



WRITING 101:

A FREE E-BOOK

FOR BEGINNING WRITERS

from inkandquills.com

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME, WRITER!



I'm going to share a secret with you: when I started writing my first novel, I didn't have a clue what I was doing.

The experience was exciting and frustrating at the same time. I felt like Lewis and Clark exploring uncharted territory for the first time, discovering this whole new world of writing. Except, um, I didn't have a map (or a smart lady like Sacagawea to guide me). And I got lost. *So* lost.

Looking back 11 years later, there are a lot of things I wish I had known when I first started writing. Since then I've poured countless hours of study into the craft of fiction writing, and also earned my BA in Creative Writing and History. When I say I'm absolutely *obsessed* with learning how to write amazing novels, I mean it. Story is my life and passion, as is helping budding novelists.

Which brings us to you, friend. This e-book began as a blog series I created to share with you everything I wish *I* had known as a newbie. And since a blog series is cool but an e-book is even cooler, I combined the posts into this workbook with exercises to help you deepen your understanding and grasp on the concepts introduced.

Sound like fun? I'm so excited for you as you begin your journey as a writer, and I'm honored that you've let me be a part of it by reading this e-book. Allow me to warmly welcome to the world of writing, friend! Now turn the page and let's get started!

-Kaitlin

LESSON 1

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF STORY

Before we can write a story, we must first understand how story works. And before we can understand that, we must understand *why* we seek out stories. In every culture and on every continent since the beginning of time, human beings have been creating stories that captivate generations. Why do we bother with story?

Now, you might be thinking the answer is obvious: stories provide fun and entertainment, and in modern times we love losing ourselves in a good book.

While that may all be true, there's another why behind the human connection with story that runs a little deeper. In her book *Wired for Story*, Lisa Cron explains this phenomenon:

“Recent breakthroughs in neuroscience reveal that our brain is hardwired to respond to story; the pleasure we derive from a tale well told is nature’s way of seducing us into paying attention to it...our neural circuitry is designed to crave story.”

Think about that. *Story is programmed into our DNA.*

Have you ever noticed how even people who don't like to read can't resist a good story? Or how politicians and businessmen use stories in their speeches and product pitches? This is because human beings are designed to relate to story. It draws us in, and we can't help but listen and respond emotionally. We remember stories far better than we do facts, dates, or statistics.

For example, I can tell you that the human trafficking industry brings in \$32 billion dollars annually. I can tell you there are 30 million people trapped in modern-day slavery right now, and that 80% of them are women and children. These facts might shock you, but the shock will fade and you'll soon forget these numbers.

But what if I told you the story Mealea, a 13-year-old Cambodian girl whose mother sold her to a brothel to pay her family's debts so they could survive? What if I told you about her terror and pain, how her captors made her feel worthless and beat her when she tried to escape? What if I told you how she still dreams of going to school, but the pimps cheat her out of her earnings so she can never be free?

Her story would stick with you while those statistics slipped away. Why? Because as Lisa Cron revealed, the human brain is designed to respond to story. We connect with people in a way we can't connect with facts and figures. To share a story is to share an experience. Through story, we're able to connect emotionally with another person, whether they're real or fictional. Even now, you're probably wondering in the back of your mind what happens to Mealea, and if she manages to escape her captors.

Besides entertainment and sharing an emotional experience, there's a third reason why human beings can't resist story. Through story, we learn about the world around us, how we should act, and how to survive. We learn what to do and what not to do from the experiences of other—whether they are real or fictional. Since the beginning of time cultures have passed down tales designed to teach future generations important lessons or explain the world around them. Think of Grimm's fairy tales, Aesop's fables, or Jesus' parables.

Cognitive scientist Steven Pinker explains how we use story as a learning tool:

“Fictional narratives supply us with a mental catalog of the fatal conundrums we might face someday and the outcomes of strategies we could deploy in them. What are the options if I were to suspect that my uncle killed my father, took his position, and married my mother?”

