

Revision: 20 Questions to Answer Before You Call Your Book Finished

Laura Joh Rowland

1. Can I identify and articulate what I think is good and bad writing in other people's books?
2. Am I able to see what's good and what needs improvement in my own work?
3. Am I emotionally detached enough from my manuscript to subject it to major surgery?
4. Are my characters up to the challenge of carrying the story?
5. Is my plot strong enough to support my vision of my book? Laura's magic test #1.
6. Have I included high-stakes conflicts that are clearly defined, that escalate throughout the story, that are satisfactorily resolved by the end?
7. Is viewpoint used effectively and controlled firmly?
8. Is the setting clearly and vividly established?
9. Does the dialogue fulfill its main purposes? Laura's magic test #2.
10. Is there enough action, and is it the right kind for my story?
11. Does each scene begin with a strong opening hook and end on a springboard?
12. Have I achieved the right balance between all the elements of fiction? Laura's magic test #3.
13. Are all the facts correct?
14. Is the length appropriate?
15. Is the language top-flight? Laura's magic test #4.
16. Have I nailed the mechanics?
17. Have I played up my strengths as a writer and overcome my weaknesses sufficiently?
18. Is the quality of my manuscript consistent from beginning to end? Laura's magic test #5.
19. If the answer to any of the previous questions is "no," can I do what needs to be done?
20. Have I run my manuscript by a trusted reader, and has it passed muster?

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Laura Joh Rowland is the bestselling author of the mystery series set in 17th c. Japan that features samurai detective Sano Ichiro. Her work has been published in 13 foreign countries and nominated for the Anthony Award, the Hammett Prize, and the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Award. Her fourteenth and latest book in the series is The Cloud Pavilion. The next book, The Ronin's Mistress, will be published in September 2011. She is also the author of Bedlam: The Further Secret Adventures of Charlotte Bronte, the second book in a historical suspense series that stars the famous Victorian author. A full-time writer, former scientist, and art student, Laura lives in New York City.