

# *Don't Lose the Plot*

All in one guide to completing your First Draft



Finally... I don't feel  
like a fish out of  
water!

Isabelle King

## Don't Lose The Plot – All in one formula to completing Your First Draft

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Don't Lose The Plot

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## Don't Lose the Plot

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## Don't Lose the Plot

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### 1. Creative Writing First Draft - Introduction

The all in one formula to creating your first draft is a condensed guide to helping you start and finish your first draft. It covers aspects from the ground work, research to plot and scenes. It is my desire that by the time you have finished reading and working through this guide, you will have created your own complete blueprint for your novel. After which you will be free from writers block and be able to write using your creative imagination without having to worry about what your character is doing or what he will do next. You will already have a fine tuned well crafted blueprint to work by.

We start with a seed, your story idea and work through all aspects to develop a strong ground for your story. All novel elements are explored from character, plot and setting to description and scene ladders. These have been discussed as an ensemble as each aspect is vital to the other. Novel elements need to be tightly interwoven and in this guide, we do just that.

The information and guidelines provided, is from personal experience as a writer and from many hours of research and reading the craft of writing from the writing masters. The guide has been condensed to save you time better used to writing your story. I have included what I call the bible booklist. It is a pile of books I have on hand on my desk while writing. I hope you will find them as useful as I have.

After completing the guide you will have believable unforgettable characters, a tight well crafted plot and emotion packed scenes. All that remains for you, the writer, is to put pen to paper and enjoy the journey.

### 2. The Marriage of Story and Plot

In E.M. Forster's book, "Aspects of a Novel", great detail has gone into story and plot. Reading numerous books on plot I have seen this referred to as Story verses Plot. Two great heavy weights each ready to do battle in the ring. It is true, these heavy weights have independent roles, but I prefer to put these boxing duo hand in hand, spot lit, dancing on the ballroom floor. Why, because they are story – in harmony.

Take for example the infamous love story:

*The boy died and then the girl died.*

It is an idea and yes one could say a story.

Let's take this even further then.

*The boy died after seeing his love's dead body, thinking she was dead he drank poison. The girl who was not really dead drank poison after seeing his dead body.*

E.M. Forster would agree that this is a story because there is a chronicle of events. He also shows us that plot therefore is a chain of cause and effect relationships that create a pattern of unified action and behavior.

Let's take our example above and add the why's of plot. This becomes story.

*The boy died after seeing his love's dead body, desperate and stricken by grief he thought that his love would surpass even death, so he drank poison to be with her again. The girl who was only pretending to be dead awoke to find her dead love's body.*

*Her heart could not bare the weight of pain and she decided to join her lover. She died beside him.*

There are many different crafting aspects that hold the reader in the story, that have them eager to read the next chapter, and then leave them saying, “wow, what a great story”.

With respect to our readers it’s a writer’s job not only to give the reader a well crafted novel, but also one that is compelling, original and unique. In an autobiography this would be an easier task. It is in itself unique. So already from the writer’s experience we have a point to start for our story idea.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What and who make you burning with anger?  
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- What do you fear the most?  
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- What do you love the most?  
.....
- What country have you visited that intrigues you the most?  
.....
- What and who are the greatest loves of your life?  
.....

## The Ground Work

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- What desires are you passionate about?

.....

- What moments of envy or jealousy have you felt?

.....

When you answer these questions you'll find that others arise and you will also have a wealth of ideas that spring to mind. Once you have an idea for a story, take it one step further. Take that idea, be in it and feel it. If you are passionate about your story it will be easier to write. If you are passionate about your story it will be believable. Readers are tough audiences and leave little margin for errors. Don't be a bystander in your story. To be so is to ask your reader to take a back seat, we want them right in the front row ... full view, living the story.

Don't be too quick to reject ideas for a story because it's too familiar to you. Use your imagination, throw in some characters and turn the view point around. Study aspects from their responses to the idea and let it play out in your mind. Explore experiences from other character traits.

Example:

"Everybody Comes to Ricks" was a play written by Murray Burnett after he visited a bar in Europe in the late '30's. German soldiers were in the bar and a black man played piano. The threat of war was looming and the scene of the bar went on to inspire him to write. Burnett's play was later sold to Warner.

You probably know it as: Casablanca

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See where an idea can take you!

Use your experiences, follow your fascination, explore all facets and dare to be original. We're all different, and how you react to emotions or experiences can be totally different to others. Explore these avenues and give them life through other characters.

### Tips

Create an idea note pad. Write down ideas that spring to mind, but leave out fully formed story ideas. They will be preconceived and leave no room to take your idea to the limit. With that idea in mind, let your imagination play scenes and jot down next to the idea key phrases or words that have been created (for example: suspense, lies, passion, mystery, action ...) so that you can explore your story further off the page. Energize them with rudimentary human urges such as, hate, vengeance, ecstasy, ambition, greed, terror and so on, then after you have written these down, add a surprise element.

By keeping an idea log, you'll have a wealth of ideas at your disposal, for the next novel.

### Did you know?

John Grisham was fascinated by law. This led him to write a series of best selling books. Fascinated by relationships, Nora Ephron went on to write "When Harry Met Sally".

### 3. Genre

You have a great idea for your first or next novel and you're eager to see the magic of words appear on paper. To me there is nothing more exhilarating than watching the screen fill with words and a frustration that my fingers cannot glide across the keyboard as fast as my imagination weaves the story. The first few paragraphs I write are the original outline for my story, a brief synopsis of my ideas. This you will later find to be an eye opening reference as to how much you have learnt, and how far your characters, plot and structure have taken over to create an indelible journey.

The next step is to do some research as to what genre your story / synopsis meets. A genre as described in the dictionary is: "a class or category of artistic endeavor having a particular form, content, or technique".

This is an important step for several reasons.

- Is your novel marketable?
- Will a publisher or agent be likely to take on your genre?
- Is your novel a style you feel comfortable writing?

When considering your story idea, it is important to ask yourself why you are writing. Are you writing for a market with future publication options or just the pleasure of writing without publication or market in mind? This question will save you valuable time or worse a manuscript that will not be accepted as it doesn't fall into the publishers market. Do you just want to write a story or do you want to write a story that will be considered publishable? If choosing the latter it is important to consider the audience and publication guidelines. Market guidelines vary depending on what genre you are writing for, but in general anything under 500 words is considered flash-fiction

(online publication), under 10 000 words a short story (short story collection or magazine) between 10 000 and 50 000 a novella and between 70 000 to 100 000 a novel (writing for teens or children has a lesser word count).

Understanding the market area and genre will give you an insight into your audience. When I write I like to take on the individual approach, getting into the mindset of my reader, one on one. To me this gives the reader a personal experience. Even though market and target audience are considered as a group, reading is a personal experience and should be approached as such. Knowing your audience, including yourself, helps develop form and format as well as mastering characters that captivate and embrace the reader every step of the way.

Some publishers or magazines for example require specific types of genres or subgenres where events, themes, settings follow more or less the same conventions. Writers aiming at getting their short story published in a magazine, or certain mainstream romance publishers, would follow quite specific guidelines ranging from a specified word count, believable explicit love scenes, to conflict resolution. These guidelines are usually made available to writers and it is important to inform yourself before taking on these genres. You will be saving yourself eventual re-writes. Remember, publishers are meeting the demands of their readers and the closer your work adheres to the guidelines the greater chance that your manuscript will be considered.

Most fiction novels are categorized into the genres such as; genre fiction, general fiction, commercial fiction, and literary fiction. In genre fiction the reader knows the tone of the novel and made a selection based around their preferred type of story.

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This could be mystery, thriller, fantasy, etc. The plot is the most important aspect, the themes, characters, scenes and subplots vary but the overall tone remains true to the specific genre. Uncategorized fiction generally goes under the heading of general fiction, and do not conform so tightly to a specific genre. Their structural components are not clearly differentiated. Some genre fiction is classified under general fiction however, to attract a wider audience. Commercial fiction applies to novels where the character journey appeals to the reader. Literary fiction is presumed to have a greater artistic and cultural value. It is considered to appeal to a niche market and consisting of conventions of its own, such as an elevated prose style or philosophical ideology. It is treated as a category apart from the others, where style is considered as equally important as plot.

There exists what is known as crossovers and the path I chose to take in writing my novel. When asked the question by my writing coach, what genre I wanted to write and consequently continue writing I was left with a dilemma. My original synopsis was a women's story, but I wanted something more; an edge to set it apart. Hence the crossover of a woman's story couched in suspense. The research into what genre my original idea for the story and what genre I would keep, lead to the first growth and development of my story idea. Some famous novelists combine attributes from different genres, and it may be worth considering this approach if the genre fiction doesn't quite suit the writing style you are comfortable with. Before doing this, however it is equally important to do your market research to see if the combinations would be marketable. Ian Rankin for example takes his writing style as equally important as his plot. Others use this mix of compelling original characters with individual style of writing, in combining crime and romance, or historical genres crossovers with crime.

**Exercise**

Write for 5 minutes non stop about a conflict scene between yourself and one of your characters. You are a defense lawyer and defending your client against the prosecutor (your character). Stop. Now write again for 5 minutes non stop the same conflict scene but this time you are your character (prosecutor).

*This exercise will give you greater insight into the diverse possibilities of the author reader relationship and how you want to approach your market audience.*

**Tips**

Start being proactive, immerse yourself in your chosen genre by reading and watching as a writer.

Note down what kind of books, films or television programs you like and look for a pattern or style that stands out, it will probably be the genre you feel most comfortable with.

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Get to know your reader. Who are they?

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What is your target audience and is there a market?

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What genre do you feel comfortable writing? Why?

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By answering these questions you'll get a feel for the style and language to use to appeal to your target audience, and one you feel comfortable writing.

**Did you know?**

Agatha Christie wrote romance novels under a pseudonym name.

#### 4. Left Brain / Right Brain... Why it's important

We've known since the sixties that certain functions of the brain are lateralized to the left and right hemispheres which are in communication with each other via the nerve fibers, the Corpus Collosum. They receive and process different types of sensory information. Neurologist Roger Sperry studied patients who had undergone a colostomy, typically in patients suffering from severe attacks of epilepsy, where the two hemispheres of the brain were separated. The information passed from right to left was severed by cutting the corpus callosum. The knowledge that the two hemispheres worked separately changed everything and saw an influx into right brain tapping and creativity in the 70's.

The right side of the brain is intuitive, and processes imagination, interpretation of feelings and dreams. Accessing the right hand mode becomes important when free writing when we can shut out our critical left hand hemisphere, and open our minds to imaginal and spatial awareness. We can then work in conjunction with our left hand hemisphere to analyze, and work on language or word constructions later. I have spent hours on a single paragraph dissecting sentence structure and the correct composure of grammar. I have also spent five minutes free writing a single page effortlessly in right hand mode letting my visual and imaginary world come to life on paper, granted with editing required afterwards.

##### Left Brain processes:

Analytical – rational  
Controls right side of body  
Factual – names, dates

##### Right Brain processes:

Artistic  
Controls left side of body  
Dreaming

Linear – sequential information	Imagination – speculative / fantasy
Literal	Interpreter of feelings
Mathematical	Metaphoric
Verbal – Language skills	Non-Linear – holistic information processing (e.g. face recognition)
	Musical Spatial perception
	Spiritual

A writer's most valued tool in creative writing is ... IMAGINATION. Imagination is primarily a right brain function, it is the visual process, but as writers we need to access all four parts of the brain. Start visualizing your characters. Play them out like scenes from a movie in your mind. Picture the settings. Now put in those "what ifs" and see the movie unfold from your imagination. "What if" your protagonist (main character) was held at gun point? Feed your imagination by left brain questions and tasks.

