The Mindful Writer's Guide to

BETA READING

- Understand the value of beta reading for you and your readers

- Design and execute an effective beta reading campaign

- Set intentions for beta reading success as a mindful writer

EMPATH ✒ EDITOR

BETA READING IS AN EXERCISE IN EMPATHY

There's a whole world out there of eager readers who set aside time to dive into unpublished books and offer writers a beautiful, and often free, little gift: their honest thoughts, their love and encouragement, and sometimes . . . their complaints. Beta reading is an exercise in empathy for writers who want to learn how to connect with readers and receive compliments and criticisms with open arms. And a mindful writer doesn't take this work lightly. They understand that this is practice in vulnerability, sharing what's on their soul and letting others in to see it. But they also know how to separate themselves from their writing in a healthy way.

Learn more about the magic of beta reading and how you can plan, execute, and make the most of it for your manuscript.

contents

a beta reading review

Beta reading is a tool that many authors use to obtain feedback on their work, both fiction and nonfiction, from their **ideal readers**. Although it requires a lot of time and energy from readers depending on the ask of the writer, it's usually a **free service** offered by volunteer **book-lovers** who enjoy getting sneak peeks of their favorite types of books and genuinely enjoy sharing their thoughts and feelings with authors.

Typically reserved for **later** in the writing process when a manuscript is complete or nearly complete, beta reading allows the writer to assess their work **objectively** and make adjustments before working with a professional editor and publishing.

With all of its juicy comments from readers and the improvements writers are left to make with its help, beta reading is a valuable asset in the **self-editing** stage, highlighting areas of the manuscript that didn't land well with page-turners and need the most attention. It also helps writers get a feel for how their work will be received by their target audience when it's published (readers of a certain genre, age group, etc.) because writers get the opportunity to learn what readers expect as they move through their books.

juicy comments   excitement

sneak peeks   connection

improvements   research

new skills   confidence

benefits

the perfect campaign

The most successful books, whether independently or traditionally published, owe their popularity to **marketing**. Great marketing campaigns showcase what's unique about the books they sell and speak to the wants, needs, and hopes of contemporary readers. And beta reading is a process that happens **behind the scenes** to gather data from a target market before the book launch and big marketing campaign.

Thinking of beta reading as a way to **obtain data** can help you begin to insert that healthy distance between you and your manuscript when it comes time to take in readers' comments, which is necessary in preserving **self-confidence** and building greater **self-empathy** as a writer. But this view can also elevate a simple beta reading effort to a sparkling beta reading **campaign** —a fancy marketing term for a project or series of steps that lead to a desired outcome. In this case, the outcome is helpful reader feedback.

A **full-on** campaign, rather than a simple manuscript send and call for comments, will meet your personal needs and the needs of who you're "selling" to throughout the project and will help you appear **organized** and **professional** to everyone involved.

Building a beta reading campaign that's perfect for you means considering your goals as a writer and your goals for a particular manuscript in order to piece together everything you need before, during, and after the beta reading process.

setting mindful intentions

Let's pause for a moment, mindful writer, to consider the prep work you'll need to do before starting your campaign: setting intentions and tuning into your **emotions**.

Sharing a manuscript is a big deal for most writers—it takes **courage** to put your work out there into the world and hear what others have to say about it. That's why part of the first step in building a beta reading campaign that truly benefits you is acknowledging **what you want** when you come out on the other side.

Take a moment to think about the wants you have for yourself, your manuscript, and your readers and how you can see these through. Some of your intentions may turn into new favorite writing **affirmations**: words affirming positive, e m p o w e r i n g thoughts that you can hold yourself accountable to.

Here are some examples of mindful intentions you can set before you begin beta reading:

the writer

I intend to maintain my confidence as a great writer.
I intend to keep a healthy separation between my identity and my work.
I intend to use constructive feedback to improve my writing skills.
I intend to be grateful for both positive and negative feedback.
I intend to take the insights that resonate with me and leave the rest behind.

the manuscript

I intend to be open to seeing my characters from a new perspective.
I intend to think critically about my manuscript's messages and themes.
I intend to dive deeper into the structure and pacing of my manuscript.
I intend to discover and embrace what readers love about my manuscript.

the reader

I intend to empower beta readers to share honest reactions.
I intend to show beta readers continued appreciation for their efforts.
I intend to connect with my ideal reader with help from beta readers.

planning for purpose

Keep those intentions in mind as you plan for the campaign launch to achieve your main purpose for beta reading.

Now let's discuss the **three key elements** that fold into the perfect beta reading plan: reader guidelines, project timeline, and tangible materials.

▶ The Guidelines

▶ The Timeline

▶ The Materials

the guidelines

Beta readers need a set of guidelines to know what kind of feedback they should aim to provide and how they can meet any other requirements an author may have. These **instructions** can be as basic or as detailed as you prefer to meet your intentions and fulfill your project's purpose.

