



Visual Language Checklist for Picture Book Manuscripts

How to use this checklist:

Read through your manuscript with these prompts in mind. Check off each item as you address it during revision. Aim to complete as many checks as possible, focusing first on areas where your manuscript needs the most improvement.

Section 1: Emotion Check

- ☐ Replaced emotion labels (sad, happy, angry) with physical reactions
- ☐ Included facial expressions that illustrators can draw
- ☐ Showed body language that conveys feelings
- ☐ Removed phrases like "felt," "was," and "seemed" where possible
- ☐ Included heart/breathing responses to emotions (racing heart, held breath)

Example transformation:

- ✗ "Sara was nervous about school."
- ✓ "Sara's fingers trembled as she clutched her lunchbox."

Notes

Section 2: Setting & Scene Visualization

- ☐ Described spaces with specific details rather than generic descriptions
- ☐ Included sensory details beyond just visual (sounds, smells, textures)
- ☐ Provided scale references (tiny mouse in huge kitchen vs. general "small")
- ☐ Created clear scene transitions for page turns
- ☐ Avoided over-describing elements better left to illustrator's creativity

Example transformation:

- ✗ "The forest was dark and scary."
- ✓ "Shadows stretched between towering trees. Twigs snapped underfoot."

Notes

Section 3: Character Action Check

- ☐ Replaced generic verbs (walked, went, moved) with specific actions
- ☐ Included meaningful character interactions with objects
- ☐ Added distinctive character movements/gestures that reveal personality
- ☐ Created action sequences with illustratable progression
- ☐ Removed unnecessary explanation of actions that will be visible

Example transformation:

- ✗ "The dog was excited when the doorbell rang."
- ✓ "Rusty's ears perked. He scrambled to the door, tail whipping in circles."

Notes

Section 4: Language Strengtheners

- ☐ Incorporated strong verbs that suggest movement and action
- ☐ Added sensory words that evoke smells, sounds, and textures
- ☐ Included figurative language (similes, metaphors) that creates visual connections
- ☐ Removed adverbs in favor of stronger, more specific verbs
- ☐ Created rhythmic language that enhances the visual experience

Example transformation:

- ✗ "It was windy outside."
- ✓ "Leaves tumbled across the yard. The window shutters clapped."

Notes

Section 5: Final Manuscript Evaluation

- ☐ Highlighted all "telling" words in one color
- ☐ Highlighted all sensory/visual language in another color
- ☐ Each spread contains at least 1-2 clear visual opportunities
- ☐ No spread is over-described or leaves nothing for the illustrator
- ☐ Story can be understood through illustrations alone

Example transformation:

- ✗ "Max felt proud of his tower."
- ✓ "Max stood taller, chest puffed out, pointing to his tower."

Notes

Pro tip:

Read your manuscript aloud while imagining turning pages. Can you visualize distinct illustrations for each spread?



Bonus: Illustration Note Check

- ☐ Included only essential art notes (cultural details, plot-necessary elements)
- ☐ Kept art notes brief and focused on what (not how) to illustrate
- ☐ Removed art notes that restrict illustrator creativity unnecessarily

Example Proper Art note:

Zara wears a hijab throughout the story

Words to Watch For:

- Emotion labels: happy, sad, angry, excited, nervous, scared, worried, frustrated
- Vague verbs: was, felt, seemed, went, moved, looked
- Telling adjectives: beautiful, scary, big, small, nice, mean, good, bad

Replace these with specific, illustratable details!