

# BETA READER SPOT HANDBOOK

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READER'S EDITION



Pictou-Antigonish  
Regional Library

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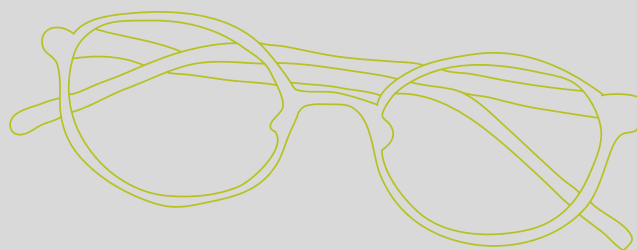
# THIS BOOKLET IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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## Thekla Martina Altmann

Thekla has been with the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library since 2018 and works out of the Trenton branch.

With a masters degree in Literary Translation and extensive editing experience, Thekla knows what is involved in the editing and proofreading process. Thekla writes poetry and prose, and is an active member of the Pictou County Writers.



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## THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME!

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Being a beta reader is very rewarding, and we think you'll love it!

### What you need:

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love of reading  
attention to detail  
patience  
reliability  
good judgment  
kindness



First things first, thank you for taking the time! You rock! Your feedback is wanted and valuable, and there are some very, very grateful writers out there. You are not just volunteering for the community, you are helping in the creation of a piece of art, and chances are, the end product will bear some of your influence.

### The Beta Reader Spot

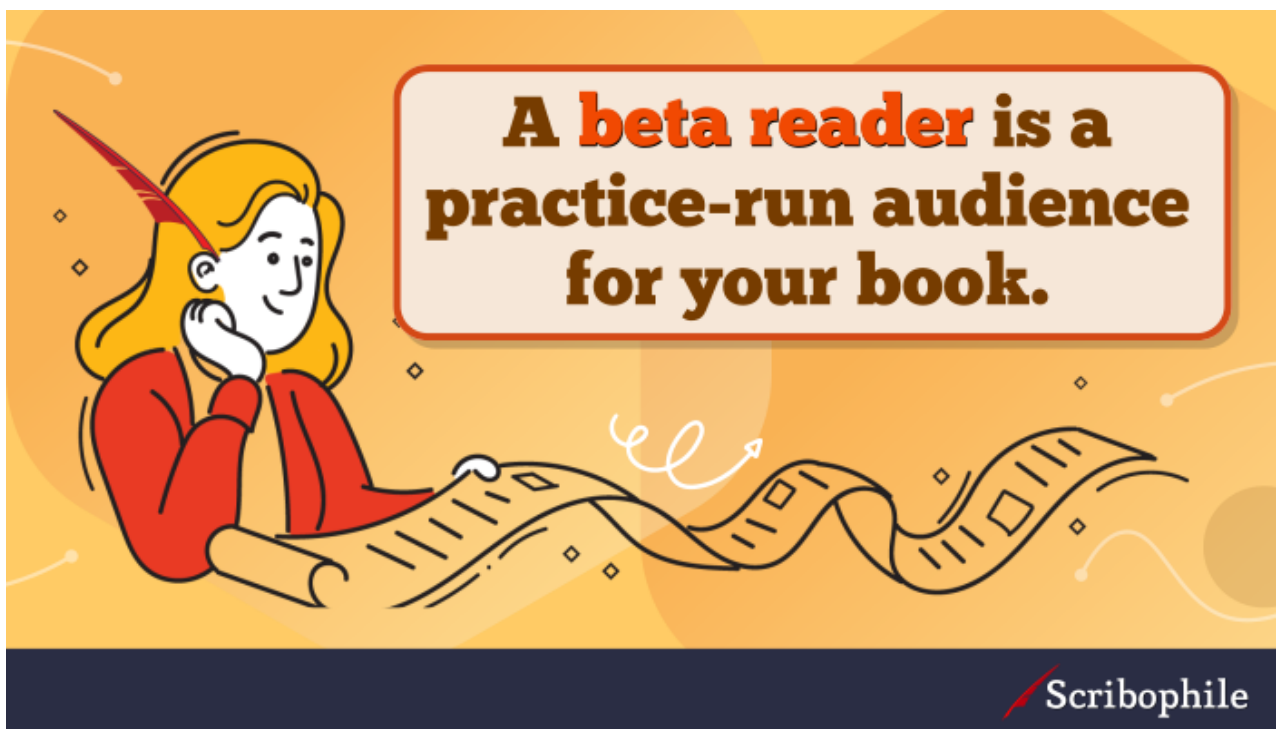
is a project piloted by the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library. To our knowledge, this is the first of its kind in Nova Scotia. It is an exchange hub located at the Trenton Library where writers can test out their work on their target audience, and readers can get involved in the development of a book. Physically, it looks like a shelf of spiral-bound manuscripts with empty pages at the back. Those pages will gradually fill up with comments before they get back to the original author.