First consider what type of **commentary** you're looking for from readers and what type you're not looking for. This will give them a better idea of what they should spend their time **focusing** on. If you're really only seeking thoughts on character development to see if characters are realistic and resonate with readers, then you might want to mention that you don't want readers to provide grammar edits and suggestions or waste time commenting on the structure and pacing of chapters.
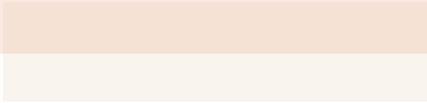
And beta reading doesn't have to serve manuscript-only aims; it can also be a great technique for more objectively assessing the **growth** of your writing skills and identifying areas that may need improvement.

Here are some of the manuscript elements that you can ask participants to offer specific feedback on or pay closer attention to as they read:

plot	theme	middle
story	character	end
pacing	dialogue	grammar
structure	conflict	genre
setting	style	message
mood	beginning	clarity

In explaining to readers what you'd like to see, you can also share in your guidelines a little bit about how you **intend** to use comments and what overall goal you want this manuscript to achieve. You might mention the main **mission** you have as a writer, the **inspiration** for this piece, the **message** you hope readers receive from it, or the **story** you want to tell. But keep in mind that you can take one of two paths with whatever you choose to divulge upfront with readers as they begin the process and complete questionnaires and other submission work:

Path 1:

You share your goals upfront and readers can tell you whether they think you've met them successfully. This might spoil some surprises or cause readers to look at the manuscript from a viewpoint that they've been given rather than seeing the piece through fresh, unbiased eyes, but it allows you to receive more pointed feedback in the end.

Path 2:

You keep your goals secret and judge whether you've met them successfully based on what readers discover on their own. This might result in looser direction from your guidelines and feedback that's off-topic or broader than what you're looking for, but it gives you the chance to truly see if you've hit your mark.

You may want to include a note explaining to participants the difference between **constructive** and **destructive** criticism. This will remind them to keep both their positive and negative feedback friendly and worthwhile—and to be aware of the person behind the pages (you!).

Then you'll want to include the **deadline** that readers should submit feedback by and discuss the desired format for submissions. We'll talk timing next, but submission formats can include a simple reaction **email**, a returned manuscript with **tracked** or **in-text comments**, a reader-created document with **notes** in a layout they prefer, or a completed **questionnaire**. Formats that require files to be sent back and forth can all be sent and received via email or a website form.

Many writers go the questionnaire route, which ensures any specific questions you have will likely be answered by participants. You have a few options for this particular format as well. One is to use a web-based tool built for gathering responses, such as Google Forms or SurveyMonkey. Another option is to create your own custom questionnaire, template-style, made as a Word doc, a fillable PDF, or a website form with multiple fields. Whatever method you choose, be mindful of the **number of questions** you require readers to complete, and make sure they are simple, unique, and **straightforward**; no one wants to read a long-winded question before sharing a response or answer one question in four different ways.

You can also grant sharing **permissions** at whatever level you're comfortable with if you want to create buzz for your book; it's never too early to start marketing. This might mean allowing participants to tell friends, family, and social media followers that they are beta reading for you and, if you want, letting them share the tentative title of your work or their reactions and thoughts as they read.

If you want to gather a few great **reader quotes** for your digital or print dust jacket or for use on your website and in marketing materials, you may want to state in your guidelines that all participant feedback could be used for such purposes. If you don't want to require this from all readers, you can offer an opt-in instead for those who want to grant you that permission or ask for beta reader quotes once the submission phase is over.

the timeline

Timing is big with beta reading. If you set an unreasonable time frame for readers to get through your **entire manuscript**, compile their **comments**, and send them to you by your preferred **deadline**, you'll have a hard time finding willing participants—or you'll end up with frustrated readers and rushed feedback that doesn't do you any good in the first place.

Jot down some ideas on when you'd like to execute your campaign, start receiving feedback, look through feedback, and edit your manuscript. Then you can establish **key dates** surrounding your campaign.

factors

Typical read time for length
Typical read time for subject matter
Typical read time for grade
Typical read time for average readers
Size of feedback ask from readers
Total time for readers' investment

Flexibility for illness and holidays
Manuscript send date to readers
Feedback deadline for readers
Preferred self-editing time
Estimated professional editing time
Intended publish date

The most important thing to get right is the deadline you set for readers, which should be based on the size of your ask and the amount of time readers will need to finish things for you.