You need to be aware and have the ability to access the process of imagination fully by using all four parts at given points in your writing. To give you a working idea of the four brain process try the following exercises.

**Exercise**

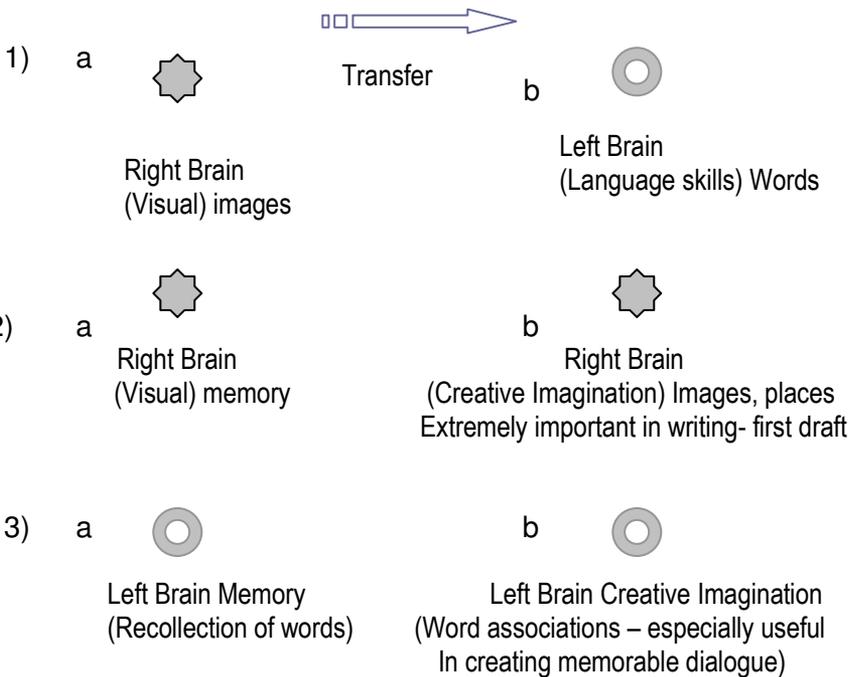
- Picture yourself on a beach in Hawaii.
  - Name some of the things you saw.
- Using only mental images think back to your most memorable birthday party. Who was there? No words, just visual images.

b) Imagine a space station. An alien ship has just debarked. Visualize the different alien species descending the vessel.

3) a) Say out aloud the first line of your favorite poem or song.  
b) Use the blank spaces to complete the following.

To be or \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

You have just experienced all four functions.



## 5. Writing Rituals and Getting into Right Hand mode

What are writing rituals and do we really need them? How often do I need to write and how much? These were questions I often came across in writing forums and books on writing. One famous author would put on his hat and coat and walk around the block three times before sitting at his desk to write, others I found chose to start by writing an entry into their journal. I listen to music before writing to calm and get into right brain mode before working on my first draft. The choice is a personal one, what ever works the best for you to get those right hand creative neurons into action. The importance is not how much you write but to write and write everyday. There is a debate as to whether writing is an art or a craft and many will indisputably say it is purely a craft. I believe it is both, a craft which like any other needs to be learnt then practiced, and an art that comes from the vary depths of our being, our imagination. Whilst doing the ground work for your novel it is best to get into your writing ritual and write. It could be a journal entry, a letter or take a headline from a newspaper and create your own version of the story. The important thing is to write, at this stage don't worry about any errors. You are trying to tap into your creative mode.

Your writing space should be wherever you feel best writing. I have several places in my house where I write, depending on my mood. It is the place I feel comfortable writing on the day and what works best for me. Some days I feel like company when I'm writing, and take a notepad or my laptop to a café and write to the sounds of life vibrating around me. I have written on the rampart of a twelfth century castle overlooking a gradient green forest and on the beach with my feet dug into the sand.

There is a mythology that a writers life is a lonely one, and one that I would like to dispel.

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Some of our greatest writers were social butterflies. A perfect example would be Hemingway. To explore human nature and the differences surrounding us is one of the greatest gifts of being a writer. I spend as much time writing as I do with friends, talking to people I have never met before, or chatting on the phone with fellow writers. I spend equal time, exploring and sharing an incredible journey with my characters or of those that other authors have brought to life.

The indelible words of my friend glide through my mind as soothingly as Mozart's sonata in D major. "Creative mode... listen to Mozart." It has become one of my writing rituals and one that works for me, but I have an inquisitive mind and the inevitable question lingered in my thoughts. What effect does music have on the brain and body?

In a study conducted by Neuroscientist Anne Blood, McGill University Montreal, the findings revealed that music can activate different parts of the brain, depending on what music is listened to. From the moment we were in our mother's wombs we have been receptive to sound. It reaches our brain and runs through our bodies. In its most fundamental form, sound is a field of vibration that makes up tone. An organized field of vibration gives birth to language, communication of thoughts, ideas, expression, and music.

We are all different, and thankfully so. We react differently to sounds and various forms of music, so why does music in the genre of Baroque, or composers such as Mozart touch an appealing accord on so many? The Centre for New Discoveries in Learning, have found from their research that Mozart and certain Baroque pieces recorded around sixty beats per minute, left students feeling calmer and stimulated right brain activity.

The creative part of the brain! The even one beat per second music also affects our physiological conditions and is linked to reduced blood pressure and pulse rate. Personally, I have found that it is a powerful means of relaxation and stimulation. Once in right brain mode, I have often been surprised by the expression of thoughts and ideas that I am able to write afterwards.

Don Campbell, author of nine books including his 1997 best seller, *The Mozart Effect*, provided evidence on the influence of particular rhythms and sounds on mental performance. The *Mozart Effect* shows how music can be used both psychologically as well as physiologically, from improving health to unlocking creative impulses. Mozart's music has been the most researched and is popular mainly because it is not over stimulating, the flow and structure of the rondo, sonata-allegro form are similar to the ways in which the brain becomes familiar with the development and familiarity of ideas. It helps to clarify time/space perception. That being said, it is also true for composers such as Vivaldi, Handel, and Bach. Campbell's volume three, entitled "Unlock the Creative Spirit", has been created for those who want to access the creative mind.

### **Exercise**

Sit down quietly and write about the sounds you hear around you, what sounds stand out, which ones do you block out? Now get another blank sheet, put on a piece of inspirational music. Listen to the piece quietly for two minutes and then with the music playing in the background write about your visions of how you would like your work, family life, friendships creativity to be. Envision each area to the sound of the piece of inspirational music of your choice.

### **Tips**

You are an explorer in search of inspiration and artistic insight. Go to festivals, art museums, a garden, a jazz club or a musical.

Take time for yourself. Many writers are infamous walkers. This is not only good exercise but liberates your thoughts, lifts your mood and opens your mind.

Talk to others and share experiences, you'll gather valuable insights into human nature.

### **Did you know?**

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote: "Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where he would not go."

## 6. Theme / Premise

As writers we all have stories to tell and the underlining factor that drives us to write is a theme, irrespective of genre. A theme is the general idea or insight, a moral or message that the story reveals. It is the moving force of the story and the writer's opportunity to express your deepest views or beliefs into human nature. It is carried through out the story by scenes, dramatic events and the character's journey that suggests to the reader the theme of the story. It answers the fundamental question of the reader. What's the point of the story? When discussing theme it is important to take into consideration cultural differences.

One moral insight might be acceptable and thought provoking in America for example, but unimaginable in another country. This is solved by showing events, character growths or shortcomings that leave the theme open to interpretation and an insight by the reader. Theme is therefore what makes your story emotionally significant.

Once you have become clear as to the theme of your story, you will know what belongs in the story and what doesn't, and you can explore this through your characters, scenes and symbols. The key aspect to consider when approaching theme is to make sure that your theme is shown and not made so obvious that it becomes preachy. Show, don't tell. Make the reader experience it through drama, it is the subtext of your story - what's beneath.

To understand what the theme of your story is, you need to summarize it down into one sentence. Trying to sum up the point of the story (theme) in our own words is a way to make ourselves aware of what we have understood and approached with the love and care that your story deserves. Such statements can bring into focus a rewarding story.

To give you a clearer idea of how to do this, consider the following examples:

- E.T. - believing and friendship.
- The Terminator - consequences of technology vs humanity.
- Romeo and Juliet – true love defies death

As writers we all have issues we believe in. When considering your theme, challenge that mind. Ask yourself what intrigues you, what do you love, fear or hate the most, what do you believe in? Look within yourself and develop this further by digging deeper to make your theme less obvious.

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Now write your theme in one sentence, remember this is for your eyes only.

.....

.....

.....

To sum up: Your story takes your reader on an incredible journey; your theme is what stays in their thoughts. Your theme must stay invisible throughout, concealed in the seductive art of writing, but resonate beneath the story.

#### Techniques to showing not preaching

- Make the theme into a question not a premise. Take for example the Shawshank redemption. We can turn the premise into a question and show in the story through the character's journey as an alternative approach and have the story reach its natural conclusion. Instead of showing that hope surpasses despair, we can have the reader asking, can hope overcome despair?
- Make the theme about the protagonist's inner journey, where they must endure an emotional decision in order to solve the problem. In the example of the unlikely hero, the protagonist would go from failure to success. The protagonist would have an inner need to change.
- Make each character reveal different perspectives of the theme. In my novel, the theme was shown by three different aspects.

## The Ground Work

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Each character had made different choices surrounding the theme. This created interesting angles and deepened the theme.

- Make the opposing argument stand out, this will enhance your theme. Create different points of view and enhance the drama.
- Make the theme develop through subplots, where the protagonist is moved by the different characters and the different ways they react to the theme.
- Make the protagonist show the positive aspects of the theme and the antagonist the negative aspects of the theme. For example: good versus evil, or freedom over repression.
- Make the reader feel the theme through emotion and images. Using colour in images creates an interesting perspective when showing theme, for example red symbolises passion, blue spirituality. Theme can also be shown in images using symbols, in my novel I chose a postcard which symbolised renewal, rebirth and hope. Evoke the reader's emotions to suggest the story's theme through scenes rich in anger, sorrow, loss or hope, whichever suits or heightens your theme.

### Tips

Create a value note book and jot down what is important in your life, this will change as your experiences change and develop through time. You will have a wealth of themes at your fingertips for exploring ideas for your next novel.

Create a wisdom note book with proverbs, quotations and sayings worldwide, this will get your mind wandering and asking questions.

### Did you know?

William Faulkner once said, “If you are going to write, write about human nature. It’s the only thing that doesn’t date.”

