Pro Podcast Editor Checklist

Pro Podcast Editor Checklist

Hi, my name is **Jon Christensen** and I help **experienced podcasters** who have seen their numbers plateau or can't get engagement from their audiences fix the most important thing: the quality their shows, by giving them specific feedback they can apply to their next episode.

This **Pro Podcast Editor Checklist** is the exact template our industry experts use while they prepare feedback for our community members.

You can use it yourself to take stock of things you should focus on.

The end result: **Your show will be better.** Better shows get more listeners.

We believe in audio that lasts that gets people excited to listen today, in three weeks, and even in three years.

Takeaways

Using this checklist will help you actively listen to your own episodes with specific things to focus on.

For each item in the list, we've added a few things to listen for that we've seen across the dozens of shows we've already reviewed.

Think of it as a cheat sheet of how to avoid common pitfalls and stand out in a crowded field.

Using this guide might mean a bit more time at the editing station, but an extra hour of editing is surely better than weeks and weeks of audience stagnation.

Better shows get more listeners

You hear it all the time that better shows get more listeners. What does that specifically mean, though? I used to think it meant trying to be funnier, making sure content was absolutely correct and easy to understand, and picking interesting topics for each episode. Those things are important, but there are more fundamental ways of improving quality that I wasn't even aware of.

Since we started our podcast feedback community *The Edit*, everyone has said that the feedback we're giving is really helpful. One person in particular said that after three months of getting and incorporating the feedback, she saw an increase in downloads.

Specifically she pointed to improving the **focus**, tightening the **format**, and working on **stickiness** (all from our feedback) as the reasons that one of her episodes received double the number of downloads and trended on the iTunes charts despite her guest not having as high a profile as some earlier guests.
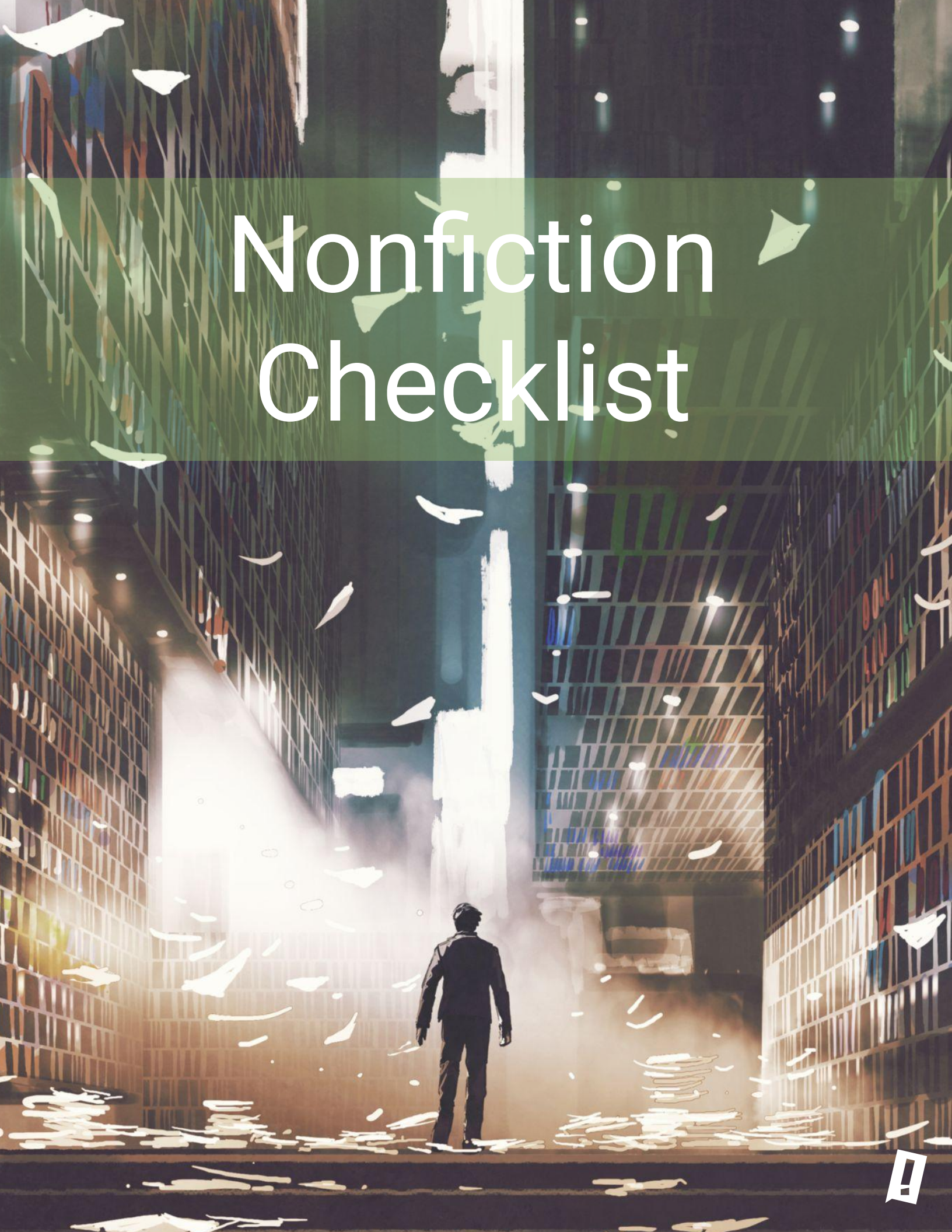
How to use these checklists

