FREE TEMPLATE

Plot hole checklist

Seven groups of checks for revising a novel or screenplay, and a log for what you find. Use it after a full draft, before line editing: fix the logic before you polish the sentences.

How to use it

1. Check with one group in mind at a time. One question is easier to hold than seven.
2. Tick a check when the whole book passes it. Write the chapter number when it does not.
3. Note each problem in the log on page 3, with the chapter where the fact was first set.
4. Compare both places, then decide which to change: the earlier set-up or the later scene.

01 Time and chronology

- [ ] Dates, days and seasons add up from chapter to chapter. Ch. _____
- [ ] Characters can physically get from A to B in the time the story allows. Ch. _____
- [ ] Ages match the years that pass, including birthdays. Ch. _____
- [ ] Flashbacks and time jumps never create a contradiction you did not intend. Ch. _____
- [ ] Injuries, illnesses and travel take a believable amount of time. Ch. _____

02 What characters know

- [ ] Nobody acts on information they have not learned yet. Ch. _____
- [ ] If someone forgets something important, the story shows or explains it. Ch. _____
- [ ] Secrets stay hidden from exactly the people they should. Ch. _____
- [ ] When someone learns something big, it changes how they act afterwards. Ch. _____

03 Objects and places

- [ ] Every important object is where it was last left, in the right hands. Ch. _____
- [ ] Things that were lost, broken or used up stay gone, unless their return is explained. Ch. _____
- [ ] Places keep their layout, distances and features. Ch. _____
- [ ] Names of people, places and things are spelled the same throughout. Ch. _____

04 Abilities and rules

- [ ] Magic, technology and institutions follow their rules; exceptions are explained. Ch. _____
- [ ] If a power could solve the current problem, the story shows why it is not used. Ch. _____
- [ ] Characters stay within the skills you have shown, or a new skill is set up first. Ch. _____
- [ ] The costs and limits of a power are still paid when it matters. Ch. _____

05 Motivation and choices

- [ ] Each major choice fits what the character wants and knows at that moment. Ch. _____
- [ ] If an obvious solution is ignored, the story acknowledges why. Ch. _____
- [ ] Antagonists keep pursuing their goals when the heroes are not looking. Ch. _____
- [ ] A character's change of heart is caused by something on the page. Ch. _____

06 Setups and payoffs

- [ ] Every planted clue, promise or loaded detail is paid off, or dropped on purpose. Ch. _____
- [ ] Payoffs are set up early enough to feel earned. Ch. _____
- [ ] Subplots end, or are at least acknowledged. Ch. _____
- [ ] Characters who leave the story get an exit. Ch. _____

07 Cause and effect

- [ ] Each major event follows from something earlier. Ch. _____
- [ ] The consequences of big events are still felt in later chapters. Ch. _____
- [ ] No key problem is solved by a coincidence the story has not set up. Ch. _____

An open question is not a plot hole, as long as it fits the facts the story has established.

Plot hole log

One row per problem. Fill in where the fact was first set before you decide which chapter to change.

Ch.	What doesn't add up	First set in	Fix