

Polishing Your Book With Beta Readers

A.A. Abbott , British thriller writer

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Polishing Your Book With Beta Readers – what we'll cover

- Why use beta readers?
- How (and when) to work with beta readers
- Where to find them

About A.A. Abbott

- British thriller writer, author of 9 books including forthcoming release **LIES AT HER DOOR**.
- Member of Alliance of Independent Authors
- Works with at least 20 beta readers per book



What is a beta reader?

- A beta tester for your book
- Possibly an ARC (Advance Review Copy) reader
- An adjunct to an editor and/or proofreader

Why use beta readers?

- A fresh pair of eyes
- Specialist knowledge
- Reduce (*not eliminate*) editing costs

Why use beta readers? Survey responses

- I surveyed other writers – mostly fellow members of the Alliance of Independent Authors
- 23 responses
 - 19 used beta readers – 82%
 - 4 did not

Why use beta readers? Survey responses

- To find typos
- To improve story structure
- To improve flow and readability
- To improve characters
- To improve dialogue
- For specialist knowledge
- Pick up inconsistencies
- Pick up plot holes
- “All of the above, and I am careful of the order in which I use beta readers. There is no point addressing typos in a section that later gets cut.”
- “To reassure myself the book is of a publishable standard.”

The million dollar question: do you pay?

- Golden rule: No
- Pay in kind with a book or a beta read swap
- Pay cash if you're generous or using a commercial service like BooksGoSocial

How and when to use beta readers

- **Pre-edit – most useful IMHO, but YMMV**
- **Post-edit**
- **Post-proofread – ARC readers**

How and when – survey results

- Pre-edit 9
- Post-edit 5
- Both pre and post-edit 3
(also ARC readers post-proofread – 2)
- “I don’t use an editor” 2

How and when – survey results

“I'm also an editor. I would send edits to an author, and they would say, “Well, my beta readers didn't mind that.” They may not have minded, but that change would make the book that much better. Betas shouldn't replace editors.”

“I give my beta readers a short questionnaire to let them know the sort of issues I'd like them to address”

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How and when – my approach

- Pre-edit
- “Give feedback in any format you like, but here is a questionnaire in case you find it useful.”
- A questionnaire helps them focus on the areas I think are important.

Beta reader questionnaire – LIES AT HER DOOR

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Beta reader questionnaire – LIES AT HER DOOR

1. Did you review a soft copy (electronic) or hard copy (paperback book)?
2. What genres do you typically read?
3. Is this book in a genre you would typically read?
4. What genre do you think this book is? (I am aiming for a psychological thriller or domestic thriller, but I am aware there is a lot of police procedure in the story.)
5. Did the first paragraph make you want to read more? If not, what deterred you?
6. Did the first page make you want to read more? If not, what deterred you?
7. Did each page make you want to read more? If not, what deterred you?
8. Was the pace of the story about right, too fast or too slow?
9. Did the story flow well? If you felt it didn't, please state where you think it needs improvement.



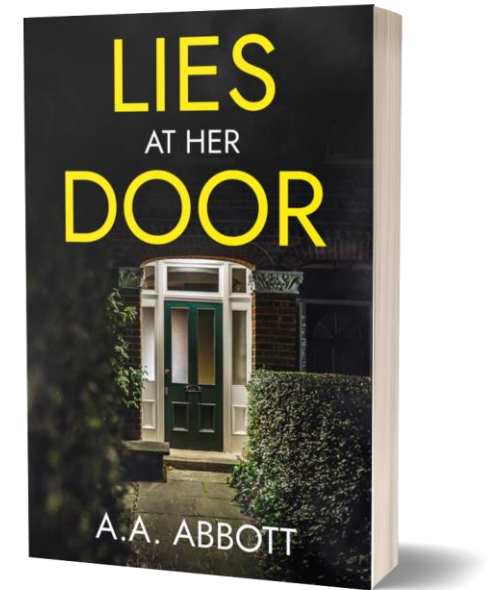
Beta reader questionnaire – LIES AT HER DOOR

10. Did you find Lucy a sympathetic character? If not, and you have ideas for making her more sympathetic, please share them.
11. Were there people or places for which you would have liked more description? Please give details (names, places) if so.
12. If you know something about the music industry today or 20 years ago, British police procedures, eating disorders or the Parkinson's variant progressive supranuclear palsy – did you spot errors, or otherwise have any suggestions? Please give details.
13. Were there any words or specific language you didn't like (eg clunky phrases, or dialogue unsuited to the character)? Please give page no.
14. Do the characters and places appear credible? For any that do not, please give recommendations for improvement.
15. Do the characters behave and interact in an age-appropriate way?



Beta reader questionnaire – LIES AT HER DOOR

16. Is the ending satisfactory? If not, please give recommendations for improvement.
17. Does the book feel long enough to you? If not, how and where do you feel it can be expanded?
18. Is there anything else you especially disliked (eg because annoying or confusing)? Please explain.
19. Is there anything else you especially liked? Please explain.
20. Does the book remind you of any other author – if so, who?
21. [Long question with a list of suggested book titles – beta readers mostly detested them and suggested others]
22. Any other comments?



Beta reader feedback – how to use it

- Remember it's the beta reader's opinion – you choose how to react
- If the majority say the same thing, then rewrite
- If you like an idea, use it
- It's OK to ignore it and move on

Finding beta readers – survey results

- Writing group 4
- Family 1
- Friends 5
- Word of mouth via network 1
- Newsletter subscribers 6
- Searching out expertise 7
- Bloggers 1
- Also consider social media like Facebook groups and LinkedIn.

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Questions?