Novel Editing Checklist

A comprehensive editing checklist can guide you through refining your novel to a professional level. This checklist covers various stages of editing, from structural adjustments to the final polish:

1. Developmental Editing (Big Picture)

- **Plot and Structure**: Ensure your story has a clear beginning, middle, and end. Check for logical flow, pacing, and that each chapter serves the story's progression.

- **Character Development**: Verify each main character has a clear arc, motivations, and growth. Ensure side characters enhance the story.

- **Setting and World-building**: Ensure your world is vividly described and consistent throughout the novel. Check for sensory details that bring the setting to life.

- **Theme**: Identify your novel's central themes. Ensure they are woven seamlessly into the narrative without being overly explicit.

- **Opens with hook**: entire book, and each chapter.

- **Wraps up**: each chapter, and entire book.

2. Content Editing (Scene-Level Focus)

- **Scene Necessity**: Ensure each scene advances the plot or character development. Remove or revise scenes that don't serve a clear purpose.

- **Conflict and Tension**: Check each chapter or scene includes some form of conflict or tension to keep readers engaged.

- **Emotion check**: balanced drama, not too dramatic or unemotional, not judgmental, or preachy, stay positive, not negative.

- **Dialogue**: Ensure dialogue is realistic, character-appropriate, and serves a purpose (revealing character, advancing plot, etc.). Also, double check dialogue grammar.

- **Show, Don't Tell**: Identify instances of telling where showing could be more effective. Enhance these sections with action, dialogue, or sensory details.

3. Line Editing (Prose-Level Focus)

- **Clarity and Conciseness**: Eliminate unnecessary words, phrases, or sentences. Clarify vague descriptions cliches, or actions. Find any repeats or redundancies.

- **Voice and Style**: Learn your author's voice, then stick to it. Ensure a consistent narrative voice that matches the story's perspective and tone. Adjust sentences that feel out of place stylistically.

- **Syntax Variety**: Vary sentence structure to avoid monotony. Mix simple, compound, and complex sentences.

- **Word Choice**: Replace weak, overused, or incorrect word choices with stronger, more precise language. Clean up adverbs and passive verbs. Challenge yourself to add a few new words you didn't know without making it difficult to read. Eliminate words like "thing" and "stuff".

4. Copyediting (Detail-Oriented Focus)

- **Grammar and Punctuation**: Correct grammatical mistakes, punctuation errors, and typos. Use Microsoft Word tools. Check subject – verb agreement.

- **Consistency**: Ensure consistency in names, places, timeline, facts, and the story's internal logic. Do your research. Double check your facts.

- **Formatting**: Standardize chapter headings, font size, paragraph indentation, and other formatting elements according to your chosen style guide.

5. Proofreading (Final Review)

- **Final Check**: Conduct a last read-through for any overlooked errors in spelling, punctuation, or formatting.

- **Read Aloud**: Reading the manuscript aloud can help catch awkward phrasing or errors missed during silent reading. Use Microsoft's read aloud feature.

- **External Feedback**: Consider getting a fresh set of eyes on your manuscript. Beta readers or a professional proofreader can offer valuable insights.

6. Formatting and Submission Prep

- **Manuscript Formatting**: Ensure your manuscript meets submission guidelines if sent to agents or publishers. This includes margins, spacing, and file format.

- **Cover Letter/Query Letter**: If submitting to agents or publishers, prepare a professional cover letter or query letter according to their specifications.

This checklist is a roadmap for thorough novel editing, leading to a polished, cohesive manuscript ready for readers, agents, or publishers. Remember, editing is a multi-layered process that might require multiple passes to address everything fully.