Editing Beyond Gut Feel – Checklist
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☐ **Main idea** – Is the story's main idea big enough, compelling enough, fresh enough, important enough?

☐ **Characters** – Do they feel real? Well-rounded? Flawed as well as heroic? Sympathetic as well as evil? Do they ALL have internal as well as external motivations?

☐ **Conflicts (or problems)** – Are there enough of them (both internal and external)? Are they real enough? Are they big enough? What is truly at stake?

☐ **Setting** – Does the setting contribute to the mood and atmosphere of the story in a useful way? Does it reveal or enhance the character's emotions, or the conflict? Is there too much of it all in one block (info dump)? Not enough to make the reader feel like he/she can see the place?

☐ **Opening hook** – Does the opening grab you and pull you in immediately? Does it set up time, place, character, problem, and genre? Does it start at a pivotal moment when the character's life is changing (whether they know it or not)?

☐ **Point of view** – Is there head-hopping? (In most cases, there should be only one character's POV per scene.) Is the POV in each scene coming from the best character for that scene?

☐ **Internal dialogue/thoughts** – Do the characters spend time thinking, and not just doing or speaking? Readers want to see inner demons, debates, turmoil. Do the internal thoughts stay within the POV character's head? Do their inner thoughts feel realistic? Do they ramble on for too long?

☐ **Originality** – Does this all feel new, or is it too much like something already out there?

☐ **Plausibility** – Does it hang together realistically, or are there leaps in logic that just wouldn't happen in real life?

☐ **Audience** – Does the story and the writing fit the audience? Is it too young, too old, too formal, too slangy, too simplistic, too complex?

☐ **Clarity** – Does it all make sense?

☐ **Language** – Is the writing itself strong and vibrant (strong verbs, few adverbs, etc.)? Does the writer use an intriguing narrative voice and give each character a unique voice? Does the writer avoid clichés? Do metaphors and similes make sense and sound natural?

☐ **Dialogue** – Does it sound real? Can you tell the different characters apart by just their dialogue? Does the author primarily use "they said" (good) or use body language or movement as attribution (better)?

☐ **Senses** – Does the author use all 5 senses to fully engage the reader?

☐ **Description** – Do descriptions move the story forward or bog it down? Is there too much of it all in one block (info-dump)? Not enough to make the reader feel like they know what's going on? Are descriptions inserted when the character encounters the thing being described (good), or just dumped in for the reader's sake (bad)?

☐ **Pacing** – Does the story drag in places? Or is it constant action with no breathing room? Are there too many flashbacks? Too much foreshadowing? Is there too much time spent on "fluff" scenes, and not enough time spent in crisis/action/pivotal scenes?

☐ **Grammar, spelling, word choice** – These are the least important edits in the first draft. Save most of these for the final draft. However, if there's a consistent problem, you can highlight it.

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