new person speaks?

26. **Clarity** - Is it clear who is speaking? Use "he said," "she said" as needed.

27. **Adjective Restraint** - Do you use adjective to explain your dialogue (e.g., "he said happily.") Don't. Let what's happening in the scene amplify the emotion.

ENDING

28. **Satisfaction** - Does your character move the initial scenario/argument forward in a clear and satisfying way?

29. **Momentum** - Does your chapter ending clearly lead to what comes next?

30. **Hook** - Have you left your reader with a question or a decision, or at a crossroads so they can't help but turn the page?



At the Author Accelerator, we pair you with a book coach who each week is paying as much attention to these elements of your story as you are. Come check us out and take your book from good to great: authoraccelerator.com.