



Beta Reading – Non-Fictional Work

Reading early drafts

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Preamble

Why on earth do you want to become a beta reader? Now, you may not want to read this, but as an author, I take beta reader contributions seriously, and so the guide is to help you. Of course, should you be put off already, that's fine. The work or manuscript (MS) is draft and rough, so do not expect it to look like the final copy. You are receiving a piece of work developed to a particular level.

The first question might be **What's in it for me?** This is a fair comment, as you will spend time on a task that might be alien. Authors are rarely wealthy; maybe only the top 5% make the type of money. Perhaps 15% do very well but turning writing into wealth is uncommon.

Non-fiction

Non-fiction is different from fiction work; most non-fiction writers/authors don't write for money but for personal satisfaction or to help the profession or business. A writer might produce a manuscript; an author is a writer who has his or her work published.

The work should mean something to you as the beta-reader. Do you want to do this, or are you vested in the subject? You know the author personally, most likely, but not necessarily. Being involved might be sufficient motivation. Developing a new skill might be your motivation.

Being the first to read something is exciting, especially if the book takes many months to reach the sales platform. You will be acknowledged; your name will be printed in the book.

A free version is provided, but if you are asked to write the Foreword, you can collaborate more personally, and subsequent copies can be purchased at a lower price than the retail sales price.

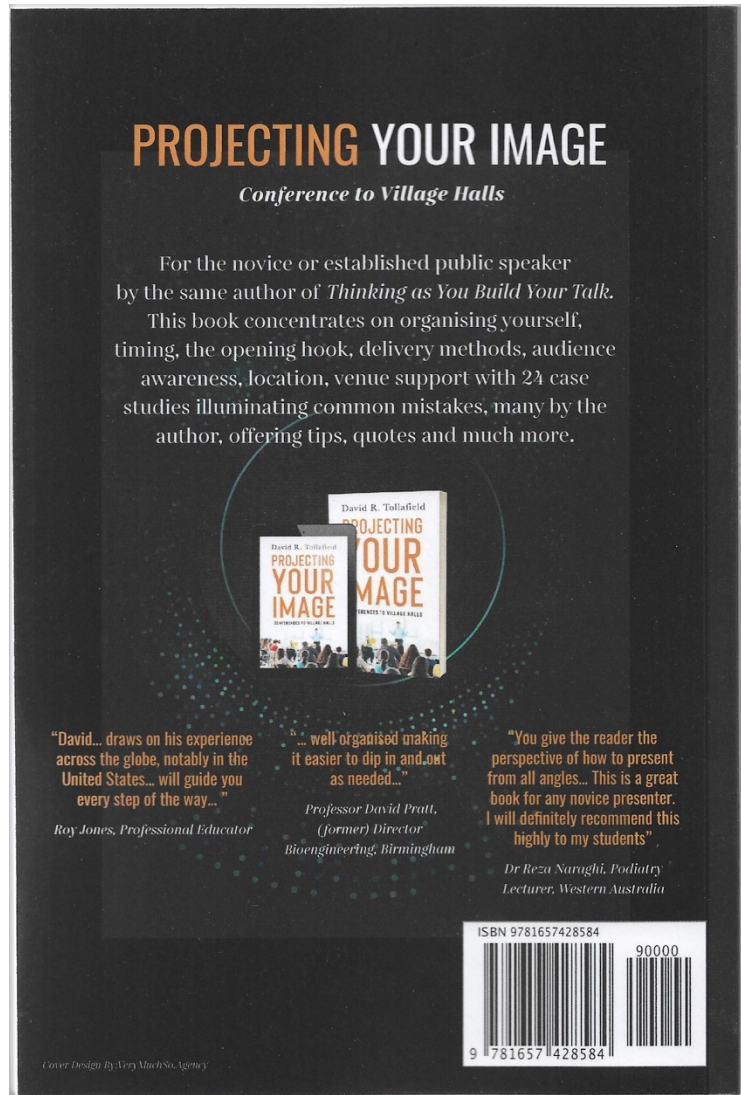
Beta Reader for Non-fictional Works.