Many writers also think about when they'd like to pursue **publishing** as they craft their beta reading campaign. A timeline can help you plan around rewriting, editing, and publishing efforts and factor in any services you have purchased or plan to purchase, such as writing coaching, professional editing, sensitivity reading, or book formatting.

beta reading campaign timeline

manuscript
completion

call for beta
readers

opening beta
reader outreach

beta reading
campaign setup

check-in beta
reader outreach

beta reading
feedback
deadline

beta reading
feedback review

closing beta
reader outreach

extra beta reader
thank-yous

self-editing

professional
editing

publishing

post-publish
book marketing

pre-publish
book marketing

the materials

Your beta reading campaign should consist of three basic phases: opening, check-in, and closing. Each phase is about giving readers all the tools they need to get the job done—the way you want it done—to the best of their ability. Beta readers require clear **direction**, steady **encouragement**, and earnest **appreciation**. And you'll require a few tangible materials to set up your campaign. Use the checklist on the next page to wrap your brain around everything you need.

storing your campaign

list of beta reader applicants with contact info, submission statuses, etc.

final files

schedule

readers

submissions

submitted questionnaires, files, or emails from beta readers

guidelines

outreach

marketing

notes

content for your opening, check-in, and closing outreach communications to beta readers

copy, imagery, and other materials for your call for readers on social media, via email, on your website, etc.

beta reading campaign materials

guidelines

The guidelines you've developed to be shared in your opening outreach and in any other communications you'd like to use for this campaign, such as a page on your website.

final files

The correct reader-facing manuscript in the desired file type, such as Word doc or PDF.

The method of reader feedback submission, whether a provided document or a link to a questionnaire or webpage.

timeline

A timeline, calendar, or other method of setting key outreach dates to ensure campaign tactics stay on track so readers receive tools on time and you stick to your editing and publishing schedules.

call for readers

An announcement on social media platforms, writing forums, your personal website, your email newsletter, or any other method through which you'd like to find beta readers.

A method of vetting beta readers if you prefer to review applicants before sharing your manuscript, such as a templated or web-based application form or an email response request. This can obtain information on reader age and experience, reading habits, genre preferences, and other surface-level details that help determine if applicants match your ideal reader profile and would be likely to provide valuable feedback.

opening outreach

An introductory email or other communication method that includes an overview of who you are and what your manuscript is about, your guidelines, your final files, and the contact methods available to participants should they have questions or technical issues as they participate.

check-in outreach

A quick "Hello, how's it going?" email or other communication method that includes a reminder of your guidelines, your final files, and contact methods so readers know you're thinking of them and so readers can easily find all materials at this point in the process without having to dig for your opening outreach. This may also include a reminder to share their participation and tag you on social media.

closing outreach

A closing email or other communication method that notifies readers the deadline has occurred and thanks readers for their participation and valuable feedback. This may also ask willing readers to share quotes for your dust jacket or marketing materials.

feedback review

A way of reviewing reader feedback, collecting notes on the success of your campaign and experience, gathering campaign materials, and jotting down ideas you have for improving the next round or future campaigns. You may want to save beta reader submissions and correspondance in one "submissions" folder and your own notes after reviewing that feedback in another folder, organized by what area of the manuscript those notes address.

launching & letting go

Once you've set intentions and planned for your purpose, you can push **Go** on your beta reading campaign with the confidence that you've done all you can to prepare yourself and your beta readers for amazing results.

If you think of your campaign as encompassing all of your actions before, during, and after your beta readers have your words in their hands, here are the **basic steps** you should follow:

1. setting intentions
2. planning for purpose
3. pressing send
4. patiently waiting
5. saying thanks
6. self-editing

Pressing send, patiently waiting, and saying thanks map to the opening, check-in, and closing outreach communications in your materials. But they also require you to **maintain** those mindful intentions you set at the start of this adventure.

You should make yourself available to readers at each of these stages if they have questions, but you need to be focusing on your **mindset** as a writer behind the scenes. What can you do before you press send? What can you do while you wait for submissions? What can you do when they finally arrive? Think about the **self-care** practices that would help you navigate this process as positively and smoothly as possible.

It's also important to take **breaks** as you go through feedback and later begin self-editing. This will prevent you from feeling weighed down by negative comments or overwhelmed by new ideas, confused on what direction to take.

Everything our pen produces is intrinsically entwined with our **identity**, so of course we'll be affected by others' opinions of our work. But our aim as **mindful writers** is to stay proud of who we are and what we've written and to not let criticism, helpful or otherwise, rattle our self-esteem and push us off our desired paths.

SOAK UP
EACH STEP

What does your perfect beta reading campaign
look like, mindful writer?

I hope this guide serves as a helpful resource in dreaming it up and making it a reality so you can move from magical manuscript to finished book and fully enjoy the journey in between.

Still have questions? Feel free to get in touch. I'd love to help you with your beta reading campaign or hear about your experience!

EMPATH EDITOR

www.empatheditor.com
info@empatheditor.com
ig: @empatheditor