### 7. Symbols, motifs and symbolic acts

Symbols and motifs in a novel leave you the opportunity to play with scenes rich in sensory detail and help achieve your goal as a writer, to have the reader entranced by emotions and imagery that make them become part of the character. They enrich and deepen your plot. A symbol is a representation of something. It points to a world of meaning that is beyond itself, whilst a motif is an image or phrase that is repeated. These can be used in combination but the most important thing is that it remains natural and is used to deepen and strengthen the plot. Symbols and motifs must be justified, do not create a symbol or motif just for the sake of it, it will put your reader off and only jeopardize the story. If a symbol is not a natural development from the plot, character or theme, don’t use it. For symbols to work effectively it must come after the real world and grow from the character or setting and be an evolution from the plot itself. The advantage of using these representations to something bigger adds mystery and life and creates a multiplicity of meanings that get the reader asking questions.

Example:

Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It". It starts with motif the connection between water, fly fishing and religion.

"In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing. We lived at the junction of great trout rivers..."

... And ends symbolically and echo's the stories theme.

"All things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time ... I am haunted by waters."

Kaye Gibbons's novel "A Virtuous Woman" starts with the opening paragraph.

"She hasn't been dead four months and I've already eaten to the bottom of the deep freeze. I even ate the green peas. Used to I wouldn't turn my hand over for green peas."

In this symbolic gesture we see that Jack cannot survive without Ruby, and suffers from her loss.

A symbolic act is a gesture with larger significance. Take Melville's Captain Ahab in Moby Dick who snaps his tobacco pipe in deliberation and throws it away to suggest that he will let nothing distract his vengeance. Symbolic gestures can give the reader a wealth of information about the character, without long descriptive passages or dialogue.

In essence symbolic acts, motifs or symbols are those peas, the river and the violent destruction of a pipe, which led to the writer's theme.

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### 8. Research

Personal experiences play a big role when writing. What you have seen, the emotions felt and the people you know or have been in contact with. A major part of creative writing stems from your imagination, and this would be particularly so if writing a fantasy novel or science fiction novel. There will always be a time when writing, when you will need to do research. Why, to make the story plausible. When writing my novel I found myself having to research things from places, items and events such as horse jumping. I am not a huge fan of horse jumping, and I am often the one jumping away from horses, but my lead character was passionate about horses and it was part of her character journey. I needed to do the research so that when I came to write about horses, I knew what I was taking about and the reader also had confidence that as a writer I had done my job in obtaining the correct information. Writing for writings sake about topics that you don't know will damage your story and worse weaken your credibility in the mind of the reader. We all like learning, so try enhancing your story with information that will lead the reader to learning something new. Yes it's a story, but we have creative license to a certain extent. We want the reader in the story, living the protagonist, we don't want them feeling put off by feeding false unbelievable information.

One word of warning on doing your research, don't research yourself to be a professional. You want the information to be exact, but you're a writer. Research exactly what you need and leave the rest of the time for writing. It's an easy trap to get caught in the information highway and you'll spend countless hours wasted on information you probably won't even use. Your book should be well researched but only look up information for those questions that need to be answered.

Start by making a list of things you need to know and get information on only these items.

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This will be a process you can do after you after you have created your scene ladder. Then with your list, make notes on the research you have done. You can get information from:

- The library – try the children's non-fiction section. There's a wealth of information there from animals, biology, weather... to history. They are written by experts in simple terms, which is perfect for writing.
- Internet – try looking up blogs as well for useful links.
- Telephone – pick up the phone and talk to an expert in the field. Introduce yourself, tell them your writing a book and need some expert advice on the subject.

Experience first hand – try experiencing the topic you want to research. For me it was visiting a horse club. That way you can gain knowledge and experience the emotions and senses that you want to write about. It was said that Arthur Hailey spent a week on a car assembly line doing research for what turned out to be one paragraph in his book “Wheels”.

9. How many pages and chapters?

Knowing in advance how many chapters or pages you will need to write will save you valuable editing time later after the first draft of your manuscript is completed. Imagine spending months or years (your writing speed is a personal choice) writing your first draft only having to cut pages and pages of prose because you have over written, or having a final draft sorely lacking in publishers page count expectations.

Even though there are no fast rules that I have come across as to how many pages are in a chapter, there is one theory that I came across that I have found a useful guideline. A reader friendly chapter should contain 10 pages. There are two reasons why this number has been suggested. One it gets the story moving and two, it is reader friendly. Readers tend to read by chapters, and by having a 10 page chapter they can move through the novel quicker. With the fast paced lifestyle that most lead, it is predicted that most readers spend up to fifteen minutes reading a book. If they can follow the read a chapter each break, on the train, lunch or just before going to bed, they'll be hooked into the story.

Most genres have an average page count that readers are used to. Publishers print certain categories of books based around an average number of pages according to what sells best. It is therefore, especially as a beginner writer, important to know in advance the page length of your chosen genre. Imagine trying to get an agent or publisher to take on your romance novel that has 500 pages, when industry standards are 350. That's an enormous amount of editing and re-writing to do afterwards.

Genre	Av. # Pages	Av. # Chapters
Romance	350	35
Fantasy	350	35
Horror	350	35
Science Fiction	300	30
Mystery	280	28
Adventure	280	28
Pulp Romance	240	24
Western	200	20
Teen Novel	200	20

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## 10. The Ground Work Summed Up

\* Before moving on you should by now have a good basis for your novel idea and a footing to develop further. You've learnt how to get a story idea, how to develop you idea further by looking deeper into your personal experiences, engaging the reader by pulling out basic human nature elements and throwing in elements of surprise.

\* By exploring your preferences in movies and books, and going to a bookstore to read the synopsis of various books, you will get an idea of whether there is a market for your book and what genre you want to write for. This will give you an insight into your audience, and genre criteria demanded by publishers. You will have a good understanding of what genre you feel comfortable writing. Remember if you're passionate about writing your story the reader will sense this. You are a writer, and your readers will expect to read your next novel in the same genre.

\* You've seen the importance of accessing all four elements of Right Brain / Left Brain, creative mode and memory. As writer's we rely on our imagination and capacity to visualize places, people, events and scenes based on cause and effect. We play these out in our mind using right and left brain creative imagination and memory. To access the creative imagination and visual space we use our right brain, word association especially used in dialogue, we use our left.

\* Writing rituals are a personal choice, whatever works for you to relax you and get you into right hand mode. Once the structure for the story is completed, you will be writing your first draft mostly in right brain mode. Walking is one way to get into creative mode; another excellent way is by listening to music. Music not only relaxes the mind and gets you into creative mode, but it is a good tool for inspiring emotions.

When writing certain conflict scenes I have often found myself resorting to listening to music that brings out my fighting spirit. Another important ritual to adapt to is to write and read each day, even if it's just a little. As the old saying goes “practice makes perfect”, we can also learn a lot from other author's work.

\* Think about the theme or premise of your story. Telling a great story is wonderful, but we want to satisfy the reader by showing what was the point, what the story was about. The theme is always kept as an under lining argument that is looked at from all sides. It is shown and never preached.

\* Symbols, motifs and symbolic acts can enhance the story, but if not used correctly will weaken and confuse the story. Don't put one in for the sake of it, you'll jeopardize the story. If you can use them and play with them effectively they will enrich the story. They add mystery and leave an opportunity for the reader to reflect.

For your novel to have credibility, it is important to do research, it is equally important to find out the page count of your novel before beginning your first draft.

*Note: It is preferable to look up agents or publisher's websites for word count requirements, before planning your chapters and scene ladders for the chapters.*

Fill out the following from what you have gathered so far, we'll be using this to nourish the seed and watch it grow.



A large rectangular box with a solid black border, containing 20 horizontal dotted lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a template for handwriting practice.

Who have you in mind for characters?

Protagonist (lead character) Name:

.....

Character 2 .....

Character 3 .....

Character 4 .....

Character 5 .....

What is your theme / Premise?

.....

.....

Do you have a:

Symbol: .....

Motif: .....

Symbolic Act: .....

.....

.....

.....

## 11. Characters Come to Life

Writers often dwell over whether plot or character creation comes first and the classic question arises, “Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?” Clearly one cannot exist without the other; however I have chosen to start with character. Why? By knowing your characters inside out you will have a greater understanding of their psyche and how they will react to a given situation. This foresight will move the plot forward and you will see a surprising phenomenon, where characters begin to drive the plot and vice versa, they become dynamic and this is what makes your story packed with emotion.

In order for your characters to be believable you will have to get to know them fully. By studying and working on all aspects of your character, you should create characters that become unforgettable. Get to know the three dimensional aspects of your protagonist and antagonist, their education, social and psychological aspects. You will need to flesh out secondary characters as well. By doing this your characters will react to situations and others around them appropriately to their personality and beliefs. When creating your characters it is important to know what the character wants, what is his / her goal and what motivates that person. It is the same for the antagonist (the villain), as this gives strength to the story.

Character creation is not only a crafting process it is also a nurturing one, so take the time to look closely into your characters and deepen their emotional impact on the reader. Characters have to grow and change by events, this is their character arc and the story is their journey to change in perspective and growth. Characters should not just react to events, this makes them appear weak and victims, instead they should grow as a result of their choices made as a result of the events.

As writers, we craft character, plot and setting to express theme all the time. We have the characters making choices and developing in order to help show the theme of the story. By knowing your character fully you will have them making natural credible choices that suit their character profile or traits. It also helps to insure that the character can carry their role successfully.

What do readers look for in characters? When creating your characters it is important not only to map them out as you see them, but also to take the reader into consideration. We want them to have empathy for the protagonist and be rooting for them every step of the way.

Readers want:

- Characters who entertain them and have a sense of connection with.
- Characters who take them on adventures, through interesting places and dynamic events.
- Characters that are admired. They have strong goals, common sense and feelings. They also have flaws which make them easier to relate to.
- Characters who face up to complex challenges, whether succeeding or not, who are logical and responsive.
- Characters that is not predictable, that have paradoxes. The Protagonist who makes a wrong choice or something against his nature. The Antagonist who shows good sides as well as bad. Giving the antagonist some good qualities makes him more unpredictable.
- Characters that confront conflict where they have to struggle or change to succeed.
- Characters that have inner and outer conflicts.
- Characters that struggle through escalating risks and obstacles.

Every character in your story should be there for a purpose, if not don't put them in. It will only confuse the reader and harm the story. By the end of the story the character should have changed from the beginning of the book. We should see the character growth and the consequences of the character journey towards the theme.

**Exercise:**

Take your main character and turn him / her around. Change their sex, profession and make them do the opposite of what is expected from their personality.

12. Researching Characters

When doing research for your characters the first place to start is by using your experiences. What you know. Watch people in the street, how they walk and talk. We've all been to school, so we know already how a school teacher would act in class. Take that one step further and get inside the profession. Ask a teacher about their experiences, how they feel in front of students, how much preparation and work actually goes on behind the classroom walls, and what relationships do they have with their co-teachers. You will be surprised at the psychology behind the scenes.

General research is something we do every day. It is observation of the movements and sounds going on around us.

Call on what you know to get started then ask around, talk to friends and professionals to get a further insight into a profession. If your character is a fire fighter, call the local fire brigade and do some interviews or even spend a week there. Observe what goes on around you, the emotions, setting, smells, anything that stands out or you think is interesting.

Characters are influenced by numerous factors which you will have to research and become familiar with. These include culture, location, occupation, historical periods, education and ethnic backgrounds.

Ask yourself the following questions!

- What cultural background does your character have?
- Do you fully understand the culture?
- What occupation does your character do, are you familiar with that occupation?
- Where does your character live?
- Do you know the vocabulary sufficiently to create believable dialogue?

