

# Inlet Beta Readers Club

## Author Tip Sheet

*Version 4: 2/20/23*

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## Preparing Your Manuscript for an Inlet Beta Read

Simulate an “off the shelf” reading experience. Make it as unimpeded and unbiased of a read as you can--as if your reader were about to sample your book on Amazon, or pluck your book from their shelf.

[First, get your manuscript read by alpha readers before reaching out for a beta read.](#)

Alpha readers are first responders--coaches, workshop peers, critique buddies, or otherwise--who read early and sometimes multiple drafts of a manuscript and often provide ongoing feedback and critique. Just as the letter b follows a, a beta read comes after the front-line alpha reader response.

Don't ask for a beta read before you get your alpha reads. Rely on your alpha readers to help you build the book. They know your process, hopes, fears; where the duct tape is, and where the darlings you killed are buried. Use those readers to get feedback, craft tips, and troubleshoot as you write.

Betas read AFTER the work has been critiqued by alpha readers, so they're blissfully unaware of all the sweat, tears, and backstage hammer-and-sawing it took for you to put your manuscript together.

The Inlet Beta Readers Club is not a substitute for a critique group, coach, or writing buddy. But if you already have alpha readers, have already shared your 10, 50 pages or full manuscript with your alpha readers, and incorporated their feedback, then you're likely ready for a beta read. (For longer manuscripts, you may not have had every section of your novel critiqued by others. That's fine. Pull the critiqued material together, revise, and you may be ready for your Inlet Beta Read.)

If your answer is no, your work hasn't been read by alpha readers, you're not ready for a beta read—but you may be ready soon. And the Inlet Beta Readers Club can help you if you're in that position, too. How? Read on:

**If you DO want alpha readers, you're welcome to join as a Reader Only Member.** Use the club as a steppingstone to look for alpha readers, build community, and network. Then please return for the next season of the Inlet Beta Readers Club for a beta read.

**How do you know if your novel manuscript is Inlet-Beta-Reader Ready?** Read on:

[Next, test your manuscript readiness using this handy four-question self-assessment.](#)

## Your Four-Question Beta Reader Manuscript Self-Assessment

### 1) Can you imagine your manuscript as a book, even if it's incomplete?

Can you imagine how you want the book to be—or what it COULD be? Do you feel like you have what could become a fully formed novel on your hands, even if your novel's in early draft form, or even if it's in deep revision form? If it's just fragments, if you don't have a sense of it as a BOOK coming into being—then you're not ready for a beta read yet. But if you can see a shape already, read on:

### 2) Have you revised so your launch (10 or 50 pages, or full manuscript) FEELS complete to you?

Does the launch have the promise of a complete idea? Does it cohere? If you can't imagine that promise, if it doesn't cohere enough to deliver the novel's promise in the opening pages—or a version of that promise as you see it now, in this stage—then keep revising and workshopping.

Here are a few ways to feel your way into that sense of completion.

### Inlet Beta Read manuscript phases:

**LAUNCH PROMISE IBR Manuscript Phase:** Does your novel's launch have the promise of a complete idea; does it cohere? Does it deliver the novel's promise in the opening pages--or a version of that promise as you see it now, in this stage? If it has the promise of a complete idea, have you done deep self-editing? Have you received feedback from alpha readers, incorporated that feedback, and revised with intention, multiple times? If so, join the club for a reader-response on your first ten or first fifty pages to help you start your second pass.

**SECOND PASS IBR Manuscript Phase:** You've finished or are about to finish a first draft and have received feedback on that draft. Before you move on to deep revision, imagine this: If your first ten or fifty pages were the real launch, what promise do they hold? **Can you polish for that starting promise**, setting up the rest of the novel, as you'd like to see it, in those early pages? If so, you're ready join the club for a reader-response on your first ten or first fifty pages to help you start your second pass.

**REVISION PLATEAU IBR Manuscript Phase:** You're working on deep revisions, have taken your novel through two or more drafts, and received feedback on those revisions. You may be close to done, ready to move on to final draft stage. Or you reached a plateau in the midst of revisions. You've polished portions of your manuscript, duct-taped others together. Some may be near-complete, others feel like sketches, others are pages you haven't yet tossed but probably will. Maybe probably. Still, there's something there—a novel forming, coalescing. And

you are at the point where you could use a fresh pair of eyes to look at your manuscript AS IS, but don't want another close developmental edit. Just a gut-check read—how does it FEEL as a BOOK, or the beginning of one? Look at your first ten, first fifty, or if you're feeling ready, the whole thing. What must you do to get ready to ask for a gut-check read? What "next step" items do you want to add to your to-do list to polish? Can you accomplish those tasks for 10 or 50 pages, and be ready by April 15<sup>th</sup>? Then join for a reader response on your first ten pages, first fifty, or a completed mid-stage draft of your full manuscript.