There’s a reason why survival stories are so popular—stories like *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Walking Dead*. We like to put ourselves in the hero’s place and ask ourselves whether we would be able to survive in their situation.

What would we do if we were stranded on a deserted island? What would we do if we were forced to fight to the death? What would we do in a zombie apocalypse? How would we *survive*?

As we read, our brain takes notes on how to survive these scenarios without us even realizing it. Sure we may never encounter a zombie apocalypse, but if we *did*, we would know what to do (and what not to do) to survive based on what we learned in the story.

But survival doesn’t have to be physical. Stories also teach us how to survive socially—how to get the guy, deal with manipulative family members, get through our first day of school, make up with an angry friend, etc. Think of novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Jane Eyre*.

We learn so well through story because we’re designed to *think* in story. Our brains soak up stories like a sponge, and they stick with us.

So what does this mean for you as a writer? Knowing the reasons why we read means that you now know what readers are subconsciously looking for in a story. A good story will provide readers with all three elements: emotional engagement with the characters, entertainment through plot, and an underlying theme that reveals something about what it means to be human or the world around us (we’ll talk more about theme in Lesson 9). Having this insight already puts you ahead of the game!

Why Humans Seek Story

1. To connect emotionally to another person and share their experience (whether they're real or fictional).
2. To learn about the world around us from the experiences of others and to learn how to survive (whether physically or socially).
3. For entertainment and escape.

What is a Story?

Something else we must understand before we can begin writing a novel is that *writing* a story is a completely different experience from *reading* one. This is because we're so used to the masterful skill with which experienced authors weave words that we don't realize *how* they do it. We're too busy becoming emotionally engrossed with the hero, sharing her experiences and emotions, to take notice.

We might be able to *recognize* what makes a good story, but actually *creating* one is an entirely different matter. In the same way, we might be able to recognize an amazing sculpture, painting, figure skating routine, or basketball play, but if we tried to recreate any of these ourselves? The results would likely be poor attempts to say the least.

Mastering a skill takes time, hard work, and practice. It also requires studying the techniques needed to succeed. In the case of novel writing, this means first understanding story structure.

New writers often don't realize there is a structure to stories (I know I sure didn't when I started writing!). Heck, just the word "structure" seems to send most writers scurrying. But structure really isn't as scary as it sounds. You see, in order to become a good writer, you *must* be able to dismantle a story like you might a clock. You must learn all of its parts, what they do, and how they work together to make the clock tick.

Essentially, this is what story structure means—the working parts of a story that make it tick. So, what makes a story a story?

A story is about someone (hero) who wants something (goal), sets out on a journey to attain it (plot), and grows or learns something along the way (change).

No matter how many explosions, sword fights, or rabid vampires you have in your novel, without this structure you have nothing more than a string of random events that won't work as a complete, coherent story no matter how exciting they may be. This structure can be found in all plots across every genre—it is the “master blueprint,” the basis of all stories.

Basic Structure of a Story

Hero + Goal + Plot + Change = Story

Most beginning writers start out trying to create a story by focusing on building a plot. While plot is important, here's the problem: plot alone isn't story. You need a hero, goal, and internal change guiding your plot to give it direction, focus, and purpose. These elements combined create a true story with meaning instead of a collection of meandering, disconnected events. Apply this structure to your story and like winding up a clock, it will begin to tick.

Exercise 1

On the next page, practice identifying basic story structure by finding the hero, goal, plot, and change of your favorite films or books. Using this information, write a short paragraph that describes what the story is about.

Exercise 1

Basic Story Structure:

A story is about someone (hero) who wants something (goal), sets out on a journey to attain it (plot), and grows or learns something along the way (change).

Title of book/film: _____

What is the story about?

Title of book/film: _____

What is the story about?

Title of book/film: _____

What is the story about?

LESSON 2

FINDING STORY IDEAS

Coming up with an idea for a story is a strange process. Sometimes, inspiration slaps you in the face. But most times...well, you'd be lucky for it to give you so much a poke. Usually you have to coax little nuggets of inspiration out from within the dark recesses of your brain. It's not always an easy process, but here are 10 strategies for luring out the plot bunnies.

