

Manuscript X-Ray

10 Critical Questions to Diagnose Your Picture Book

How to Use This Worksheet

It's time to take a peek beneath the surface of your picture book manuscript. Whether you're polishing a first draft or preparing for submission, the Manuscript X-Ray helps you see your story through an editor's eyes and expose the underlying strengths and weaknesses of your story.

It's important to answer each question honestly. The more detailed your responses, the more insights you'll gain. Circle areas of concern and note questions or potential solutions. Use the scoring scale to track strengths and weaknesses across all elements of your story.

1. Core Concept

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Is the central premise of your story clear and distinctive?

What makes your concept stand out from similar books?

2. Character Agency

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your main character solve their own problem or drive the story forward?

List three actions your protagonist takes to resolve the central conflict.

3. Emotional Connection

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your story evoke a clear emotional response?

What specific feelings will children experience while reading? How does your story create these feelings?

4. Page Turn Potential

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Have you created moments of anticipation or surprise that will drive readers to turn the page?

Identify 3-5 strong page turn opportunities in your manuscript.

5. Visual Opportunities

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your manuscript leave room for illustrations to tell part of the story?

List scenes or moments where illustrations can convey information not stated in the text.

6. Language Quality

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Is your language engaging, age-appropriate, and enjoyable to read aloud?

Circle words or phrases that might be difficult for your target age group. Identify any tongue-twisters or awkward rhythms.

7. Pacing

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your story maintain momentum throughout, without dragging sections or rushed conclusions?

Mark sections that feel too slow or too quick. Does the ending feel satisfying or rushed?

8. Universal Theme

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Does your story connect to a universal childhood experience or emotion?

What is the core theme of your story? How will it resonate with children?

9. Adult Appeal

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Would adults enjoy reading this story multiple times?

What elements might appeal specifically to the adult reader?

10. Marketable Hook

Rating: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Can you describe your story in one compelling sentence that creates interest?

Write your hook/pitch here. Does it convey what makes your story special?

Continue Your Assessment

You've evaluated the core elements of your manuscript! On the following pages, you'll find the **Overall Assessment** and **Action Plan** to help you synthesize your findings and create a strategic revision plan.

Take a moment to review your answers to questions 1-10 before proceeding. Look for patterns in your responses that might reveal your manuscript's greatest strengths and most significant opportunities for improvement.

→ **Flip to the next page to complete your Manuscript X-Ray analysis.**

Overall Assessment

Instructions: After completing all 10 questions, use this space to bring your findings together. Identify your manuscript's greatest strengths and most significant opportunities for improvement. Look for patterns across your responses - areas where you consistently scored high or low.

My manuscript's greatest strengths are:

List at least three of your manuscript's biggest strengths:

The areas that need the most improvement:

List the three areas that need the most improvement:

Based on this assessment, my overall impression of my manuscript's readiness is:

- ☐ Ready for submission/publication
- ☐ Needs minor revisions
- ☐ Requires significant development
- ☐ Concept is strong but execution needs work
- ☐ May need to reconsider core concept

Action Plan

Instructions: Now that you've identified areas for improvement, create a specific action plan. Be concrete about what changes you'll make and set reasonable deadlines for yourself.

The first three improvements I will make to my manuscript are:

Improvements needed:

Goal Completion Date:

Resources I need to make these improvements:

- ☐ Information, books, or articles
- ☐ Critique partners
- ☐ Professional editing
- ☐ Market research
- ☐ Other (list below)
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

My target date for completing all revisions: _____

How Can We Help?

Your Manuscript X-Ray has revealed both strengths to celebrate and opportunities for growth. Wherever you are in your picture book journey, we offer resources designed to help you succeed:

Identified weaknesses in concept or structure?

Our [Self-Publishing Software](#) includes planning, writing, and storyboarding tools that make it easy to write, refine, and visualize your picture book layout. Click the button below to start your risk-free 7 day trial.

Start Free Trial

Need guidance with the self-publishing process and best practices?

Our 12-week [Self-Publishing Club](#) provides weekly group training sessions where experienced coaches provide guidance through the entire self-publishing process - from ideation to publication and beyond. BONUS: Members get FREE access to our self-publishing software for a full year.

Join the Club

Looking for more personalized support?

Our [One-on-One Coaching](#) pairs you with an experienced coach who specializes in picture books and self-publishing. Together, you'll develop a customized plan to address your manuscript's specific needs and strengths. Click the button below to start with your free 15-minute strategy session.

Book My Free Session

[Visit our website](#) to explore your options and take the next step in your publishing journey.

Remember: Every successful picture book author has gone through this same process of evaluation and revision. You're on the right path!