**NEAR-FINAL IBR Manuscript Phase:** You're finishing what may be your final draft. You have begun to polish pages and clean up your prose after multiple rounds of feedback. You are nearly READY to submit your book to an agent or editor (or self-publish). Even if there are a few more ducks to get in that row, there are enough right now for a practice run. Your novel is going to be "in submission" soon, so this reader's read will help you with your next, maybe final, pass. Imagine THIS IS IT. Make your to-do lists. What must you do to get ready to ask for a gut-check read? What "next step" items do you want to add to your to-do list to polish? Can you accomplish those tasks for 10 or 50 pages, and be ready by April 15<sup>th</sup>? Join to get a fresh perspective on your nearly-polished first ten pages, first fifty, or a completed draft all-but ready for querying.

### 3) Are you able to polish a clean manuscript by April 15<sup>th</sup>?

Can you produce a manuscript without distracting typos and grammatical snafus by the deadline? Are you ready and willing to edit even more than you might before submitting for workshop, and format so readers can relax into an easy read that simulates the feeling they'd get as if plucking your book off a shelf?

Once you've gotten your manuscript read by alpha readers, clean up your draft as best you can. The cleanest drafts will be NEAR-FINAL manuscripts. For LAUNCH PROMISE, SECOND PASS or REVISION PLATEAU manuscripts, don't bend over backwards, but do make things tidier than usual.

### 4) Can you prepare and post your Manuscript Profile by April 15<sup>th</sup>?

[Download the Manuscript Profile Tip Sheet, found on the club pages.](#) It walks you through how to write a Manuscript Profile—and that includes writing up a short "movie trailer" like blurb, or jacket copy, to introduce your manuscript to browsing readers.

This will not feel like writing your novel. It will feel like you're being asked to tame a whole different kind of animal than a novel—and you may struggle with snappy language, or ways to hook, despite the fact that you wrote the darn thing you're describing.

That's normal. You are creating marketing copy—and unless you're a marketer by trade, it probably won't feel natural.

Think movie trailers. And read read read examples—they're everywhere on Amazon, Goodreads, the books on your shelves. The tip sheet walks you through the process.

### **If your answer is “Yes, I’m ready,” then read on.**

(If not, then please consider joining as a Reader Only Member)

#### **When your manuscript isn't ready.**

If you haven't gotten your work read by alpha readers, if your full or partial manuscript doesn't have hold the promise of your novel's premise, if you're unable to have a clean manuscript formatted by April 15th, then your manuscript isn't ready to be shared for an Inlet Beta Read. But you can still join the club as a Reader Only Member.

So, your “yes” means you’ve gotten alpha readers (or will get them before you post your Manuscript Profile by April 15<sup>th</sup>). It means you know you will make time to polish your manuscript for a reader, and get your Manuscript Profile posted on the Club Hub by the deadline, using the Manuscript Profile Tip Sheet for guidance.

**Okay, once you finish those steps, what’s next?**

### **Format so your manuscript meets your reader's needs.**

**Format options:** I recommend either PDF, or e-reader formatting.

Eventually, after you connect with a reader, you’ll want to quickly format and get the pages to them. So prepare now. Your reader may one to print off pages from their computer, or read electronically. Can you be ready to help a reader download your ten page or fifty page or full manuscript-formatted pages onto an e-reader? Or will it be more doable for you to simply format for a PDF?

Whether you format for PDF, e-reader, start with Manuscript Formatting: Double Spaced Times New Roman 12 point font, paginated, indented paragraphs, new chapters 1/3 down the page; mark each scene break with three asterisks. That way you’ll set up the correct length for a partial manuscript, and prepare for the download to an e-reader.

If you’re using a Kindle or other device, see specifications for that device after ensuring the length of your manuscript, and ensuring your Beta Reader can easily access that device.

**Why not use the classic Word document?** I don’t recommend Word documents for an Inlet Beta Read because they may invite readers to edit line by line, and that’s not what this read is about. PDFs are harder to edit, and feel more permanent. You want to simulate an “off the shelf” feel. An e-reader is ideal for the electronic read experience—but your eventual Inlet Beta Reader may more comfortably access a PDF, and/or want to print off pages. When the time comes, ask what they prefer, based on what you can offer.