Strategy #1: Look at Photos

I draw a lot of inspiration from photos, and they really help to get my creative juices flowing. Pinterest is my go-to source for photos. You can even find collections compiled by fellow writers themed for all genres—fantasy, horror, romance, steampunk, etc. When you look at photos, ask yourself: what is the story behind it? What happened before? What will happen after?

Strategy #2: Brush Up on Your History

If you love history, this is a great place to find story ideas. Just look at *Game of Thrones* author George R.R. Martin—his best-selling fantasy series was inspired by a period in English history called the War of the Roses. Martin has also drawn from other historical

events for his series, such as the Black Dinner, and he admits to constantly finding inspiration in history. Choose an event or time period in history that interests you and read up on it. You'll be surprised what fascinating stories you'll uncover that would make a great novel!

Strategy #3: Explore Mythology

There is a wealth of ideas waiting to be harvested from the mythologies, folklore, and fairytales of cultures all around the globe. I use mythological inspiration in nearly all of my stories. A wonderful starting point for finding interesting myths from all over the world is Encyclopedia Mythica (Pantheon.org).

Authors such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien drew heavily from mythology, as have modern-day authors such as Maggie Steifvater, Sarah J. Maas, Marissa Meyer, and Rick Riordan. Don't limit yourself to familiar tales—unearth legends other authors haven't yet used!

Strategy #4: Writing Prompts

Writing prompts can be a good way to get you in a creative mood. Often once you start writing and “warm up” your brain, you begin uncovering ideas. You can find scores of free writing prompts online, but you might also want to look into writing prompt books such as *1,000 Awesome Writing Prompts* by Ryan Kinder or *1,000 Character Writing Prompts* by Bryan Cohen. With that many options to choose from, it would be sure to keep you scribbling for a long while!

Strategy #5: Listen to Music

When I'm in the midst of a creative dry spell, I love listening to music. Specifically, I listen to instrumental scores. Without lyrics to go along with the song, my imagination is free to create its own “story” to accompany the music. Based on how the music makes me feel, there's no telling what sorts of scenes or imagery might spring into my mind. Listening to regular songs with lyrics is also a great strategy, as the words might help spark some ideas.

Strategy #6: Daydream—Ask ‘What If?’

This is probably one of my favorites. As a writer, I love asking questions and being curious. I also love giving myself the time and mental space to unwind and daydream. Too often in our busy lives we don't give ourselves enough quiet moments to allow our imaginations to wake up. There's a reason why so many writers get ideas in the shower, before bed, or while driving—because it's during these quiet moments in life that our imaginations can get loud.

So take some time to just daydream. Look at the world and ask ‘what if?’ What if Hitler had won WWII? What if the Europeans had never settled the Americas? What if your boyfriend turned out to be an alien refugee? What if you discovered your cat was really a shapeshifter? Let your imagination wander wherever it pleases.

Strategy #7: Travel or Explore

Getting out in the world exposes you to different ideas and cultures and offers unlimited sources of inspiration. But if globetrotting isn't possible for you at the moment, don't fret! Start small by exploring your hometown with fresh eyes. What would be different or unique about it to an outsider?

If you can branch out a little further, try venturing to other areas of interest in your state (if you're in America), or explore a part of your country you've always wanted to visit. Try to unearth the quirks, subcultures, histories, urban legends, dark sides, and mysteries of the places you visit. And of course take notes—you never know what you might use for a story!

Strategy #8: Get Out in Nature

Whether we realize it or not, humans share a deep connection about nature. Not only can getting out into nature help you feel relaxed and refreshed, but it can also provide inspiration for your stories. How? Exploring different types of terrain such as mountains, forests, beaches, etc. can give you ideas for settings. Experiencing nature first-hand will also give you a supply of sensory details to use in your descriptions of those settings. And finally, going back to Strategy #6, taking a long walk outdoors also provides you quiet time to let your imagination come out to play.