Find your own words in print

Nothing is more satisfying than seeing your own words in print. Responding with something that can be quoted, in part or whole, is important. This is used as part of the blurb or promotional advertising. If you are uncomfortable, then please make sure you say this at the outset. Publishing is a fickle marketplace, and we need to boost our product as much as we can—the product being the book, the message, and the story.

If you are able, it would be helpful to provide an Amazon review and rate the book after production, having received your final copy..

The back cover (illustrated) shows three reviewers, but you will be used on Amazon's pages as well and on other forms of publicity. The box and text *below* represent a book on Hallux Valgus published in 2019. Two beta-readers were used in publicity.



And what some readers had to say...

... I had to scratch around the internet looking at blogs, which mainly were American. In fact, had I read your book I may well have saved myself some money. I particularly enjoyed your patients' diaries Your book is extremely well written and I would highly recommend anyone considering surgery to read this first. There was more post-op information than anything that I could find!

Nicola Harvey, Registered Nurse and foot surgery patient

This is a very comprehensive book, covering all aspects of hallux valgus surgery. I think it's an essential read for anyone undergoing this type of procedure, explaining things in layman's terms. The 'real' stories answer the age-old question from patients 'Is there someone I can speak to who has had this done?'

Mr Tony Wilkinson, Consultant Podiatric Surgeon & Former Dean, College of Podiatry

> Read less

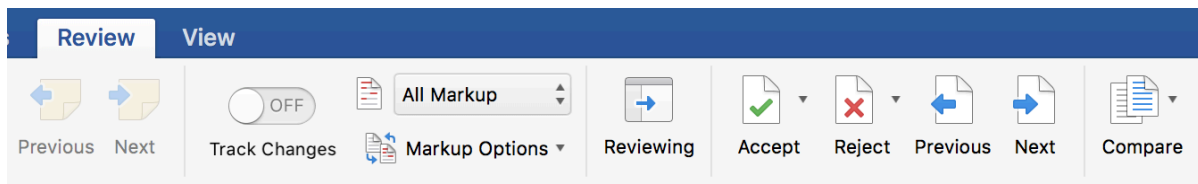
What is a beta reader?

The Role

As a beta reader, you are not acting as a copy editor, developmental editor or proofreader. These are official terms for tackling manuscripts for authors and are more formal in their execution.

The **copy editor** is a professional who polishes the manuscript for a living and produces guaranteed work set to a deadline for financial payment. They will most likely be a published author. They will check facts, alter words to improve sentence balance (punctuation) and change structural layout. This is all part of their role. The **developmental editing** involves plot, sequence, and smoothing out the story's direction so it hangs together. The roles of copy and developmental editing often overlap. **Proofreading** is usually undertaken simultaneously but can be a separate action.

Tracked comments are fine if you wish to use this system but there is no mandating or expectation.



You are only being asked to correct English or make literary comments if you wish to—some find this difficult not to do. You could look at the task as though you were market-testing written prose. Do the lyrics match the melody?

Draft

The manuscript you receive is a work in progress and incomplete. Drafts are often raw and may appear unrefined because they contain the first workings of a person's mind. You can add more brush strokes to give it colour and dimension. Leave a piece of bread out and it will grow mould. Under the right conditions the mould may be the penicillin of life, so a draft will develop growth. Some drafts will already have gone through this penicillin process as most writers won't let anyone handle a draft manuscript until they feel it has progressed sufficiently to see the light of day. The final polish is done at the copy editor stage.

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Timescale



The primary obligation is the timescale. If you cannot finish a beta review, then it is better to say so because the production of a book may be delayed. The advised time scale will be provided. The author will move on if the deadline is missed and a reminder is ignored. This is not personal, just good business. Most writers do not mind you asking for longer but say so at the outset. As a rule, I would only ask people to return a copy from four weeks ago; although I have had beta readers turn work around fast, this is optional.

Accuracy

A beta reader can clarify the MS. Is the explanation clear and precise in what it intends to convey? It may be that you do not entirely agree or see where the writer is going, so when looking at several reviews, if more than one person spots a glaring error, this validates the point. It is best to mention something at the beta-reading stage so the writer can re-script. This is what a good writer cum author must do.

Responses from a beta-reader

There is no financial remuneration and no legal obligations, but there is a certain etiquette to decline if you feel unable to perform the task. The other obligation is to be honest in your appraisal. This comes from a trusted beta reader...

