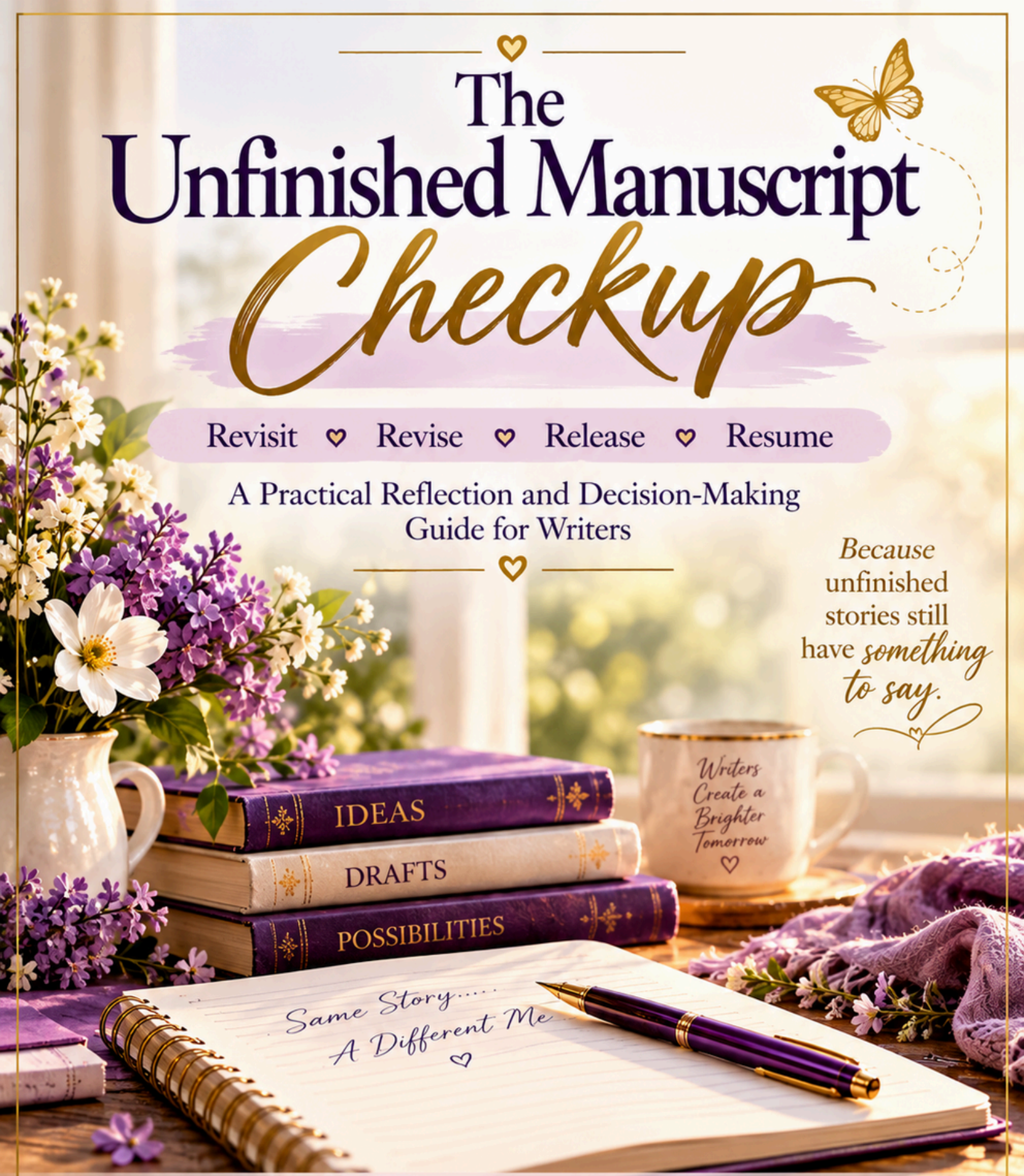
The Unfinished Manuscript Checkup

Revisit ♡ Revise ♡ Release ♡ Resume

A Practical Reflection and Decision-Making Guide for Writers

Because unfinished stories still have *something to say.*



The Author Collab™

More Readers. More Impact. Together.

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Introduction: Every Unfinished Manuscript Has a Story

Somewhere in a notebook or computer folder may be a writing project you once felt passionate about. Perhaps life intervened, your priorities changed, or the idea simply lost its spark.

An unfinished manuscript is not necessarily a failed manuscript. Sometimes it needs a new direction. Sometimes it needs time. And sometimes it is right to let it go.

After losing my daughter in 2007, I set aside manuscripts that I returned to nearly two decades later. That experience reminded me that our creative lives do not always follow the timelines we imagine.

Use this checkup to reflect on one project and choose your next step. There are no wrong answers, and no obligation to finish what you started.

Part One: Rediscover Your Project

Project title or working title:

_____

Type: ☐ Fiction ☐ Nonfiction ☐ Memoir ☐ Workbook ☐ Other

When did you begin?

_____

How far did you get?

☐ Idea only ☐ Outline/research ☐ Partial draft

☐ First draft ☐ Editing/revision ☐ Nearly publication-ready

Part One: Rediscover Your Project (continued)

Why did you originally want to write it?

_____

_____

What caused you to put it aside?

☐ Family responsibilities ☐ Grief, illness, or personal challenges

☐ Time or competing priorities ☐ Lost interest or motivation

☐ Unclear direction ☐ Perfectionism or fear of criticism

☐ Another project took priority ☐ Other: _____

Part Two: Five Questions Worth Asking

1. Does this project still matter to me?

What still excites me—or no longer excites me—about it?

_____

_____

2. Am I still the right person to write it?

What knowledge, experience, or perspective have I gained?

_____

_____

3. What would I change if I started today?

Could I update its content, structure, audience, or direction?

_____

_____

Part Two: Five Questions (continued)

4. What is really preventing me from finishing?

Is the obstacle practical, emotional, creative, or something else?

_____

_____

_____

5. What would finishing look like now?

Does this need to become the book I first imagined—or another form?

_____

_____

_____

Part Three: Choose Your Path

☐ REVISIT — Explore the possibility. I am curious, but not ready to commit.

☐ REVISE — Give it a new direction. The idea needs updating or reimagining.

☐ RELEASE — Let it go. I can move on without guilt; I may archive the work.

☐ RESUME — Begin again. I am ready to take one small step.

Part Four: My Next Step

My decision:

_____

One small action I can take:

_____

Part Four: My Next Step (continued)

When would I like to take that action? (Optional)

_____

What support or resources might help?

_____

_____

A Final Reflection

If I could tell the writer I was when I began this project one thing, it would be…

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion: Your Story, Your Timeline

The project you started years ago may not be the one you want to finish today. You may have grown, changed direction, or discovered that your energy belongs elsewhere. Whatever you decide, the work you did was not necessarily wasted.

If you revisit, allow yourself curiosity. If you revise, make room for new possibilities. If you release, let go without guilt. And if you resume, begin with one manageable action.

You are not defined by the manuscripts you have not finished. Your writing journey belongs to you.

“Sometimes a pause isn’t the end of the story. Sometimes it’s part of the story we haven’t yet learned how to tell.” — Heidi Richards Mooney

Keep the conversation going: Share your experience with other writers at The Author Collab™.

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