Research is a questioning time by posing those “what ifs” then observe. How does your character dress, what are they like physically? Observe details closely when visualising characters.

- What if you added a prop to you character, how does affect them, change them?
- What if you took them out of their familiar cultural zone, how would they react? Why, what is different and important that makes them act the way they do?

### 13. Creating 3D Character Skeletons

What does the character mean to you and the reader? When thinking back to Obi Wan Kenobi, Huck Finn or Captain Ahab, we instantly get an image and feel who they are. They are characters that evoke strong emotions because they have depth, complexity and are three dimensional. Their complexity makes the character arc (growth) interesting and compelling. Your story will have plot points. For example, your hero may throw a five million dollar diamond into the river as a symbolic act. However this means nothing unless we know why. What was the character's motivation? How characters react to situations and their motivation to do so drives the story forward. In order to understand our characters, we need to explore them fully both inside and out. Even if information about the character is not revealed to the reader, knowing all aspects of your character (inner and outer workings) will not only make them believable but unforgettable.

When creating my characters, I called on experiences and observation as well as using archetypes. From there they were developed deeper by delving into their emotions, back-story and motivations. Archetypes in psychological terms are fingerprints or personality types. When writing, these fingerprints are used as foundations for building well crafted fleshed out characters. They are a valuable tool for developing your character, as the essence of your character is already there. When using archetypes as a guideline into character traits, remember this is only a model at its most basic level. It is up to you, the writer, to develop and grow your characters from insight and imagination. Archetypes have their roots from different sources (mythology, Biblical) and have been used as skeletons for character creation by writers such as Shakespeare and C.S. Lewis (The Chronicles of Narnia).

The core elements in these archetypes according to Carl Jung remain part of our cultural memory and are rooted in a collective unconscious. These core elements then, give a skeleton for character traits that readers can relate to. Details on archetypes can be found in the book by Victoria Lynn Schmidt – “45 Master Characters”.

Example: Obi-Wan Kenobi (George Lucas)

The Savior or Wise Old Man (savior, redeemer, guru): personification of the spiritual principle, representing "knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness, and intuition on the one hand, and on the other, moral qualities such as goodwill and readiness to help, which makes his 'spiritual' character sufficiently plain. . . . Apart from his cleverness, wisdom, and insight, the old man . . . is also notable for his moral qualities. What is more, he even tests the moral qualities of others and makes gifts dependent on this test. . . . The old man always appears when the hero is in a hopeless and desperate situation from which only profound reflection or a lucky idea . . . can extricate him. But since, for internal and external reasons, the hero cannot accomplish this himself, the knowledge needed to compensate the deficiency comes in the form of a personified thought, i.e., in the shape of this sagacious and helpful old man" - C.G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

### Exercise

What Archetype do you see them as? Do research into your main character. You can find a wealth of information on the internet, sites such as author Tami Cowden (Heroes and Heroines: Sixteen Master Archetypes)

<http://www.tamicowden.com/archetypes.htm>



In order to start fleshing out your archetype and create a 3 dimensional character, we need to define their physiology, sociology and psychology.

Start by completing the following list then add what comes to mind.

Character Name: .....

(Keep in mind that names have meanings and often reflect character traits. Don't make names complicated to pronounce or decipher as it stops the reader and takes them out of the story)

PHYSIOLOGY

Sex: .....

Age: .....

Height: .....

Weight: .....

Hair (color / type): .....

Eyes (shape / color / problems): .....

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Nose Shape:.....

Ears: .....

Skin Type (flaws / perfections):

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Posture: .....

Appearance:

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Neat or Messy: .....

Physical defects:

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Health:

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Birthmarks: .....

Heredity (e.g. Back troubles / sensitive to sunlight):

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SOCIOLOGY

*American Heritage Dictionary*

- 1. The study of human social behavior, especially the study of the origins, organization, institutions, and development of human society.*
- 2. Analysis of a social institution or societal segment as a self-contained entity or in relation to society as a whole.*

Class: .....

Occupation:.....

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Education:

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Home Life:

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Family Members:

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IQ: .....

Religion: .....

Hobbies: .....

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Community Activities: .....

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Political Views: .....

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Religious beliefs: .....

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Amusements: .....

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PSYCHOLOGY

*American Heritage Dictionary*

1. *The science that deals with mental processes and behavior.*
2. *The emotional and behavioral characteristics of an individual, group, or activity: the psychology of war.*
3. *Subtle tactical action or argument used to manipulate or influence another: He used poor psychology on his employer when trying to make the point.*
4. *Philosophy The branch of metaphysics that studies the soul, the mind, and the relationship of life and mind to the functions of the body.*

Love Life:

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Morality:

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Ambitions:

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Frustrations:

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Motivation:

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Temperament:

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Attitude:

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Complexes :

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Superstitions:

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Imagination / Fantaisies:

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Fears / Phobias:

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Desires:

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Animal lover: .....

Fascinations:

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### Tips

- Observation and imagination work together to create unforgettable characters. Observe people in restaurants, train stations, parties... look for idiosyncrasies, their personalities.
- Integrate experience, what you know.

- Make physical description evocative. Physical description should imply other aspects of the character, let your imagination and that of the reader visualize.
- Characters are consistent – believable. Their actions and reactions must follow suit.
- Give your characters paradoxes and flaws. Nobody likes a perfect hero. People are illogical and unpredictable, that is what makes them interesting.
- Add deep values and emotions that make them unique. Look into psychological complexities. What are their inner and outer conflicts?
- Add a sense of humour to your character.
- The hero / heroine should be worthy and believably capable of taking on the nemesis.
- Mark your character with distinguishing characteristics such as a tick, outlandish clothing or speech pattern.

It is essential to show physical aspects of your character by allowing the reader to create their own visual image. Your character bio and physical aspects are for your eyes only, to enable you to know your character inside out. Physical description should only be written where or if necessary. In Steven King's novel, "On Writing" he says that he doesn't care about character details, how they dress or in-depth descriptions of the appearance of the character. This takes away the key element to creative writing; imagination, that of both author and reader. Take Agatha Christie's characters for example; Hercule Poirot is "a Belgian with an egg-shaped head and passion for order." Think about Agatha Christie's example. Use the character bio and show the character using your imagination with limited detail.

#### 14. Character Arc (Growth) – The protagonist

Who is the protagonist? The protagonist is the person who is forced to learn and grow in your story while echoing the theme. It is the main character who we empathize with and are rooting for.

Once you have established the protagonist's type, go into depth and explore their traits. People are multi-dimensional with many layers to explore and develop. These include positive, neutral and negative traits. A protagonist or antagonist (villain) that is all good or evil is predictable and at the least unconvincing. Give your character individuality through their views, beliefs, attitudes and values. Add another unpredictable dimension to your protagonist by adding flaws, these help add tension and make the character more human. Flaws can include fears, resentment, jealousy, emotional troubles or manic obsessions as seen in Monk.

The next three points are important for developing your character whether protagonist or antagonist. They are what breathe life into your character and plot. Your character has to have.

- A goal - What he / She wants.
- Motivation – what the character needs.
- What's at stake if the character fails?

What the character wants in the story forces him to make choices and overcome obstacles. The character must have one goal, the thing he wants the most so the reader can follow the journey. What inspires him / her to overcome challenges in order to get what they want? We are all motivated for different reasons to achieve what we want. This motivation pushes us forward even at times to our limits.

It controls our way of thinking and behavior. In a thriller for example, the characters need would be survival.

Try taking this one step further and dig deeper into the psychology of the character. What if the need does not coincide with the goal? Melvin's (As Good As it Gets) need for love contradicts his wanting to be alone. The contradiction makes the story interesting and the reader can follow the intricacies of character growth. If Melvin had decided to stay true to his want of being alone, he would have given up on Carol and ignored Simon. Instead we see a humoristic and emotional story following Melvin's growth and his choice to follow his need for love. In his character growth (arc) we experience paradoxes in his character that make him complex and unpredictable, which make us wonder what he will do next.

When the character chooses goal over need or vice versa we have the following outcome:

- Protagonist →
- a) Goal over Need = unhappy ending
  - b) Need over Goal = happy ending
  - c) Goal plus Need = happy ending

What your character has to lose is what's at stake. What does the protagonist risk gaining or losing? The character must be passionate about his goal otherwise the reader will not empathize with them.

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The stakes help create rising tension. What is the character willing to sacrifice to arrive at the goal, what happens if he / she fails. Basically if the stakes aren't there the reader will not care if your protagonist succeeds or fails. The protagonist should be proactive, not necessarily all of the time, readers don't encourage passive characters and it leads to an un-compelling story.

How your protagonist develops and grows emotionally is what is known as the character arc. It is the psychological journey for example of conquering a fear, obsession or flaw, anything that stops him (his inner conflict) from achieving the goal. Change creates interest and keeps the reader involved with the character. It also adds conflict by showing the reader why the events changed the character and what they learned in order to grow.

The change can be physical, emotional or even behavioral, but the arc must show a change. In order for the character arc to be believable, you must consider when looking at plot, if the arc:

- Is it too sudden?
- Is it too exaggerated?
- Is it too weak?
- Is it gradual?
- Is it realistic?

Characters that grow provide inspiration to the reader, they give hope that they too can succeed.

## 15. Characters Come Together

You have a visual image of your characters and explored their emotional aspects and motivations. Now it's time to build further. Memorable characters are well crafted and deserve the attention, passion and creation time.

### The protagonist's back story

The back story is the characters past, where he came from before the story begins. Back story is used to show what the character has to lose and experiences that make them who they are. It could include something traumatic from the past, a trigger to a phobia or the perfect life which becomes in peril. Explore the back story of your character and make it intriguing. It could be a mysterious past where clues are left within the story then revealed at some stage. It could be the perfect scenario at the beginning of the story that sets the stage to show what the character has to lose or the introduction to the bonding character.

Whatever the past of the protagonist, it should always be shown, and never told out right, by including it in scenes. Telling the back story in dialogue weakens its importance making it insignificant and a passing fact. It is not always necessary to show back story. Your knowledge of the character and the way in which they will drive the story will indicate whether to include it or not.

Everything in nature has a connection and it is the same with our characters. It is not enough to have a great story idea, strong characters and a compelling theme. All of these elements need to be connected.

- What are the connections with the other characters?
- What is the inciting incident that pulls your protagonist and bonding character together?
- What is the connection between protagonist and antagonist?

The protagonist not only learns through choices and conflicts, but through other characters. When looking at theme we explored all aspects of the theme, the different arguments to support theme. Another way in which the character grows is in the relationship with the bonding character that shows theme and helps the protagonist grow.

### Bonding Character

The bonding character ideally should be **unlike** the protagonist. This makes character arc and emotional relations interesting and hooks the reader. The bonding character follows the protagonist's journey and should have equal mention as the protagonist. Readers learn information and get involved in the relationship between the bonding character and the protagonist as their relationship grows. In general the protagonist and bonding character are thrown together by an inciting incident by the antagonist or involving the antagonist.

The hero and bonding character work together, grow and resonate theme to conquer the antagonist.

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Depending on genre, the bonding character can also be the antagonist. This applies to *The Person in Peril* (the bonding character's purpose turns to destroying the hero) or *Romantic Comedy* (struggle between hero and bonding character).

In these cases the bonding character is not a third character.