Strategy #9: Real-Life Events and Experiences

Sometimes real life might seem boring, which is why we usually turn to fiction to escape reality, but ideas for stories abound even in the seemingly mundane. Try looking in places like news headlines, magazine articles, documentaries, and reality crime shows. The challenge of going this route, however, is that you must be careful about putting real people into stories so you don't run into legal trouble. You'll either need to obtain permission to tell their story, or change names and disguise the characters/events to avoid similarities to their real-life counterparts.

Everyday personal experiences can provide fodder for stories as well, such as post-graduation struggles, parenting, mid-life crisis, moving to a new country, struggling with body image, or trying to discover who you are and what you want to do with your life. Chances are there are others out there who have shared that experience and will be able to relate. And using your experiences doesn't mean you have to be the main character—you can transfer your experiences onto fictional characters.

Strategy #10: What do You Want to Say? What are Your Passions?

A good source for inspiration is passion. Are there any issues, topics, or interests you're passionate about? How could they inspire a story? For example, I'm passionate about the issue of human trafficking and would like to write a story about this topic in the future. I also have a passion for travel which has spawned an idea for a story. What do you feel strongly about? What do you have to say to the world?

10 Strategies for Finding Story Ideas

1. Look at Photos
2. Brush Up on Your History
3. Explore Mythology
4. Writing Prompts
5. Listen to Music
6. Daydream—Ask “What If?”
7. Travel or Explore
8. Get Out in Nature
9. Real-Life Events and Experiences
10. What Are Your Passions?

Write it Down!

As you can see, ideas for stories are all around us. But just as important as finding ideas is keeping track of them. Always write everything down—never rely upon your memory. Personally, I prefer to keep a separate Word Document just for story ideas. Other writers might prefer a physical journal.

Another option is loose pieces of notebook paper. The drawback to this is that they're easy to lose and scatter about, which can become a nightmare, but the advantage is that unlike a notebook, you have the freedom to rearrange the order of the pages. If you must use loose paper, be sure to place it in a binder to ensure everything stays in one place. On the following pages you will find a story idea organizer which you can also print and use for this method.

Any of these strategies are good options, it's a matter of what works for you! If you choose to go the digital route, I would also recommend printing a hard copy and/or backing up your files to guard against any hard drive failures that might send your precious ideas hurtling into the abyss of nothingness. Story ideas are invaluable to a writer, so be sure to keep yours organized and safe!

Exercise 2

Part A: On the next page, reflect on how you usually find story ideas to identify your most productive strategies (For example, mine are history, mythology, and photos).

Part B: Using any of your favorite strategies, start brainstorming ideas and record them on the provided organizer, or in a journal, binder, or Word Document.

Exercise 2

Part A: What are Your Top Sources of Inspiration?

Reflect on the following and check all that apply.

I seem to get ideas for stories when I am...

- Looking at photos
- Studying historical events
- Reading mythology, folklore, fairytales, etc.
- Using writing prompts
- Listening to music
- Daydreaming and asking questions like “What If?”
- Traveling or exploring
- Walking out in nature
- Reading newspapers, magazines, etc. or thinking about my personal experiences
- Learning about topics, interests, or issues I have a passion for
- Other:

Of all the sources you checked, which do you seem to draw from the most? Which would you say are your top three?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Part B: Brainstorm and Organize Your Ideas

Use any of your favorite strategies to start hunting for story ideas. Then, record them on the organizer provided on the next page, or in a journal, Word Doc, etc. if you prefer.

Story Idea

Planned Length <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Series<input type="checkbox"/> Trilogy<input type="checkbox"/> Novel<input type="checkbox"/> Novella<input type="checkbox"/> Short Story	Title Ideas
Genre & Premise	Setting
Characters	
Plot	

LESSON 3

DISCOVER THE PERFECT AUDIENCE FOR YOUR NOVEL

I'm going to ask you a question that writers loath even more than the dreaded "What is your story about?" Are you ready for this, writer? Brace yourself: *Who is your novel for?*

If your answer is somewhere between "Everyone" and "I don't know," it's high time you identified your story's *target audience*. You know, the readers who will find your story irresistibly appealing and snatch it right off bookstore shelves.

