

Scott Editorial

Chapter-by-Chapter Tracker

An in-depth workbook for testing purpose, movement, pressure, and continuity across a manuscript.



Designed as a working tool. Use it while drafting, revising, or preparing for editorial feedback. Be specific, be honest, and write directly onto the page.

How to use this workbook

This tracker is built to stop a manuscript drifting chapter by chapter. Each chapter should earn its place. That does not mean every chapter must contain explosions, revelations, or dramatic twists. It does mean each chapter must perform clear work: it should move the story, deepen understanding, sharpen pressure, or reframe what the reader thinks is happening.

Editor’s note: When a chapter feels flat, the problem is often not the prose. More often, the chapter lacks a defined job, arrives too early, stays too long, or repeats work another chapter has already done.

What a strong chapter usually does

- Introduces, escalates, or complicates a problem.
- Creates a fresh question, pressure point, or expectation.
- Changes the reader’s understanding of a character, relationship, or situation.
- Forces a choice, reveals a cost, or alters the direction of the story.
- Leaves some residue, a tension, consequence, image, or uncertainty, that carries into the next chapter.

The Five-Part Chapter Test

Prompt	Your notes
Purpose	Why does this chapter exist? Name its job in one sentence.
Pressure	What is pushing on the point-of-view character right now?
Movement	What changes by the end of the chapter?

Position	Why does this chapter belong here, and not earlier or later?
Residue	What feeling, question, or consequence does the chapter leave behind?

A practical method for tracking chapters

Read your draft chapter by chapter and fill in the tracker before you revise line by line. The aim is not perfect wording. The aim is to surface patterns. You are looking for repetition, dead space, rushed turns, missing bridges, and chapters that sound important but do not actually change anything.

Example: weak chapter purpose

Chapter 7 exists to show that Maya is lonely and worried about the exhibition. The problem is that Chapters 4 and 5 already showed this. A stronger purpose would be: 'Chapter 7 forces Maya to choose between protecting her reputation and protecting her brother.' That gives the chapter a decision to build around.

Detailed Chapter Tracking Sheet

Prompt	Your notes
Chapter title or number	Name it clearly, even if the manuscript only uses numerals.
Point of view	Whose emotional and narrative experience controls the chapter?
Scene summary	Summarise the chapter in three or four lines only.

Chapter job	What single job matters most here: set-up, escalation, revelation, turn, fallout, contrast, recovery, or convergence?
External movement	What changes in the plot, investigation, relationship, journey, plan, or power struggle?
Internal movement	What shifts in fear, belief, resolve, shame, hope, denial, or desire?
Conflict source	Who or what resists the character here? Person, institution, environment, memory, self, time, secrecy.
Stakes	What can be lost if the character fails in this chapter?
Information management	What does the reader learn? What is withheld? What is misdirected?
Bridge value	How does this chapter hand off to the next one?
Cut or keep?	If this chapter vanished, what exact damage would be done to the manuscript?

What to watch for when chapters drag

- The chapter explains a feeling the reader has already inferred.
- The chapter repeats an argument, fear, or piece of information with no new angle.
- The chapter begins too early, before the pressure starts.
- The chapter ends too late, after its real beat has landed.
- The chapter contains movement, but that movement belongs in a different chapter.
- The chapter functions as throat-clearing, orientation, or summary when a sharper scene would do the work better.

Before revision	After revision
A chapter opens with a character driving to an important meeting, thinking through everything that might happen, then arriving, then having the conversation already implied by the internal monologue.	Open at the moment of pressure, the first loaded sentence of the meeting. Fold necessary orientation into action, reaction, and detail. Cut the drive unless it changes the stakes or introduces a meaningful complication.

Testing Chapter Order

A chapter can be solid on its own and still be weak in sequence. Track not only what a chapter does, but what it does next to the manuscript around it.

Prompt	Your notes
Before this chapter	What expectation has the previous chapter created?
During this chapter	Does the chapter answer that expectation, twist it, frustrate it, or delay it productively?
After this chapter	What is the reader now waiting for?

Pacing map

Use the scale below to label each chapter after your first pass. You are not aiming for constant intensity. You are aiming for variation with intent.

Prompt	Your notes
Low-pressure chapter	Recovery, aftermath, planning, intimacy, orientation. Keep these short unless they radically deepen character or redirect the story.
Mid-pressure chapter	Obstacle, negotiation, pursuit, controlled tension, unstable calm.
High-pressure chapter	Confrontation, exposure, irreversible choice, disaster, discovery, collapse.

Example: pacing pattern

If Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 are all high-pressure confrontations, the manuscript can become monotonous. Contrast matters. A quieter chapter after a rupture can sharpen impact, provided that the quieter chapter still contains unease, consequence, or a new line of tension.

Continuity audit

- Track time of day, weather, injuries, promises, missing objects, open secrets, and travel logic.
- Mark unresolved threads at the end of each chapter so they are not quietly dropped.
- Track emotional continuity: if a character is devastated in one chapter, they should not sound untouched in the next unless there is a clear reason.
- Check that chapter openings re-enter the story at the right temperature. Do not reset urgency by accident.

Workable Example, Mini Chapter Breakdown

Prompt	Your notes
Chapter purpose	To force Nina to discover that the anonymous letter is linked to her father's archive.
Pressure	She wants to protect her mother from scandal, but the archivist has already seen the document.
Movement	Nina shifts from denial to reluctant investigation.
Best ending beat	She recognises her father's handwriting in the margin.
Carry-forward question	What else was hidden, and who else knew?

Revision actions to choose from

- Combine two chapters that perform similar work.
- Split one overstuffed chapter whose emotional turn and plot turn need space.
- Reassign a chapter to a different point of view if the current narrator is too distant from the pressure.
- Move the chapter later so the reader understands its consequence.
- Begin later and end earlier.
- Replace summary with a live scene, or replace a weak live scene with sharp summary.

Blank Chapter Tracker Pages

Prompt	Your notes
Chapter number / title	
Point of view	
One-sentence purpose	
What changes here?	
Main source of pressure	
What the reader learns	
What the reader is left wanting	
Keep / cut / combine / move	

Prompt	Your notes
Chapter number / title	
Point of view	
One-sentence purpose	
What changes here?	
Main source of pressure	
What the reader learns	

What the reader is left wanting	
Keep / cut / combine / move	

Prompt	Your notes
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What the reader learns	
What the reader is left wanting	
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Final Pass

Once all chapters are tracked, step back and look across the whole manuscript. Which chapter starts the real story? Which chapter repeats work? Which chapter carries the emotional centre? Which chapter is doing too much invisible labour and needs strengthening so the structure can hold?