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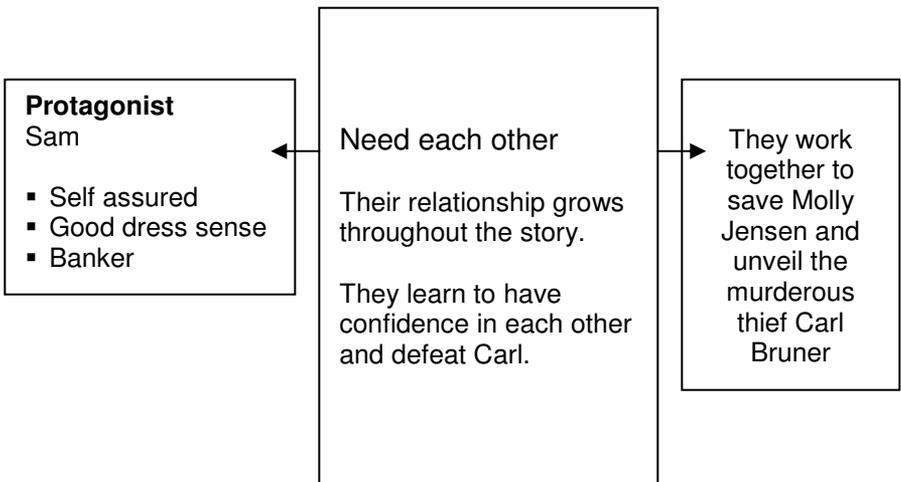
Example: The movie “Ghost”

**Antagonist**  
Carl Bruner

Forces

Sam Wheat and Oda-Mae Brown together after Sam is killed

Inciting incident – Sam is murdered



The Antagonist

Antagonist is as strong as the protagonist.

Antagonist is similar in character to protagonist.

Difference            Moral position

The antagonist, protagonist and bonding characters come together through a bonding event. An inciting event sets the story in motion and connects the characters together. The antagonist is the opposing or attacking force to the protagonist and the opposing force of the theme. It can be in the form of a single person, a leader of a group, several people, a force of nature, or family members set against a love of the protagonist. Unlike the protagonist, the antagonist has come from a strong position even before the story begins. At this stage he/she has the greater force.

The protagonist is like the antagonist, they have the same goals, though their motivations are different. The main character is not only threatened or put in jeopardy by the antagonist, but they learn and grow from the antagonist as well. The antagonist has different sets of values to the hero and is consciously willing to do anything it takes to get to his/her goal.

The antagonist is stronger than the protagonist at the start of the story but as the protagonist grows (character arc) the antagonist is threatened and weakened, but both characters must be worthy of each other. If the protagonist does not have the strength to overcome an attacking force the final outcome will be unbelievable.

### Supporting Characters

Stories include more than the protagonist, antagonist and bonding character, they also include supporting characters. These characters help, either by positive or negative actions, in the protagonist's growth. For example a false friend could help the hero / heroine come to a stage of awakening.

Other supporting characters include:

- The best friend
- The lover or The rival
- The wise person / mentor
- The pessimist or The joker

Supporting characters add color to the story, memorable moments as well as conflict. When looking at plot, scenes and subplots visualize where you can place the supporting characters to enhance the story through emotions. The theme of the story is hidden in motifs in scenes involving the supporting characters, whilst the protagonist is the supporting element and the antagonist the negative.

There comes a point where an amazing phenomenon happens and characters begin to drive the story themselves. Let the characters have a life of their own and breathe life into the story, however remember that supporting characters are there to support not take over the main character's role. The story and characters must remain balanced. Supporting characters are there for a purpose, if they don't have one, don't use them. Before including them, ask yourself if they are necessary to the story or protagonist. Adding too many supporting characters confuses the story. Choose characters that help define the protagonist and their importance in the story.

## 16. Characters – Show, Don't Tell

How you the writer reveal characters on the page determines how the reader emotionally connects with them. This is a crucial process to create the desired reactions you intend for your story. The character traits, goals, motivations, flaws and growth must be shown through-out the story. This makes your characters jump off the page and into the hearts of the reader, whether with empathy for the protagonist or hatred for the antagonist.

We want the reader to experience emotions and in order to do this we must show our characters living the story, how they feel and how they react. This is done through their actions, dialogue, and choices made from dramatic scenes that reveal personality and character growth.

### Character Description and Contrast

Once again, your character name should have meaning. It should also be easily pronounced by the reader. Complicated names stop the reader and attention is taken away from the story.

Giving contrast to the character reveals not only their traits, but can also offer an opportunity to explore different aspects of theme. Contrast can also been shown by supporting or bonding character to show the protagonist's personality. Take for example the successful sitcom "The Odd Couple". We see differences in character traits by comparisons. It can also be used as a form of conflict in the case of the antagonist – for example with contrasting values.

Contrast can reveal character by:

- Contrast with other characters - “The Odd Couple”  
“As Good As it Gets”
- Environment – Cast away
- Contrast within (inner conflict)

When writing about the supporting character in my book, the introduction of the character is shown by a scene where Rose first sees him, his character description is minimal letting the reader create their own visual image.

“...a man inside was taking my photograph. I watched him peel back his wraparound shades, placing the midnight-blue lenses squarely on his shaven head. He let the camera drop slightly and stared at me unflinchingly. “

“...the indelible image of the man’s staring eyes set hard against his sharp features.”

We can see from this scene that this man is somebody not to mess with, and poses a threat to the protagonist. He is calm, self assured and a professional who at this stage is stronger than the protagonist. This is the only physical description of the character in the novel.

Exercise: Write down in the following table the description of the character traits that suit the scenario, then how you could show these in a scene using limited description, rather the actions to show character.

Character Traits	How you could show character traits in a Scene
<p>Your character has a moral decision to make concerning his best friend.</p> <p>(E.g. - strong moral values / protective of his friends)</p>	
<p>Environment: Your character is in a foreign country and his car breaks down in the middle of no-where. He has no mechanical knowledge. How does he get out of it?</p>	
<p>Inner conflict (a fear that he has to overcome)</p>	

When describing characters use imagination and remember that “less is more”. To coin a phrase, “it’s quality that counts, not quantity.” Avoid cliché adjectives such as beautiful nasty, thin, and pretty; Let the reader create their own vision of the character unless it is vital to the plot. If you need to describe the character make the description jump off the page.

Take Steve Baranick’s description of Bridget Gregory for example.

“Bitch-ringmaster-goddess.”

He says it all with three words. Here we get an instant vision of who the character is and her inner workings.

We can show our character values, traits, flaws or features via:

- Other characters – how they react around the protagonist and how are they affected by him / her. What is their emotional relation? How do other characters talk about the protagonist?
- Dialogue is an effective tool to show the character’s education, motives, desires, background...
- Actions and decisions. By putting your character in conflict situations or dilemmas and seeing their reactions. We all react differently to similar situations. What would your character do when pushed to the limits? Why?
- Mannerisms, idiosyncrasies or props. Giving props can reveal aspects of character traits. A character who always wears faded jeans with a black crunched trench-coat and t-shirt gives us an instant perspective. Inspector Dreyfuss’s eye twitching when he thinks of Inspector Clouseau, shows his anxiety and dislike for him. Simple jests can reveal a wealth of information.

Growth and The Craft – Nurturing and sculpting

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Use the character sheet on the next page, and pin this on the wall next to your desk while writing to remind you of the structure and relationships of the characters you have created.

	Protagonist	Antagonist	Bonding Character
Name			
Inner conflict			
Outer conflict			
Strengths			
Weakness			
Flaws			
Moral view of the theme			
How is he/she most like the protagonist			

How is he/she different from the protagonist?			
What is the motivation?			
What is at stake?			
What happens if he/she fails?			

Supporting Characters

Name	Relation / significance

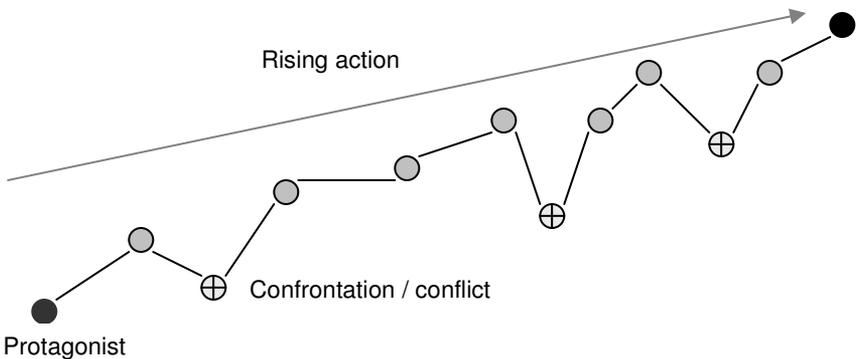
17 Plot and Structure

The Plot Outline

This is where the fun begins, the crafting side! We will look at what plot is, the various techniques and then you'll create your first draft "plot outline" for your novel. At this stage I call it a first draft plot outline, because after we have asked our "What if" questions you may want to change or fine tune certain aspects.

What is plot? Plot is all about the story; it is the framework that holds all the pieces together. Plot and structure serve as a vehicle that will transport your reader on an incredible journey... the story! In a basic plot format we have several crucial elements; the main characters (the protagonist / antagonist), the story question (what's at stake), confrontation or conflict, and the climax.

The chart below shows how this basic plot format works.



You want to show the reader what the story is about, what is happening, have them caring about your character and most certainly keep them reading. I mentioned here “show.” We are writers, story tellers or more importantly story showers. We want to engage the readers by using their imaginations. It is their experience and each reader is different and diverse, so we want to show not tell.

Now we can start building the fundamentals of the framework. Start by completing the following outline information.

Protagonist	Name
Theme	What is the underlining theme?
Motif / symbol or Symbolic action	
Confrontation	The hero / heroine are confronted by .... And why
Climax	That wow ending

Point to consider on plot:

Plot is a process not an object. Plot is dynamic, not static.

Structure is the form and shape of your story that is designed to arouse emotions. Like character creation, it is the skeleton of story that will be fleshed out through acts and scenes. Each piece needs to be creative, unique then pieced together. They are the bones that form your completed story. As discussed earlier, all stories have three movements; beginning, middle and end. These differ in their contents, but the basic element (as the skeleton) remains the same. The importance is how the story is fleshed out, the inner workings that make story unique and emotionally intriguing. As seen in the previous diagram, it rises in tension until final climax.

The three act structure is also used for more rising tension, as shown below.

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3
Plot	setup	conflict	resolution
Character	Inciting element	purpose	Growth / change
Emotion	attraction	tension	fulfilment
Theme	subject	argument	understanding

We have the basic plot outline. From here these elements will be used to create the structure (our building blocks), the timing to raise the action and hold the reader captivated to the ending of growth, fulfilment and understanding of theme. We'll now look into the Three Act structure a little closer.

### Act 1 – Beginning:

Presents the story and establishes tone. It introduces the hero or heroine's world, the setting and tone, introduces the opposition and the inciting incident, that which compels the character and reader to move to act 2.

The key to the first act is to grab your reader, but remember that tension rises, so don't start with such a bang that you can't maintain and keep rising tension through the following acts. Though-out your chapters you'll want your readers held in suspense and establish anticipation so that the reader is forced to read on. The first act serves to create mood and desired emotions that you want the reader to experience. It contains the introduction of the protagonist and the issues that face the character. It is the stage to captivate the reader's attention and have them intrigued. In order to do this the opening sentence and hook are vital. In the first act the inciting event needs to be introduced where the point of no return is established. It is the act that drives the story forward. The first act also establishes setting.