And spoiler alert: Your story will *not* appeal to every reader. It's just not possible. As scary as it might sound, there will be readers who will hate your book and that's *okay!* Your goal as an author is to delight your target readers and no one else.

So, just who did you write this story for anyways? Who would want to read your novel (besides your mom, that is)? To discover your target audience, there are two things you'll want to consider: Reader Preferences and Reader Demographics.

Reader Preferences: the types of stories a reader most enjoys. What he/she likes to see in the stories they read.

Reader Demographics: specific readers who would enjoy, relate to, and connect with your story more so than others.

By layering elements of these two categories together, you will create your target audience. Let's look at each one in more detail.

Reader Preferences

Genre and Sub-genre

Most readers have a preferred genre and sub-genre they enjoy. For example, my favorite genre is fantasy. Within that genre my favorite sub-genre is medieval/high fantasy, and I tend to avoid sub-genres such as paranormal or urban fantasy.

Plot vs. Character

Some readers enjoy stories that are fast-paced, full of action, and are driven by the events of the plot. Other readers enjoy stories that are driven by the characters and delve deep into character development.

Setting

Some readers might be drawn to stories set in a specific country and/or time period. For example, one reader might devour anything set in ancient Egypt while another might find stories set in modern-day Scotland irresistible.

Writing Style

Some readers like clean, straight-forward writing often found in commercial fiction, while others may enjoy the lush, poetic prose usually found in literary fiction. Additionally, some readers prefer the story to be told in third person in the author's "voice" while others enjoy first-person stories that allow them to slip right into the character's head.

So, for example, a target audience for *The Lord of the Rings* would be readers who enjoy epic high fantasy, complex fantasy worlds, and a plot-driven story with a lush literary writing style.

Or, the target audience for *The Help* would be readers who enjoy historical fiction that explores racial issues, settings in the Deep South, character-driven stories, and a writing style that uses the characters' voices to tell the story.

Reader Demographics

Age

Fiction is divided into different categories according to age: Middle Grade, Young Adult, New Adult, and Adult. It's important to know what age you're writing for so you can make your story relatable to the experiences and struggles of that age group. For example, a novel about high school cyber bullying is going to be more relatable to a teen than a novel about woman in the midst of a mid-life crisis.

Gender

Gender usually doesn't matter when it comes to enjoying a story, but occasionally a book might appeal more to males or females. For example, romance writers tend to target a female audience. On the other hand, an author might write a novel that is more appealing to a predominantly male audience, such as a gritty war story about the bond between brothers in arms.

Of course, either of these stories could appeal to either gender. I've known guys who enjoyed a good chick flick, and I myself tend to enjoy war stories. Just ask yourself if your story might appeal significantly more to one gender than the other and target that gender, but keep in mind any story can be enjoyed by both genders.

Ethnicity

Readers of all cultures and races should be able to see themselves in the heroes and heroines populating fiction. We often better relate to characters who share our race and culture. If you have a diverse cast of characters in your novel it will appeal more strongly to readers of the same race.

So, for example, if you wrote a story about a Hispanic woman who immigrated to the U.S., your story would likely appeal to the Hispanic demographic as well as other immigrants who could relate to the character's experience.

Religion

Sometimes, an author might want to write a faith-based story targeted to readers of a specific religion such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc. Even if the plot or overall tone of your book is not overtly religious, having a character who is Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, etc. could attract readers of that faith as well.

Profession & Life Experiences

Readers are drawn to characters they can relate to. If you have characters with a disease or disability, a character who is a cop, musician, nurse, etc., or characters who are struggling with family issues, racism, divorce, parenting a difficult child, readjusting to civilian life after a war, etc. it will appeal to readers who have had/are having similar experiences.

Why Identify Your Target Audience?