1. Pick the right one for your show. There's a regular one and a special fiction one.

2. Get it into a doc you can edit, or jot the section headings down on a couple pieces of paper.

3. Listen to your show. Stop every 90 seconds or so and review the headings and think about whether something came up that you should fix.

4. If anything came up in step 3, write it down with a timestamp.

5. Listen to the whole episode again doing steps 3 and 4 (Yes listen to your own episode twice. It'll make your show great. You can do it!)

6. Edit. You have a bunch of notes of changes you want to make. Re-record things as needed, change your narrations, fix bad cuts, etc.

7. Listen one more time (keeping the headings in mind). Make a few final notes with timestamps.

8. Do touch-up edits from step 7. Then do one last listen.

Nonfiction
Checklist

Feedback from *The Edit*

Reviewer:		Date:	
Podcast:		Episode:	

View this checklist as a [google doc](#).

1. Recording notes (any sound quality issues)

Listen for:

- Muffled sound
- Mouth noises
- Far away speakers
- Ums/Ahs, weird breaths
- Bad clips
- Distracting external sounds

2. Soundscape (notes on music, sound design, and aural feel)

Listen for:

- Music/sounds should match with mood/voices
- Sudden or surprising sounds that aren't on purpose
- How the non-verbal sounds make you feel overall

3. Personality (notes on host chemistry, humor, likability)

Listen for:

- Confidence of delivery
- Sense of humor
- Feel like you're being spoken to not read to

Feedback page 2

4. Stickiness (what's keeping listeners engaged and where listeners might lose you)

Listen for:

- Lots of storytelling (see notes on storytelling in item 7)
- Interesting questions (either spoken or implied) that will be answered
- Adding new information at least every 90 seconds
- Very little time spent generalizing or arguing without examples
- Calling listener attention to a major subject change or important story element

5. Landmines (are there any no-nos like making blanket statements about a groups of people)

Listen for:

- Accidental racism, sexim, ableism
- Jokes about people based on how they look or other things they can't control
- Arguments or conclusions based on stereotypes

6. Journalism notes (any journalistic concerns where fact checking or additional research might be suggested?)

Listen for:

- Sounds too good to be true? Fact check it
- Relying too heavily on a single source
- Actually, just go read this short article if your podcast is telling other people's stories:
  https://timber.fm/stories/navigating-trust-and-truth-as-an-independent-podcaster/

Feedback page 3

7. Story notes (how's the storytelling? Is it immersive, shareable, can you follow it?)

Listen for:

- Sequences of events in stories (want to know what happens next)
- "Signposting" which means telling the listener that something important is about to happen, or reminding them what just happened a minute ago before moving on.
- Details of not just what happened but also the setting and descriptions of people
- Something surprising or unexpected

8. Format notes (intro/outro/sections sound good and make sense and fit?)

Listen for:

- Intro should make target audience feel like "that's me!" and let them know why they should keep listening
- Outro should credit people that helped make the show
- Ads should be not over burdensome

9. Writing notes (if parts of the show are scripted, does the script need writing improvements?)

Listen for:

- Writing sounds like it would be something people would actually say, not just something they would only write
- Watch out for leaps that only the people that know the subject matter would make—go slow and explain everything

Fiction Checklist

Fiction Feedback from *The Edit*

Reviewer:		Date:	
Podcast:		Episode:	

View this checklist as a [google doc](#).