I had read a novel that was highly acclaimed, however after the first three chapters I put the book down and haven't touched it since. The reason for this was quite simple. I had no idea who the protagonist was or who the supporting characters were and why they were there. Worse, I had no idea of setting, where I was supposed to be. The setting had moved to so many different places within the first three chapters, I had no sense of where the main character was supposed to be. The introduction of the protagonist with over ten supporting characters was confusing. I was lost in a soup of names, not knowing who was who and why. The opening sentence had a hook but fell flat afterwards.

Even though a great opening sentence shows attribute of a good writer, it is essential to keep the momentum rising. The opening sentence must bond reader to character and drama.

### Act 2 – Middle:

This is where the protagonist faces obstacles and strives forward to achieve his goal. This is the largest act, where tension rises and needs to be well paced. The question needs to be maintained whether the protagonist will succeed in obtaining the goal. The middle act is where the stakes are raised, tension is at its greatest and conflict and urgency combined keep the reader in the story. In this act, emotional impact needs to be raised higher, through obstacles, twists and complications. This act also contains a crises point, a decision forcing the protagonist to become active as opposed to reactive. This is known as the midpoint. After the midpoint, the tension continues to rise, until the character is faced with the climax at the end of act 2. The purpose of the climax here, is the put questions in the mind of the reader and have them burning to read on. The climax is the dark moment, were antagonist appears unbeatable. A fork in the road, that forces the protagonist to make choices.

### Act 3 – Ending:

The final act is about resolution, where the protagonist reaches his or her goals. In this act it is important to have the emotional stakes raised to a point where the ending is both unpredictable, but rewarding to the reader. The protagonist recovers changes and moves upwards in his character arc, until achieving his/her goal and having undergone change. Inner and outer conflicts are resolved. It is imperative to keep momentum and not rush this section.

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You have created intrigue and emotional impact for your reader to have them rooting for the protagonist, now is the time to reward expectations with an unforgettable ending. All loose unresolved questions or conflicts need to be answered and the theme validated. It must continue in a logical flow. Even though the outcome may be predictable (readers want hero's to win) the way in which it is achieved must be a surprise to the reader and therefore make an impression.

“Memory and intelligence are closely connected, for unless we remember we cannot understand. If by the time the queen dies we have forgotten the existence of the king we shall never make out what killed her. The plot-maker expects us to remember, we expect him to leave no loose ends. Every action or word in a plot ought to count; it ought to be economical and spare; even when complicated it should be organic and free from dead matter.” E.M Forster “Aspects of the Novel”

### Techniques and devices to raising emotions (examples in the first 2 acts)

Remember these two fundamental points when considering your plot and structure:

- You, the writer, feel passionate about your story so look to sharing that passion with your readers.
- Let your characters breathe life, let them make their own choices.

## Act 1

- The inciting incident is where interest is created and where you grab the reader’s attention. It is the bonding event that joins protagonist, antagonist and bonding character together. Until this moment your hero does not know of the existence of the antagonist or even bonding character (if they have never met before). It is the incident that puts the story in place and changes everything for the protagonist, putting them into action.
- Introduce the goal slowly. Telling the goal outright takes away from the suspense. Desire creates anticipation. The goal is not just for the antagonist or protagonist. Everybody wants something, and the reader wants to know what and why.
- Engage your reader in the first three chapters. Use a unique opening sentence, either by a symbolic act or captivating idea.
- The setting should be introduced in the first act so the reader can establish place, time and mood. You can always take your character out of the setting at a later stage if you wish, to create the “fish out of water” effect.
- Your protagonist needs to be introduced, as well as antagonist and any other relevant characters. Don’t overfill the first chapters with all the characters as this will only confuse the reader. The character that you have created, if done successfully, should be unique and therefore hold the readers interest. By pacing your story, you will be able to reveal different layers of the characters that will arouse interest and the required reaction of the characters through-out the story.
- You should have your reader caring about the protagonist in the first act, establish the threat and leave the reader uncertain of the outcome.

- Introduce the concept of the story idea. It should be unique and fresh.
- Announce what's at stake.

## Act 2

- Create tension through conflict, obstacles that the protagonist has to face that evoke emotions. Be aware not to create similar conflicts, but vary them, leaving questions unresolved until a later scene or chapter.
- Raise the stakes both for the protagonist, bonding character and antagonist. The larger the challenge the protagonist faces, the more the reader wants to know how they will get out of the situation.
- Add changes both internal and external. This is part of the character arc and keeps the reader hooked.
- Set up dramatic questions so that the reader is obliged to make sense of what is happening and look for answers. Don't put too many questions in at one time, keep them running, and spread out otherwise it will become too confusing.
- Force the protagonist to face their fears or put them in a moral dilemma.
- Increase revelation and jeopardy. Reinforce what is at stake if the protagonist fails.

### Notes - General

- Delve deep and explore emotions that readers want to experience.
- Add back story if appropriate to the story. This could be character (character's past) or situation (point in time).
- Always keep in mind cause and effect. One action has a reaction to somebody. These should provoke meaningful emotions to the reader. Don't leave actions open ended or unresolved.
- Withholding information is a tension builder.
- Look for power emotions, such as curiosity, suspense, hope and fear.
- The ticking clock effect works well adding drama, by having to complete a task before a given time.
- Control the balance between hooks and resolutions otherwise the reader will be frustrated and not continue. Don't leave the reader hanging in suspense too long waiting for an answer.
- Setup events where the character's motives are not clear.

## Character, Plot and Structure

F. Scott Fitzgerald said, “Plot is character and character plot.”

Who your characters are will shape how they react, if they are capable of overcoming obstacles and are they captivating enough to move the story emotionally.

From the plot aspects and structure, the characters add flesh, muscles and movement to the story. These built out elements come in scenes and they often come to life in free writing sessions, under the shower, long walks or doing the dishes, where you character suddenly gives you the response you were looking for.

The key is to let the character writer and live the story.

Let yourself feel the story and see the acts in motion in your mind. Don't over plot, let the characters guide you. This may appear to be a simplistic approach, but it is essential to having a story and characters that ring true and are not solely plot driven action reaction. It is the characters that matter most to creating a memorable novel.

Plot gives us an appropriate order of events which is paced in a logical flow. If your plot isn't working, play around with it, replace events or cut others.

18      Creating Your Plot skeleton

Part 1

Using your writer's ritual, get yourself into right brain creative mode. Think about your characters and your original idea for the story. Taking each act individually, write non stop for five minutes everything that comes to mind and what you want to convey keeping in mind the following:

Title

Setting

Inciting incident

Theme

Characters, who, what and why

What are the motives (goal)?

What's at stake?

Are there props?

Symbolic acts, symbols, motifs

Rising tension

Character Arc, how do they grow?

Climax / Resolution

Take the Plot / Character / Emotion and Theme table on page 42 as a guide before starting. Jot down some notes for yourself beside the table before free writing each act.

## Part 2

“... writers should mix themselves up in their material and be rolled over and over by it; they should not try to subdue any longer, they should hope to be subdued, to be carried away. As for plot – to plot with the plot! Break it up, boil it down;” E.M. Forster “Aspects of the Novel”

Read back the piece you have free written for each act.

Take each act and write on place cards (see next page) the act number and the action or event that you have written. You can copy these and cut them out, keep some blank ones to write on during this process.

On a large table or on the floor, start piecing these together as you would a jigsaw puzzle. See the characters in action and visualize their responses, actions or emotions.

Are there holes in the plot? Are all the hooks answered, does the plot need more spice? You will be able to scrap events, move them around or even add new ones that make the plot flow evenly and be well paced.

As E.M. Forster suggests, break the plot up, and more importantly get your characters into the action, visualize, run movie scenes through you mind. The characters will do the rest. This part should be done passionately and with as much time as needed. Take a step back, walk away from it and come back later.

Example:

Act Number: 2

Character: Nathan (bonding character)

Plot Point: Nathan and James have only two hours before the bank closes. They're on foot and won't make it on time. Nathan has to convince James (the lawyer) he has no choice but to steal a car.

Act Number:

Character:

Plot Point:

### Part 3

Once you have well paced resolved plot points, note these down on the following sheet and break them down into chapters. You will be using these next as a guideline for your chapter and scene ladders.

From the genre you have selected, you will know how many chapters you will need. Keep in mind that some chapters will be longer than others. When writing, most novels tend to be added in chapter length, don't worry this will be addressed when revising and editing your first draft.

The key element at this stage is to get it all down in your first draft. Now, divide the plot points into three acts keeping in mind that act 2 will be longer. Number and name all chapters.

#### Example - Act 1

Chapter N°	Plot Points
1	Inciting incident. Rose receives a mysterious postcard.
1	Rose is shaken by a man taking her photograph. He lets the camera drop and speeds off.
1	Introduction of Kevin, her husband. He is not all he appears to be.

Plot and the Craft – The Blueprint

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Act 1

Chapter N°	Plot Points

Act 2

Chapter N°	Plot Points

## 19      Scenes

Scenes are the showing part of the story. They show the reader what is going on, what the character is doing, what they want and attributes. With scenes the readers can visualize character interactions, movement and surroundings. They are the moving force of the story, the place where actions are unfolding at a particular moment in the chapter. Scenes incorporate action and or dialogue happening in real time, propelling the story forward via setting mood, tone, characters and setting. The opening scene is of particular importance as it is used to orient the reader. The reader must be able to know where the story takes place and who the characters are.

Scenes show what events are happening, characters interactions, surroundings and thoughts. The reader doesn't need to know every single detail, but enough to get a clear idea of what the characters are doing in the scene, what they want and what's at stake. They are important to dramatize important events that are essential to plot movement. Other story points that are less important are incorporated in narrative.

Goals of a scene:

- Advance Story
- Introduce character
- Develop character
- Character movement
- Show where the character is (Setting)
- Show conflict
- Create suspense and tension
- Introduce questions (hooks)
- Give information
- Develop theme
- Create atmosphere

When considering whether to use a scene or not (within your plot points/ chapter sheets), it is important to ask if the scene has a purpose. If not, don't put it in. It should be used to capture the reader's interest. By adding hooks in scenes the writer can set up questions that need answers. This moves the story forward and grabs the reader's attention. This is usually done at the end of a scene. Sometimes the situation can get worse for the character, a twist or complication. The end goal is to have the reader asking, what will happen next and what will the protagonist do?

Scenes also add texture by showing movement, colour and sounds. It sets the atmosphere. Characters are never stagnant. Flesh out the movements, the sounds colours and smells in the sounds and capture the details that places your reader exactly where you want them to be and see.

Going back to your plot points and chapter numbers take each chapter and free write scenes that you want to incorporate by using the sheets below. You can add to the scenes later. Underneath the scenes write down the remaining plot points that will be written in narrative. The purpose of this sheet is to give you a scene ladder for each chapter. You will have at the end a plot and scene outline for every chapter.