All of this being said, this doesn't mean that people outside of your target audience can't enjoy your book. *Harry Potter* is a terrific example of this—it originally was targeted to a Middle Grade audience, but readers of all ages have fallen in love with the story. So if that's the case, then why should you bother identifying your target audience to begin with?

For one thing, knowing who you're writing for and what they are looking for in a story makes it easier for you as a writer to please those readers. You can tailor your story to feel as though it was written just for them. You will be able to write a story they can relate to, and even impact them so deeply it could have a positive effect on their life. And that's pretty powerful stuff.

Secondly, your publisher will expect you to know your book's audience. The last thing a publisher wants is to be handed a novel you claim teen readers will love but is filled with gratuitous swearing, explicit sex scenes, and a seventeen-year-old who is

having an affair with a married man. How on earth is a publisher supposed to market and sell that? You're going to get a rejection letter.

On the other hand, if you present a publisher with a New Adult novel about the emotional struggles of a heroine who watches all of her college friends become engaged and get married while she remains single, they'll realize that you've put the time into thinking about your audience. The story fits the audience, which means the publisher can market it easily.

Even if you decide to self-publish, you will still need to know your target audience. Self-publishing means marketing your book yourself, and knowing your target audience will help you to figure out where your readers hang out in real life and online, what blogs or magazines/e-zines they read, and what social media outlets they use most.

If figuring out your target audience is still making you stress, relax! Sometimes your audience doesn't become clear until your story begins to take shape. You might start writing a Middle Grade novel only to realize halfway through you have a Young Adult novel on your hands. While knowing your audience beforehand is helpful, you can always go back and tweak your story to fit your audience.

Just continue to ask yourself: Who would enjoy this story? Who am I writing for? I promise you, there are readers out there waiting for your story. Once you are able to define your target audience, you will be able to find, delight, and reach the perfect readers for your story. And that, friend, is a huge advantage well worth having.

Exercise 3

On the following pages, reflect on what types of readers your story will appeal to and identify your target audience.

Exercise 3

Reader Preferences

“Readers who enjoy X will enjoy my story.”

Genre and Sub-genre

Plot vs. Character

Setting

Writing Style

Other

Reader Demographics

“X type of reader will be more likely to enjoy my story.”