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# WHAT IS A BETA READER?

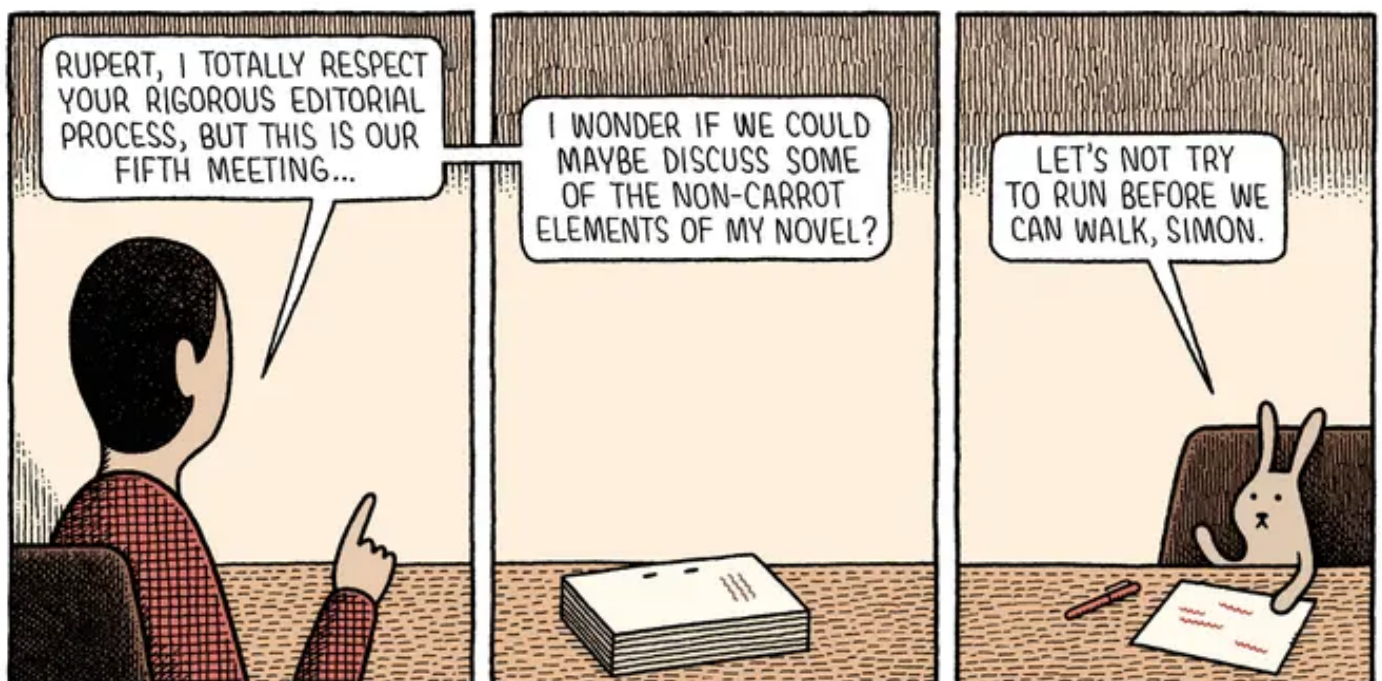
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In its classical sense, a beta reader is the first generation of readers to see the manuscript after the brunt of the work is done. An author might read bits and pieces to their family and friends while it's still a work in progress – making them the alpha readers, essentially – but now they need a fresh set of eyes. Almost any author needs this kind of feedback: Am I headed in the right direction? Are my intentions coming across? Is it as funny as I think it is? Family and friends are great for encouragement, but they are biased. You are not. That's the whole point.





The role you're taking on is important. You get the privilege of seeing pieces of writing that the author feels strongly and confidently enough about to hand over to a very limited audience – you – but it might not be ready for actual publication yet. Any comment you make on their work will be taken in. Deeply. Not every writer gets emotional about this, but a lot of them do. So be responsible! Be truthful! Be kind where you can, but honest where you have to be.



TOM GAULD

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# WHAT IS A BETA READER NOT?

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There are professional editors out there, and people who've made a business out of beta reading. There are computer programs galore that will check for grammar and spelling mistakes. What we are asking from you is your love of reading, and a bit of bluntness. That's all.