The advantage of using this

- complete story outlined
- your plot will be well constructed
- following the chapter sheets and scene ladder you shouldn't have writers block
- You will be able to concentrate on creative free writing
- Your writing will not jump all over the place

Once you have filled in the sheets for each chapter, make a photocopy then cut up each scene and plot point to make paper cards. Make sure you add the chapter number on each scene and plot point card when cutting these up. Again, on a large table or the floor layout the cards like a jigsaw puzzle per chapter (as you did for Plot). Standing back, read through each chapter and see if plot points or scenes, need taking out. Do you need to move them to another chapter to get the pacing correct? Are all the hooks or questions answered? Do you need to enrich the story further by adding more scenes?

Play around with it for a while, then take a break and re-look at your final version. Once happy with the story outline write down the scenes and plot points per chapter again using the sheet and keep these next to you when writing. You will now be able to get into right brain mode and write your story knowing what to write from your blueprint.

**Important note: YOU NOW HAVE YOUR BLUEPRINT FOR YOUR FIRST DRAFT!**

Your book will be structured, plot checked, then doubled checked by scene and narrative checks. Your chapter sheets will guide you through the end of the novel.

Remember: Your characters will lead the story so feel free to make changes to your scene ladders per chapter, but make sure that all issues are resolved in following chapters.

Before moving on to write your First Draft, make sure you read through to end of the guide.

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Chapter 1	Scenes
Scene 1	
Scene 2	
Scene 3	
Narrative plot points	

## 20 The Writer's Voice

Writers have their own voice when writing. It is your unique style that sets you apart. Good writing is more than “write like you talk”, good writing comes from a strong voice in conversation; one that is that of a skilled raconteur. It is the music of language, the vernacular, rhythm and cadences. Strong conversation creates a relationship between writer and reader. As a writer you must listen to your audible voice within using the vast resources available, conversational English, literary English, colloquial and professional. Voice can come from the narrator or true to the characters.

Example: Mark Twain – Huckleberry Finn

Mark Twain's voice is a mix of literary and Missouri colloquial exploring the American vernacular with Missouri dialect.

Our voice is unpretentious and personal. It is exploratory and gives a sense of being. Using overly literary English is off putting to the reader if your genre is romance for example. So listen to your voice and that of the character. Make sure it fits your genre.

### Tips

- Read your sentence aloud. Delete words that don't flow or roll off the tongue.
- When writing remember you are telling by conversing with the reader.
- Watch out for over use of nouns ending in -tion, verbs ending in -ize and run ons of nouns.
- Watch out for cadences (flow of rhythm)

### Exercise

Get yourself into the spirit by play acting one of your favorite characters telling a dramatic event that has just past to their confident the bonding character. You could be Yoda explaining something to Luke Skywalker, or Sam Wheat (Ghost) to Oda-Mae Brown (the psychic). Start by taking down some notes on key points then act aloud your scene! Most importantly take on their voice and fascinate your attentive listener.

## 21 Flow and Music

### Lyricism

Lyricism works on feelings and associations with words so that they convey deep emotions and thoughts. This is where your imagination comes in to add music with words.

It comes in five forms:

1. Connotation - secondary meaning of a word or expression; A possible connotation of “home” is “a place of warmth, comfort.”
2. Imagery - the formation of mental images, figures, or likenesses of things, or of such images collectively: *the dim imagery of a dream.*

3. Metaphor and simile - a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in “A mighty fortress is our God.” Simile - a figure of speech in which two unlike things are explicitly compared, as in “she is *like* a rose.”
4. Symbol - something used for or regarded as representing something else; a material object representing something, often something immaterial; emblem, token, or sign.
5. Analogy - a similarity *between* like features of two things, on which a comparison may be based: the analogy between the heart and a pump.

Lyrical writing depends on strong images and detail, but metaphors can also be used in single words. An example of this would be J. Michael Kennedy’s account of a 1989 plane crash as a “cart-wheeling fireball.”

The use of cart-wheeling adds a terrifying image. Metaphors must be original and have a logical sense that the reader can relate to, used where appropriate and always with the story in mind.

Don’t throw them in for the sake of it. Use metaphors that are from your creation and avoid clichés, they will not give you credibility as a writer.

Lyricism doesn’t have to be heavy. It can be light and even used to add humor to your novel.

## Melody

Words have acoustic effects and combined correctly together create a harmonious melody. In order to create a melodic flow we can use devices such as:

- Assonance - rhyme in which the same vowel sounds are used with different consonants in the stressed syllables of the rhyming words, as in *penitent* and *reticence*.
- Consonance - the correspondence of consonants, esp. those at the end of a word, in a passage of prose or verse.
- Rhyme - identity in sound of some part, especially the end, of words or lines of verse.
- Alliteration - the commencement of two or more words of a word group with the same letter, as in *apt alliteration's artful aid*.
- Onomatopoeia - the formation of a word, as *cuckoo* or *boom*, by imitation of a sound made by or associated with its referent.

## Meanings of Onomatopoeia

i = small

fl = awkward

sh = soft

in, -ing, -ong = bell like

sn = nose

little, slim, kid, shrimp

flitter, flounder, flip-flop

hush, gush, rush, slush

bong, bing, ring, pong, gong

sneeze, sniff, snuff, snout

Writers such as Dr Seuss and Rudyard Kipling used this technique.

Example: Rudyard Kipling “Rikki-tikki-tavi”

“This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bathroom of the big bungalow in Segawlee cantonment.”

As with lyricism, techniques in melody should only be used where necessary and when the sound and sense is natural. If over used it adds confusion and blocks the reader. The music of words should be used to enrich not confuse. Sounds give sensuality and emotions when used in a natural flow.

### Rhythm

Rhythm as in music is beat, timing – *lento* or *molto forte*. In poetry the meter (arrangement of sounds into set patterns) units are known as “feet” and consist of at least two syllables. Shakespeare sonnets often used iambic pentameter; five foot lines. In prose it is unpredictable. The meter flows within lines and words. It is a pattern of long and short sentences weaving in and out. In order to get a sense for the rhythm it is important to read out aloud your paragraphs. Ask yourself if it flows naturally, does it roll easily off the tongue, does it ring musically, rhythmically? Your writing should be a pleasure to the ear.

### **Tips**

Read some novels by Virginia Wolfe. She used this technique successfully, interweaving rhythm in long and short punctuated sentences.

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.”  
William Strunk and E.B White – Elements of style

### Exercise

Write a description about your favorite place. Mix sentences, make some longer than others, then read aloud to check the flow. Read other author’s description and see how they achieve this.

Write a paragraph using only one syllable words of your protagonist’s hobby.

## 22 Flow and Music Summed Up

To sum up, using techniques as mentioned previously can enrich your writing, giving harmonious undertones to your writing. In order to achieve this, it is important to use these where applicable and only if it flows naturally. To develop an ear for the music of words, read poetry aloud, novels and your writing. Pick up a Tom Clancy novel, read Shakespeare or Dante.

When looking at sentences be simple but go deep, take risks and use that writer’s imagination. Look for words and language that create unforgettable images. Sentences don’t necessarily have to be filled with detailed description to be effective.

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A combination of long and short sentences can also have instant impact. Mix literary prose with the vernacular, the colloquial – give familiarity, make words punchy. Dig deep and look at the beauty of words, the resonance and meaning to create your sentences. Don't over use words and string them together for the sake of it. Your writing will be verbose and confusing. Be original and make them flow musically with the two P's – Passion and Personality.

As a writer, I take joy and great care in the words I choose. The nineteenth century essayist, Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "All words are pegs to hang ideas on." Words are chosen to give voice and rhythm but primarily to give power and emotion to the theme of the story. Words are chosen for simplicity and beauty, carefully thought out. Use words that express coherently your idea.

Stories are an interaction between writer and reader, everything you write needs to ring true. "

Readers share the journey with you the writer. Take the time and passion in your story to share an indelible journey with your readers.

- Prose must be rhythmically pleasant
- Avoid run-ons
- Make sure your sentences make sense
- Avoid repeating character names too often or he/she
- Avoid repetition of words. Use your thesaurus
- Avoid over use of alliteration, resonance
- Read your writing out aloud and ask others to read it for you
- Simplify and cut words that don't work

23 Grammar

Nouns

The word “noun” stems from Latin “nomen” or name; places, people and things. Nouns form three categories:

- **Common Noun** - a noun that may be preceded by an article or other limiting modifier and that denotes any or all of a class of entities and not an individual, as *man, city, horse, music*.
- **Proper Noun** - n. A noun belonging to the class of words used as names for unique individuals, events, or places. Also called *proper name*.
- **Compound Noun** - a noun made up of two or more lexemes, such as flowerpot and southeast.

Selecting nouns is a process like selecting words. In preference and where the noun flows with the rhythm and music of the phrase use strong ones. This adds mystery and enhances your style through instant imagery. When writing, think about the layers of the word and see if you can enhance the noun.

**Tips**

- Nouns can be fun, explore alternatives, strong concrete nouns
- Nouns must be appropriate to words in the sentence and idea conveyed
- Select nouns that flow with the rhythm of the sentence
- Don't overload with extraneous nouns
- Use your imagination
- Use noun-filled detail in preference to adjectives
- Use a thesaurus and look for alternatives
- Avoid clichés / suffixes / prefixes

### Adjectives and Adverbs

- Modifier, n. – That which modifies
- Adjective, n. – A word used to modify a noun
- Adverb, n. – A word used to modify a verb

### **Golden rule = don't overuse or misuse adjectives and adverbs**

By adding modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs your sentences risk becoming incomprehensible. There is a misconception that by adding these they strengthen the verb / noun where in most cases it is the contrary. Reader's imagination is an essential part of the success of your story. By adding modifiers you take away the opportunity for the reader to delve into the story with their own visual account.

Try using stronger nouns or verbs before adding modifiers. This lightens sentence structure and has a greater impact. In general, manuscripts are rejected if overloaded by modifiers. Agents and publishers look for sentences full of commas (which separate adverbs) then at nouns and verbs. It is a sign of a novice writer as opposed to a good one.

When reading back your paragraphs, look at where you can cut your adjectives or adverbs. Read the paragraph back keeping only the strongest. Delete clichés. Re-look at your verbs and nouns and see if there is any way they can be strengthened so modifiers are not necessary. If not, try and use a modifier that is exceptional or has comparisons.

Example:

You could change - “He ate rapidly without any manners” to “He ate like a boar”

### **Tips**

Take your first page and work through the paragraphs. Highlight every noun and verb used. Look for clichés then replace them.

Highlight every adjective and adverb then read aloud your paragraph without them. Does it read faster? Is it clearer? Keep only those essential.

### Verbs

Verbs add movement to sentences. Without them sentences are a string of words in suspension.

Verbs have two major classes:

- Static – senses, to be, appear
- Dynamic – moving, suffer, take, dream

Using heavy static verbs creates a passive approach to writing. To captivate and give punch to your writing, strong dynamic verbs should be considered over passive ones. The best way to do this is to replace static verbs with dynamic ones and read out aloud the changed phrase.

An example of this would be to try and replace as many “is” and “are” with other verbs. Writing should be emotive and dynamic, moving the reader forward. Be creative with verbs and explore their uses. Play around with static and dynamic verbs to get the most out of your writing.