Age

Gender

Ethnicity

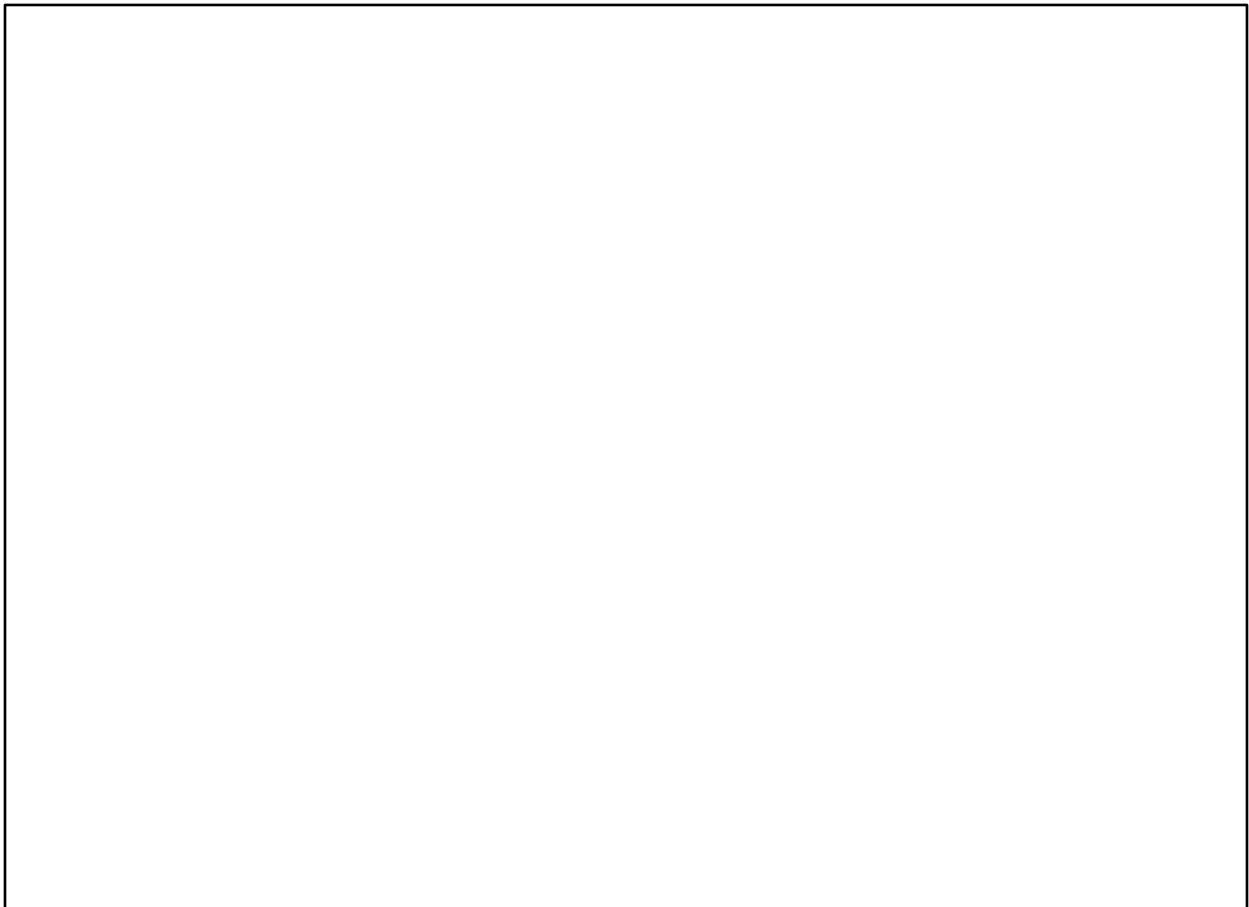
Religion

Profession and Life Experiences

Description of My Target Audience



Where Can I Find My Target Audience?



LESSON 4

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL HERO AND VILLAIN

In order to craft a solid story, you must understand two things: 1) the role your hero and villain play, and, 2) how to make these characters realistic and compelling. Your hero and villain are the most important characters in your story as they are its driving forces. It could even be argued that the villain is more important than the hero. Without the villain causing trouble for the hero there's no conflict, and without conflict there's no story. Whatever your take, both hero and villain must be crafted with careful attention.

The Protagonist's Role

In Lesson 1, we said that a story is about:

Someone (hero) who wants something (goal), sets out on a journey to attain it (plot), and grows or learns something along the way (change).

Reading a story is about sharing an experience. But whose experience are we sharing? Your hero is the character whom your story centers around. She offers your readers a point of access to your story by allowing them to experience events from her point of view rather than as a neutral outsider. We see what she sees, feel what she feels, and think what she thinks. The hero invites us in and allows us to become a part of the story.

Think of your story as the track of a roller coaster—it has ups and downs, twists and turns, and maybe a couple of stomach-dropping loops. Your hero is the car of the roller coaster the reader enters to experience the thrills you’ve created. If you don’t let your readers get up close and personal with the hero, then they’ll just be a spectator standing in line watching the roller coaster from a distance but not getting to experience the excitement for themselves. And as a reader, that’s no fun!

As the author, you must also decide whose story this is and whose experience we’ll be sharing. In most cases this will only involve one hero, but sometimes stories are told using the viewpoints of multiple main characters and switching back and forth between them. It’s up to you how many viewpoint characters you’ll need to tell your story, but keep in mind that the more viewpoints you have, the longer and more complicated your story will be.

Once you’ve decided on your hero, it’s time to bring her to life. There are four “main ingredients” you need to successfully create a hero: goal, likability, realism, and change. Let’s take a closer look at each of these aspects.

1. Goal

Your hero’s goal is what drives your story: What does she want? What is she trying to achieve? How your hero goes about getting what she wants becomes your plot. If your hero doesn’t have a goal, then your story has no direction. Actually, without a goal you don’t have a story at all. A goal unifies your story’s events and gives them focus and purpose.

