

# The Fantasy First Chapter Checklist

29 questions. 8 parts. One brutal, honest audit of your opening pages.



## PART 1 The Attachment Check

- Does the reader know what your MC wants by the end of page one? (Not the plot goal — the human want.)
- Is there a gap between where your character is and where they need to be?
- Can you feel that gap in your body by page two — or is it described but not felt?
- Would the reader notice if your MC disappeared from the page entirely?

## PART 2 The Cognitive Load Check

- How many new names appear in your first three pages? Aim for five or fewer.
- Does worldbuilding, magic, or politics appear only when the character needs it — not before?
- Does chapter one contain fewer than three location, time, or POV shifts?
- Read your first page out loud. Does anything make you genuinely stumble or re-read?

## PART 3 The Fantasy-Specific Check

- Does the chapter open inside a person rather than a description of the world?
- Is the action in chapter one grounded in emotion before it happens?
- Do dialogue and character interaction arrive before — or alongside — exposition?
- Does your opening line ask the reader to hold an unknown proper noun right away?

## PART 4 The Fantasy Romance Check

- If the love interest appears in chapter one, is there a charged moment between them?
- If the LI doesn't appear yet, is the emotional gap in your MC visible?
- Is the romantic dynamic (enemies, forced proximity, forbidden) seeded from the start?
- By chapter one's end, does the reader feel this is a love story as well as a fantasy?

## The Fantasy First Chapter Checklist — continued

### PART 5 The Engagement Check

- At what point does the reader have an unanswered question they need resolved?
- Is it easy to enter, easy to follow, and painful to put down — all three?
- What is the reader's last feeling at the end of chapter one? (Not what happened — what they felt.)

### PART 6 The Voice & POV Check

- Does every sentence in your first paragraph sound like the same person wrote it?
- Is your POV airtight — no slipping outside your character's awareness or knowledge?
- Is there at least one line in chapter one only you could have written?

### PART 7 The Pacing & Arc Check

- Does something change in chapter one — a shift in understanding, a decision, a disruption?
- Is the balance of forward motion vs. interiority working, or has it stalled in reflection?
- Does your last line make chapter two feel necessary — not just interesting?
- By page five, has the normal world been disturbed, even slightly?

### PART 8 The Buried Desire Check

- What buried desire or buried fear is your MC living out for the reader?
- Is there something slightly wrong, taboo, or uncomfortably recognisable about what your MC wants?
- By the end of chapter one, has the reader's deeper brain been given a reason to care?

### Your Score

- 25–29 ✓** Chapter one is doing its job. Polish and send it.
- 17–24 ✓** Good bones. Check the flagged parts and revise.
- Under 17 ✓** Back to the draft. This checklist just saved you a rejection.

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