You are not someone's therapist, personal assistant, tutor, agent, or publisher. Don't commit to more than you are comfortable doing.



If you feel too much pressure from what you're taking on, invest some time in self-care - and remember that this is not a job. We're happy and grateful for your time, but don't take volunteering to a level where it hurts you.

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# ARE YOU THE RIGHT MATCH?

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Even if you find something in your favorite genre, and the blurb sounds great - in order to find that fine balance, think about how blunt you are, or how much you love encouraging people. The author will circle their ideal critique style on this scale:

1. I'm pretty sensitive about it. Encouragement only please.
2. Be nice, but ideas for minor improvements are welcome.
3. Please stay polite, but if you spot something major, I'd rather know!
4. I'd rather know than not know if it's any good, but I'm still scared.
5. I need an opinion. Tell me what you think. No, really.
6. Give me the brunt of it, I want to hear it all.
7. Rip it apart. Do not hold back.



Where do you fall in terms of giving feedback? There are people who cannot hold back even when they try, and there are people who cannot bear to be anything but kind. Be honest with yourself. The right match is possible, and your kind of feedback might be exactly what some writer is looking for. That being said:



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## BE KIND.

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Unless someone requests brutal disillusionment, be sure you can find something nice to say. Remember, this is someone's heartblood on the page, and they might feel a little softer about it than they admitted.



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## TREAT THE MANUSCRIPT WELL.

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This should go without saying, but please try and avoid food stains, pet stains, other stains... As with any book, you should be washing your hands and trying not to rip the pages. Of course, it is a working document. Write in the margins all you want, underline things as required, and make notes all over the place. Just make sure someone else still wants to touch it afterwards.





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# PAY ATTENTION.

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Each writer fills in a questionnaire, and you will receive it along with their writing. When you pick something up and take it home, pay attention: Are you the right person for this story? Is this your kind of genre? Are you the right age group (reading to kids counts)? Are there any content warnings in there that would spoil the whole thing for you?

What kind of feedback are they looking for – would you serve them well by ripping off the bandaid, or are you not even the kind of person who does that? Pick something that is right for you, and if there's nothing at the Beta Reader Spot at the moment that looks like a good match, check back later.



"Martha, I finally finished reading your critique submission. What a clear, legible font you've chosen! I was also excited to see that nearly -half- of the words in your story were spelled correctly..."



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# BE RELIABLE.

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Picking up a manuscript is a commitment. Unlike books that can sit on your bedside table for a year before they get read, this is a case of someone somewhere fevering on the edge of their seat, bouncing their heels, waiting for you to get back to them. So, be honest with yourself about timelines, and be honest with us if your schedule changes. Our standard return cycle is three weeks, and we'll try and hold you to that unless agreed otherwise. (If we're talking novels of 1.000 pages, we'll agree otherwise!)



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# BE SPECIFIC.

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Once you've taken a manuscript home, make sure you take plenty of notes. A comment along the lines of "I liked it" is awesome, but not very helpful. What did you like about what, exactly?

Here are a number of questions that might help you give good feedback:

- What did you think about the main character? Did you like them? Not like them?
- What other character did you love and why?
- What other character did you hate and why?
- What did you find funny?
- What got your emotions up?
- Did you feel the tension / gripping action / steam / drama? What stuck out?
- Was there any point when you got bored?
- Was it what you expected when you picked it up?
- What about the ending? Expected or unexpected? Did you like it or not?
- Did you get confused at any point? When and where and why?



Depending on what you're reading, some of these questions might not fit, and others might be better. Pay attention to the questionnaire: the writer might have put down a few specific issues, and try to answer those.

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# ANY QUESTIONS?

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If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Email [trenton@parl.ns.ca](mailto:trenton@parl.ns.ca) or call the Trenton Library during opening hours.

If you're looking for more resources on how to be a great beta reader, here are a few websites:

<https://taraeast.com/2021/03/11/how-to-be-a-good-beta-reader/>

<https://smallbluedog.com/what-makes-a-good-beta-reader.html>



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# TRENTON LIBRARY CONTACT DETAILS

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Phone: 902-752-5181  
Email: trenton@parl.ns.ca

## Open Hours:

Tuesday 1:00pm - 5:00pm & 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Wednesday 10:00 am - 12:00pm & 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm  
Thursday 1:00pm - 5:00pm & 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Friday 10:00 am - 12:00pm & 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm  
Saturday 10:00am - 2:00pm



1 Forge Street, Trenton, NS