## Wait for a reader to contact you.

Once your Manuscript Profile is up on the hub, there's no guarantee you'll find a reader—but I'll do whatever I can to make sure that happens! The Beta Readers Club is also in beta test mode, so I'm unsure of the club size or match possibilities. You can always reach out to a writer whose work you want to read, too, and ask to swap manuscripts, ensuring that you both give AND receive Inlet Beta Reads.

But if you don't connect with a reader by May 31st, reach out and I'll provide some next step resources outside of the Inlet.

And as you wait for a reader to check out your manuscript, think about what you're looking for from your Inlet Beta Read:

## Determine when to ask questions of your reader.

You may be wondering, should you ask your reader questions BEFORE they start reading, or AFTER?

I recommend asking for an off-the cuff reader response to AFTER an unbiased read. The more questions you ask ahead of time, the more biased your reader's read will be. So don't deluge your reader with questions.

Remember, your Inlet Beta Readers are also members of the club, so they have also received the Reader Tip Sheet. They'll be looking at that "Gut Check Checklist." You don't need to send it to them, or ask those questions ahead of time. They're already primed.

But if you have one or two simple yet pressing "pointer questions" you feel you really need to ask ahead of time (e.g. "Does chapter 5 feel out of character for the protagonist?" "Does the setting of the climax work?"), you can send those questions to your beta reader BEFORE they read.

## Prepare your mindset for a reader's read.

Adjust your expectations as you look ahead to receiving your reader's response. Since this is not a critique, don't ask for things like, is there enough subtext in the dialogue, or, what about the sentence structure in chapter two, or, should I use flashback or backstory during the mid-point crisis. What would you like to know, from a reader, about the "feel" of reading your book?

Inlet Beta Readers won't be thinking about fixes or craft strategies for revision as much as what's working, what they enjoy, what they felt was missing or what they'd like to read more of—as a reader. Not the crunchy craft stuff. Okay, maybe they'll give you a little of that—they're writers after all. But that's not what they're reading for. They are reading for the FEEL of the read.

**How long should your conversation be?** I recommend you set up a conversation that's about an hour to an hour and a half. Maybe two for a fifty page or full manuscript conference.

Once more, shift into reader conversation mode, rather than constructive critique mode. You have invited your reader to settle in for an unimpeded gut-reaction response. They're reading for the feel of your novel, as if they were picking your book off the shelf.

If you want more guidance, check out these links (also in the Reader Tip Sheet):

- Reedsy Blog: <https://blog.reedsy.com/beta-readers/>
- Jane Friedman: <https://www.janefriedman.com/find-beta-readers/>

## Review and select questions to ask of your Inlet Beta Reader.

### **Prioritize questions.**

Ultimately, the read is for YOU. So, as Reedsy says, don't be afraid to steer the conversation in directions you want it to go.

I recommend that you review the questions below but pick and choose the questions you want to lean into the most.

Rather than ask all the questions, **select the best questions for your needs and your manuscript's needs as you prepare ahead of time.** Some of the options set out are intentionally repetitive. Which phrasing or approach or order is most useful for what you're looking for?

Select and prioritize the questions that feel most pressing. And prioritize based whether your manuscript is ten pages, fifty, or a full manuscript. Then adjust as needed—rephrase. Even develop other questions inspired by these.

## Afterwords questions to ask beta readers.

***At the most basic level, use this approach, which is all about inlets: where did you get into it, what threw you out of it?***

### **ALLURE**

How did you feel upon finishing the manuscript? (If it was a complete manuscript ask:) did you feel “complete” upon finishing, yet nostalgic (if so, for what?)? What felt complete about it? What felt incomplete, or missing?

Were any of the characters too over the top (i.e., memorable in a bad way)? Did the characters seem realistic? the dialogue? Did the development of characters feel natural? More so for one character rather than others? (Protagonist, antagonist, secondary characters?) Did you identify with any one character’s opinions in particular? Which one, and how?

### **GOLDILOCKS QUESTIONS**

As a reader did you want:

More or less suspense? More or less time in scene? More connections from one scene/section to the next? Fewer? Or was each “just right?”

More or less emotional tension? Page turning tension? Violence? Contrast or gritty detail? Sexual tension? Etc. Or was each “just right?”

More or less dialogue? Characters in the novel? Time exploring background on the page? Character thoughts/reflections? Or was each “just right?”

