

Fiction Fix-It Shop

Initial Critique, Book Proposal Review, and Chapter Critique Checklist

As a client, when you purchase a screening critique or book proposal review from FFS, you have a right to expect the following services, qualities, and end product:

Qualities of Critiquer and Feedback

- Published Novelist
- Thorough
- Honest
- Encouraging
- Helpful
- Understandable
- Professional yet personable
- Reflective of current fiction publishing standards
- Respectful of writer's own voice and talent

Qualities of ShopTalk Session

- Prompt start and finish
- Professional
- Helpful
- Client driven agenda
- Client-focused and client manuscript-focused
- Conversational, not lecture or "therapy session"
- Editor is prepared for session in advance
- Encouraging and friendly
- Positive and solutions-based

End Product

- Complete read-through of manuscript excerpt
- Moderate line editing using Track Changes, Comments, and analysis inserted into manuscript text
- Narrative summary at conclusion of manuscript, up to 3 single-spaced pages
- One 15-minute ShopTalk Session

Critiquing Services

During the initial critique or a single chapter critique, your editor will be considering the following areas and will comment on them as needed:

Line Editing:

- Analysis of scene structure:** Scene Goal, Motivation and Conflict, Climax, Resolution, Tension, Motivation-Reaction Units, and relevance to story arc.
- POV:** problems, errors, or opportunities to deepen POV
- Show-Don't-Tell:** flagging examples of different types of telling
- Dialogue:** flagging awkward, contrived, or unwieldy dialogue
- Wordiness or Slow Pacing:** with possibly some suggestions on how to improve pacing or increase tension
- Unclear Passages:** flagging sentences or sections that are confusing or unclear
- Writing "tics":** flagging several examples of repetitive words, phrases, or other writing patterns that do not contribute positively to manuscript. Writer is expected to find further examples during his or her own revision of manuscript.
- Character development:** flagging inconsistent behavior, unsympathetic or unbelievable behavior, stereotypes, unclear motivation, 2-dimensional character development, and other problems as noted by editor
- Back story and Explaining:** flagging unnecessary back story, research, and other types of explaining
- Clichés and Overwriting:** helping writer avoid "purple" writing, while still respecting writer's voice, genre of story, and mood or tone being set.
- Other problems or areas of improvement:** as deemed important by the editor

Line edits are not expected to correct problems, rewrite, or always make suggestions. They are not required to address continuity issues, grammar, formatting, spelling, punctuation, factual accuracy, flow of sentences, or clarity.

Summary Critique: At the end of the manuscript, the writer can expect a narrative analysis with suggestions and explanations of **up to** 3 single-spaced pages on the following areas:

Manuscript Strengths and Weaknesses—at the discretion of the editor, this section may include the following types of analysis:

- Overview or summary of greatest strengths in excerpt**
- Overview or summary of greatest areas of needed improvement**
- Highlighting of 1-5 top concepts to work on**

Summary and Further Recommendations—at the discretion of the editor, this section may include the following types of suggestions:

- Advice regarding how to approach revisions**
- Suggested next steps beyond revision**
- Encouragement regarding overall story potential**
- Reminder to schedule ShopTalk sessions to discuss further questions**

- Additional resources to help with items discussed—such as books, articles, websites, or writing groups.**

ShopTalk Sessions

ShopTalk Sessions are designed to give you an additional opportunity to ask questions and discuss your edits further with your editor. You'll find them similar to a paid critique you could receive at a writer's conference.

- Your editor has been asked to enforce 15-min. time limits**
- Your editor will ask you what questions you have about your critique**
- It's a good idea to focus on 1-2 items only, and then additional questions as time allows.**
- Brainstorming is acceptable, and it will be driven by you, the client.**
- If you have no questions, your editor will have a few items from edit ready to discuss**
- Your editor is acting as a sounding board, may explain concepts and offer suggestions and advice, but not issuing orders**
- Positive, craft-focused discussion. Not judging whether manuscript is publishable or marketable.**
- May discuss next steps such as seeking an agent or querying editors, but may not involve recommending specific houses or agents. If you ask for information on an agent or house that the editor is familiar with, your editor may share non-confidential information if they choose.**

Book Proposal Review

The book proposal review is nearly identical to the initial critique, except that the critique consists of the following:

- Critique of first three chapters of book, regardless of word count**
- Light feedback of synopsis, cover letter, marketing analysis, and other elements of book proposal**
- One 30-minute ShopTalk Session**

The ShopTalk Session and Sample Chapter Critique follow the same guidelines as for the Initial Critique. **Please note that we do not write the book proposal for you.** The feedback given on the remaining elements of the book proposal **do not include copy editing or proofreading**, but will cover the following:

- Conciseness**
- Clarity**
- Strength of story hook in cover letter and synopsis**
- Story structure as expressed in synopsis**
- Recommendations for what to add or delete from proposal**
- Other suggestions at editor's discretion**