Example: Use “paces” instead of walks

### Grammar Tips

- Nouns should be specific and concrete.
- Use verbs pulsing in movement.
- Syntax active as opposed to passive.
- Occasionally passive voice can be used for subtlety.
- To rectify passive voice try putting the subject at the start of the sentence.
- Avoid filtering phrases “he noticed” or “she feels”.
- Make sentences active and direct when describing.
- Avoid adverbs and adjectives where possible.
- Don’t weaken words by using suffixes; they only make your sentence cumbersome.

24 Description

Description is an important process in writing. Used effectively, your novel will take the reader on a sensory rollercoaster. When describing an event, character or setting go simple but deep. This is the time where your creative imagination comes in. Verbose long descriptions will bore and take your reader out of the story. As writers we want to stimulate the reader's imagination through the power of suggestion. Choose and use your words with the respect your story deserves. Instill feeling and passion into your writing. Get their sensory juices into action as your characters feel. When our characters feel fear, they could be described through physical aspects for example. Consider yourself in this situation, is your mouth dry, is your stomach knotted and is your heart beat rapid? What about facial expressions and tone of voice. If you were frightened your voice would be staggered, short of breath. Are your characters clenching their fists? The way in which a character stands or moves shows us a lot about what's going on and how the character feels.

*He missed the bus by seconds. John's race was ended by a baseball slide to the foot of the bus stop. His chest heaved as he watched the back of the bus five hundred meters down the road. His legs couldn't move any further, he looked down at his watch scratching the back of his neck.*

By adding body movements we get a feel for what the character is going through and what they are thinking. This type of description can be used whenever the character is experiencing a strong emotion, positive or negative. The trick is to get the reader to feel it as well.

Description using colors sounds or smells can enhance settings. For example in a restaurant scene in my book, I described the table cloth as popcorn yellow. Colors are great for enhancing emotional impact and description when used well. For example, red could be described as cardinal red.

*He stood in front of the body, glazing at the cardinal red stain on Janice's silk blouse. He let the knife drop and sank to his knees.*

## 25 Dialogue

Dialogue can be used to describe, action, settings or information. Deciding which technique, scene or dialogue, is story driven and as the writer you will know which one works the best. You can also slow or speed up the pace of the story by using a mix of the two devices:

- Fasten the pace – more dialogue, less description passes.
- Slow the pace – add more descriptive passages in-between the dialogue.

### Dialogue can be:

Direct – “I’m going to live in Spain,” James announced.

Indirect – James announced he was going to live in Spain.  
(Narrative)

Direct dialogue gives the reader a better sense of the character’s personality, whereas indirect dialogue gives the writer room to fully use description by showing character in scenes.

Below is an example of a descriptive scene:

“James held the champagne glass in the air, his cheeks lifted as high by his smile, then announced he was going to live in Spain.”

In this example we get a clear image and feel the emotion that James was feeling.

A combination of indirect and direct dialogue can create a natural sounding flow, especially if the scene is long and descriptive.

*James held the champagne glass in the air, his cheeks lifted as high by his smile.*

*“I’m going to live in Spain,” he announced.*

As you can see in the example above the descriptive break enhances dialogue.

Descriptive tags in dialogue move the action forward and show character emotion.

“... It don’t ‘appen to folks like us,” he said heaving the sac.”

Simple dialogue tags consist of “he said / she said”.

Descriptive dialogue tags show actions or moods (heaving the sac).

**Tip**

Avoid mistakes such as – he said sadly, angrily, happily, crossly.

Gesture pauses interrupt the dialogue showing the action without the dialogue tags.

“It don’t ‘appen to folks like us,” he said. Heaving the sack onto the pickup, John paused wiping the sweat from his forehead his eyes void, where hope once filled.

As we can see using both dialogue tags and gesture pauses move the pace and action forward. By using the same technique continuously will make your direct dialogue look pre-conceived, even forced. Play around with the different devices to get the most out of your dialogue and flow.

Good dialogue should:

- Move the story forward
- Ring true to your character
- Flow naturally
- Be appropriate to genre
- Show character traits
- Captivate your reader
- Be believable

Dialogue is a useful device to show character traits and emotions. It is the reader’s insight into the character and develops reader character relation. From dialogue we get a chance to get into the head of the character, their inner emotions and relationships with other characters. A woman will talk differently to her seven year old son than to her best friend, for example, so we get an impression of the psychology of the character.

**Exercise:**

Write a page where your main character is in a restaurant, he/she is meeting his best friend. The main character arrives first at the restaurant and as they cross the room he/she is stopped by your antagonist. They have an argument then the antagonist leaves. The waiter asks if every thing is alright then shows him/her to the table. The main character sits down and watches what's going on in the restaurant while thinking about the conflict. The bonding character arrives and noticing that something's not right, asks the main character what is wrong.

Read back your work. If there is too much dialogue, try rewriting only half the lines of dialogue and filling the rest of the page with description. If there is too much description, do the opposite. Turn some descriptive passages into direct dialogue.

Techniques when using dialogue

- Connecting repeated words can create a rhythmic flow.

Example: Casablanca “Impress” and “Half”

Rick: “Well, he’s succeeded in impressing half the world.”

Renault: “It is my duty to see that he does not impress the other half.”

- Anticipation

Dialogue can subtly show events to come and what’s at stake.

- Emotional Response

This includes humor and wit. It can be an unpredictable response by a character to highlight feelings and what the scene means to them. This adds dimensions to the character and tension.

- Comebacks

Comebacks add spice to dialogue. They are witty replies to a character's question. These could be sarcastic or humoristic.

- Sarcasm

This should only be used in a response to a previous technique or if character related. Remember in dialogue it should be true to character.

- Push button

This is a technique which works exactly as entitled. They're designed to push the buttons of the other character(s) to get emotional responses. This technique is used with specific ideas in mind; to get reactions.

- Humor

Humor can be used to lighten scenes and show character traits. It is useful to use for reader character relation, to show that the protagonist is human and has a sense of humor. However, if humor doesn't flow instinctively from the character don't force it. To get a feel for humoristic repartee look at how others would do this by watching some sitcoms such as Cheers or Seinfeld.

- Progressive Dialogue

This technique is designed to raise tension upward in the drama being told by the character. The dialogue starts slow then rises with drama.

- Visceral Dialogue

This is also a technique that raises tension and is very effective. Visceral dialogue is time sensitive, climatic or emotion charge dialogue. The dialogue starts to rise in urgency and ends packed with intensity and emotion.

When using dialogue, it should be unique and used only where necessary. Don't over use dialogue in your novel. Where you do use it, you will find that dialogue can add drama, show character emotions and move the action forward. As in style, dialogue should also have a tempo. Dialogue is affected by the character's state of mind. When characters are relaxed they talk normally, when angry they speak quickly using sharp, punchy words. When sad, they pause and talk slowly so the pace of the dialogue should be slow and paused. Explore the way you talk emotionally and that of others around you.

Dialogue must be true to the scene, but more importantly true to the character. The character's background, ethnic, educational and professional level will determine the way in which they talk.

Example: Alice Walker "The Color Purple"  
"My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing."

If your character comes from a foreign country, don't complicate your dialogue with language your reader won't understand. Keep it simple as in the following example from Ernest Hemingway's, "The Sun also Rises".

"Muy buenos," I said. "Is there an English woman here? I would like to see the English lady."

"Muy Buenos. Yes, there is a female English."

### Dialogue Summed Up

- Dialogue is human speech rendered condensed and highlighted.
- Watch dialogue tags "he said / she said"
- Waste no words. Keep it to the point.

- Dialogue must reveal character, provide tension and move the story forward where the scene calls for.
- Don't overfill with foreign language, slang or created dialect, this will confuse the reader and take them out of the story.
- Use mixes of different techniques to grab your reader.
- Avoid direct dialogue to describe the scene (the character telling us in dialogue what is going on). This should be done through scenes and shown.

When writing, visualize your characters in the scenes. Play the scene in your mind. How do they talk, react? How are they affected?

**Exercise:**

Write a scene where your character is playing a game of poker. Take into consideration, body language, what he/she is thinking, what the person sees around them and their emotions. Read it back aloud. Ask yourself if the dialogue placement fits, does the text flow?

26 Point of View

Viewpoint is the view that the character or narrator sees the story unfolding. This can be expressed, in first person (I), second person (you) and third person (he/she). Whatever viewpoint you choose it is crucial to the integrity of your story to keep to your chosen point of view. If you have decided to write in first person don't mix second and third person. There are times when your story might call for a switch of point of view, but this is tricky and should only be approached by chapter, never mid sentence.

Jodi Picoult is a writer who has successfully used this method. Make sure that your narrator is true to your point of view. The third person character cannot know certain information as he cannot see it, so make sure that they don't reveal this information to the reader. You will lose instant credibility to the reader. The reader must feel strongly towards the narrator so before deciding on which point of view to use, look at your plot notes and decide from what information you want revealed and when. This will help make clearer your decision or if you feel that you prefer a certain point of view you may have to go back to your plot and scene ladder to change scenes to match the point of view. What ever point of view you choose, remember that it must have voice and originality.

First Person (I) narrative is often used to get the reader closer to the character narrating the story. This narrative gives the point of view from their unique vision.

Example: Rebecca – Daphne Du Maurier

“I stopped, a little breathless, still uncertain of myself and whether I was saying the right thing, and when I looked up again I saw that she had moved, and was standing with her hand on the handle of the door. “

Second person (you) is rarely used in fiction novels as it is hard to maintain. The most frequently used point of view is the third person.

Third person Single vision favors the side of one character, relating only to the thoughts and observations of that character. The narrator can have their own voice or style that is different from the character. They can provide insight or information that is outside the reach of the character but is rotated around the one character.

Third person multiple vision, is the same as third person but follows the view of several characters. This allows the reader to view the story from different perspectives. Each character followed has shared time.

Omniscient is the all seeing, all knowing narrator who has the ability to follow thoughts and observations of an unlimited number of characters pivotal, bonding or minor. This narrator moves back and forth at will as in Leo Tolstoy's "Anna Karenina".

Multiple point of view is where two or more characters show their side of the story in first person viewpoint, normally with page separations, or by chapter breaks. This is an advantage where you want to give different angles of the same story.

**Exercise:**

Before beginning to write your novel take two scenes from each act 1 / 2 & 3 and write each in the different points of view as described above.

Read back your work. Which POV flows easily? Which one are you more comfortable writing? Which one is your main character comfortable with? Does this move the story forward and show the required information necessary to hook the reader? This will help determine which point of view to choose.

You are now ready, with knowledge in hand and a blueprint of your completed story. You are free to write in creative mode, without the interruptions of wondering what is going to happen next, who and why your characters are behaving the way they are. The blueprint to your story has stemmed from the seed of an idea. You have considered genre and theme. Your characters, from the work you have put into them, should be well rounded and memorable. As for plot, you know that all loose ends are closed and follow the crafting techniques required for a well paced tight plot.

It is now time for you to live your dream and write your story. Remember this is a first draft. You are not required to dissect and worry about sentence structure and elements of style at this stage. This is your chance to write freely, using the four elements of the brain. Write with the compassion and conviction that your story and readers deserve. The first draft will go through edits afterwards to perfect the craft and writing style.

On a final note, take the time to write your last chapter. It is as equally if not more important than all the rest. It is your characters and you final statements. Some writers are inclined to rush this chapter in order to see the story complete, however, take your time. Take your characters and readers through the final curtain with a bang.

Now is your time to live your dream!

I wish you all the very best with your story project.

Enjoy the journey.

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