More or less use of setting? Engagement of the senses? More or less description? Sections of narrative expansion (exposition)? Worldbuilding? Or was each “just right?”

More or less plot development? Did you want more or fewer points that you felt big turns, or small growth? Building change, excitement, twists, reveals? Or was there just enough?

More or less sentence variation? Pacing via sentences? Clarity in sentences? Too short, too long?

Consistency in voice or momentum or otherwise? Or was each “just right?”

More or less “big picture” stuff—like theme, character change, meaningful layers? Or was there just enough?

### **POINTER QUESTIONS**

If you had 2-3 specific questions you were jonesing to get answered, shared in advance—which may have addressed passages, characters, chapters, craft elements, structural components, etc you weren’t sure about, and/or you wanted readers to keep on their radar—then bring those up in your follow up conversation as well. For example, “Did you find the novel’s opening easy to “get into” or difficult?” “Does chapter five feel out of character for the protagonist?”



### **CHARACTER QUESTIONS**

Did the dialogue sound realistic for each character? For the setting? For the voice of the novel?  
 Could you see what the characters were doing while talking?  
 Could you see where the characters were while talking?  
 Could you visualize characters & actions clearly?  
 Did the characters actions and reactions seem logical and realistic?  
 Could you feel emotional tensions between the characters? Within the characters?  
 Does the story stay focused on the main character or characters w/o meandering? Do any of the characters get in the way of the story?  
 Were any characters so unlikable it impacted your read in a negative way? (i.e., impossible to sympathize with, too inconsistent, too stereotypical, stuck in victim mentality, overly dramatic, or otherwise?) Who got on your nerves and why?  
 Who did you like best and why? Hate and why?

### **VOICE/LANGUAGE QUESTIONS**

Did the sentence-level writing ever get in the way of the story—slow pacing, create confusion, etc?( i.e., were the sentences clear or sometimes fuzzy? Too short, too long, just right?)  
 Did the sentence-level writing add meaning? Enhance or intensify themes, actions, emotional engagement? Intellectual engagement? When or how did it get in the way?  
 Did anything seem overly cliché? make you cringe?  
 Did you feel the voice carried the story/genre/character/tone well? Was it consistent or inconsistent?  
 When or how did it get in the way?  
 Did you understand every phrase / term used?

### **PACING/STRUCTURE QUESTIONS**

Did any sections of the manuscript feel underdeveloped?  
 Did scenes flow naturally, one into the next? Were there leaps between chapters/scenes that felt satisfying or jarring?  
 Did one scene lead logically into the next?  
 Was there enough downtime between intense scenes to allow them to build to the next scenes?  
 Were there specific sections where you found it hard to put the novel down—in a good way?  
 Which parts did you want to skip—that dragged? Or you skipped to ‘get to the good part’? Or were there areas that skipped over information you missed?  
 Did the writer over-inform (info-dump) anywhere?  
 Did the answers to your questions come later than you were expecting?  
 What did you feel the novel was about? Why?  
 Were key scenes that you felt delivered the most interesting bits too fast, too slow, or too infrequent?  
 Too long, too short?  
 Did you reread any scenes in particular to understand who was doing what?  
 Could you see every action clearly while reading?  
 If you went there in real life, would you recognize the places?  
 Did you have to reread any part of the action sequences to understand who was doing what?

**GUT CHECK QUESTIONS**

Review “Gut Check Questions for Beta Readers” in the Beta Readers Tip Sheet document.

Did you have a least favorite part? What is it and why?

What’s your favorite part and why? What did you find the most engaging craft elements of the novel—top 3-5? Where were you engaged the most?

**LINGERING QUESTIONS & LINGERING FEELINGS**

Did you have any questions that weren’t answered adequately by the current manuscript?

What did the manuscript leaving you feeling, thinking?

## Final thoughts & networking tips.

Be sure to thank your reader for their time. If you haven’t already, you may want to offer to read your reader’s work as well.

Maybe this reader will read 10 pages and ask for the whole manuscript when it’s finished, however long that takes. That would be a boon. Or this may be a good, equitable exchange of 10 pagers, and that’s that. Wonderful.

When you connect in writerly groups, you never know what kind of relationships you’re building. After you publish, the readers who read your work in the club may be willing to provide a review on Amazon or Goodreads. Or they may encourage you to join their book club for a talk. Who knows. Be open to what may come, and take your readers suggestions to heart—as you see fit.

May you benefit from both giving and receiving, and continue to build your writerly support network at the Inlet and beyond.