I feel very honoured that you trusted me with your latest literary baby

These responses are helpful as they touch on diplomacy and practical critique.

These comments **SHOW...**

I'm going to be frank – because I don't know any other way to be!

I am acutely aware that writing styles need to vary because not everyone needs or wants to consume content or indeed learn in the same way. So what follows are just my observations as a reader of one certain type.

'Personally, I would love to see more subheadings. There were sections that were titled as being about x, I started off reading about x and part way down you were discussing something that wasn't x and I had not realised we had moved on to a different area.

The stories you tell to emphasise your points had me laughing & cringing in equal measure.

...struggled to follow the flow of the content, or thread together the different elements of the text.

...I found the chapters wandered round the houses & I was left having to tease the action points or key learning points out for myself.

The crucial part about feedback is to be helpful so that you leave in a little bit of your preference for the author to be able to re-draft your ideas. In this way, you will become part of the book that is being created. Writers will make many drafts during their efforts to bring words to print.

First drafts are usually not sent out, but if they are, the crude or raw edges might be visible. The idea behind a first draft is to see if the general thoughts might appeal to the prospective reader. It is more usual to send out a reasonably correct draft.

Suicide is not one of the writer's intentions after a review. However, raw elements remain that need to be smoothed over. The writer is exposing himself here, so please allow a little leeway. A beta reader becomes part of the design, flow, and eventual production. He is an example of helpful feedback.

'It is my rule never to respond to a beta reader to justify why I had done this or that as frankly I believe this rude and a sign of weakness over one's writing...

Thank you so much for completing your review in such an honest and open way...

If all reviewers were this helpful it would save enormous problems later on. I did note that you almost seemed apologetic in part of your reply, for which there is no need.'

Truth in attempting to be kind can have a negative effect on the final production. Here is a professional comment on the subject of health.

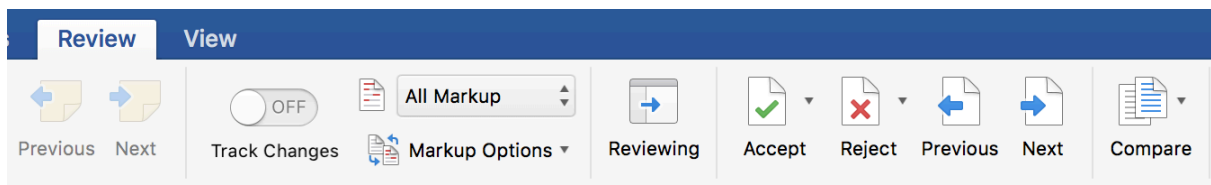
... I am not too sure about the value of including the wound pictures, they seem a bit gratuitous in a way and I am not sure that patients would really pick up on the fact that this is a very temporary appearance.

In the case of the above comment, 80% of the original pictures were in fact removed. The comment had great value.

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How detailed should you make your reply?

The answer is as detailed as you wish. The more information, the better. You can write a summary on a Word document, post an e-mail reply, or provide a tracked response. Again, the bar below shows the method of using tracked comments, but these are optional, and you can use whatever method you wish. The format is Microsoft Word.



Tracked comments

Beta readers have persuaded me that this is an effective method, and it undoubtedly ensures that all parts of the manuscript are considered, but it takes time, time that you may not have.

I know I mentioned this earlier, but if you want to correct spelling or sentences that fail to make an impact or make sense, say so. Your input is no less valid, but to help you manage your time, you can keep to a focused script. All feedback holds equal value.

The author will pour through each of your comments and adjust the manuscript. This improves the copy before it goes before an editor. When you see the final production, you may see a very different book, and this is because the author will also add new material and thoughts from your input as much as from other areas.

Overview

Look through the content and introduction and try to get a feel of the book without indulging in heavy reading. How does it feel? Please do not worry about formatting. Also, note that your copy may not have a cover, index, or images. It will have content to show you the direction of flow. Is the prose too long? Could the explanation be simplified?

Read every word or speed read?

Well, that is up to you and your method of reading. I often write reviews and have to read carefully and double-check. Unless it is a formal academic textbook for professionals, the narrative should flow freely without too much effort. The intended message provided by the text should be clear.