1. Recording notes (any sound quality issues)

Listen for:

- Muffled sound
- Mouth noises
- Far away speakers
- Ums/Ahs, weird breaths
- Bad clips
- Distracting external sounds

2. Soundscape (notes on music, sound design, and aural feel--for setting see number 4)

Listen for:

- Music/Sounds that match with mood/voices
- Sudden or surprising sounds that aren't on purpose
- Music doesn't just match story mood but *sets* story mood
- Music matches setting/location

Fiction Feedback page 2

3. Characters

Listen for:

- Easy to tell the characters apart by their voices (or by the reader's voicing)
- Important characters are round not flat
- We can visualize characters because they have been described somehow
- Characters motivations are clear or purposefully unclear but not accidentally unclear

4. Setting (can we visualize the story happening in a particular place? Is the imagery of the place clear? -- this could be done via a combination of sound design, narration, and the character dialog itself)

Listen for:

- Descriptions of the setting
- Musical and sonic notes to help visualize the setting
- Changes in setting as the story progresses

5. Acting (Is the script or text read in a believable way? Overacted or underacted?)

Listen for:

- Do the actors sound like they're reading?
- Are the actors taking proper queues from the setting (eg. talking quietly in a library)
- The intensity of emotion from the actors matches the story

Fiction Feedback page 3

6. Stickiness (does the story have a conflict and rising action that makes listeners want to stick around? Are there parts that lag?)

Listen for:

- The central conflict in a story is one of the first things that makes it sticky. Is it identifiable within the first few minutes?
- Sequences of event keep people listening, they want to know what's going to happen next.
- Story puts characters we're vested in into high stakes situations

7. Landmines (are there any no-nos like making blanket statements about a groups of people)

Listen for:

- Accidental racism, sexim, ableism
- Jokes about people based on how they look or other things they can't control
- Character motivations being drawn (unintentionally) from stereotypes

8. Story notes (how's the storytelling? Can you follow what's happening? Are there plot holes? Is it immersive?)

In addition to the stuff listed under item 6, listen for:

- Rising action
- A climax where the conflict is resolved
- Sequences of events that can be followed. (personal note from Jon: Audio dramas, because of their lack of descriptive narration, might not be the best places to tell stories that jump through time. If they do, you might limit your audience to those that are expert audio drama listeners.)

Fiction Feedback page 4

9. Format notes (Good signposting? How much strain does it put on listeners to keep up and pay attention? Does it make good use of devices in dialog or via narration to give a sense of setting?)

Listen for:

- Dialog that helps identify characters and remind listeners what's happening in a natural way
- One character telling a story about another character is a great way to introduce natural narration and reveal attributes about both characters' personalities
- Avoid having too many minor characters
- Avoid introducing more than two characters at a time
- Use sound design and some way of narrating scene changes

10. Writing notes (Does the writing meet its intention? An example of missing this would be using modern phrasing in a period piece.)

Listen for:

- Modern slang or jargon that didn't exist in the period it was spoken
- Trying too hard to do scene setting through dialog and having people say things they wouldn't: "Waiter, I'd like a slice of that caramel cake that's hiding in the third row of the bakery shelf—barely noticeable among the riot of colored confections spanning from the register to the arched entryway."

Your podcast's future

If you've been editing on instinct and barely keeping up with an exhausting production schedule, these checklists will help.

I should tell you, though, that I've learned successful podcasters all have one thing in common. They *know* other successful podcasters.

I don't know if it's about successful people pushing each other to do great work, or if great podcasters just have similar personalities, but no one Timber has profiled or interviewed is an island.

Our group of reviewers and podcasters can be your door into this world. You'll get amazing feedback with these exact checklists and you'll meet people who have worked on shows downloaded millions of times. Join us in *The Edit*!

Join *The Edit*