Just as important as the goal is the *why* behind it: What will happen if she fails? What is at stake? The more personal the stakes, the more reason your hero has to fight.

If you don't know what your hero is trying to achieve and why, then you won't be able to create compelling conflict that stands in her way.

2. Likability

One of the most important parts of creating your hero is to make readers care about her. We don't stick through a 200+ page story to read about a character we hate! It doesn't matter how awesome your plot is, if we don't like your hero we won't care about whether or not she achieves her goal—and that means game over for your novel.

Now, don't make the mistake of thinking that "likability" equals perfection or a perfectly pleasant "girl-next-door type." A flawed character will be more popular with readers than a character who's a girl scout. This is because flaws make them interesting and more relatable. As long as you give your hero a few redeeming, heroic qualities, and reveal them early in the story, you can make her as flawed as you like. A redeeming quality gives the reader a reason to care.

Take Katniss from *The Hunger Games*, for example. She's not very sociable, hates her sister's pet cat, and can be prickly. But we still care about her. Why? Because we see good qualities in Katniss. She loves her sister and volunteers to take her place in the games knowing she'll likely die. She also has a compassionate side and cares for people—Gale, Peeta, Rue, Cinna, and even Effie. These are traits we can admire, and they balance out the qualities that otherwise might make Katniss completely unlikable.

So what techniques can you use to make readers care about your hero so they will cheer her on towards her goal? Here are a few to try:

1. Sympathetic Quality—something that will tug at our heartstrings.
2. Empathetic Quality—something we can relate to and understand.
3. Heroic Traits—something we can admire about the hero.
4. Origin of Flaw—what happened to create the flaw in the hero?
5. Likable Traits—something that warms us toward the hero, like wit, charm, humor, quirks, etc.

3. Realism

In order for your hero to feel like a real person, you need to layer her with flaws, strengths, a personality, beliefs, a past, etc. The biggest mistake new writers make is creating a hero who is too perfect or too strong. If she's gorgeous, super smart, and can kick ass like a freaking ninja, your readers won't be able to identify with her. Flaws and weaknesses are relatable and provide opportunity to create layers of depth and interesting contradictions. Humans in real life are complex creatures, so your hero should be too.

4. Change

Most new writers get so wrapped up in getting their hero through the external plot of their story that they tend to forget about the internal aspect. But change is an important part of a satisfying story. Your hero should be different in some way at the end of the novel versus how she was at the beginning. If she was rich, prejudiced, or cowardly on page one and she's still rich, prejudiced, or cowardly by the time we read *The End*, there's a problem. When people go through big experiences in real life, it changes them whether for better or worse. You need to reflect this in your novel.

4 “Main Ingredients” of a Hero

1. **Goal**—what the hero wants and why.
2. **Likability**—why the reader should care about the hero.
3. **Realism**—the layers that make the hero feel complex and human.
4. **Change**—the internal journey the hero undergoes throughout the story that will either make her a better or worse person.

The Antagonist's Role

The main role of your villain is to provide your story with conflict. Whatever it is your hero wants, the villain is standing in the way. Actually, your villain wants *the opposite* of what the hero wants. Both forces are trying their hardest to achieve their goal, which causes them to clash.

The hero wants to save the city. The villain wants to destroy it. The hero wants to destroy the object of the villain's power. The villain wants to save it. The hero wants to overthrow the villain's rule. The villain wants to squash the hero's rebellion.

See the pattern? This tug-of-war between the hero and the villain creates your plot; how the hero tries to achieve his goal, how the villain tries to stop him, and who wins out in the end.

Similar to creating a hero, there are the four “main ingredients” you need to create a successful villain: goal, loathing, realism, and credibility.

1. Goal

Just as with your hero, your villain needs a goal. You need to figure out not only what he wants, but *why* he wants it. He can't be trying to take over the world or destroy New York City “just because he's evil.” He needs an actual reason he believes in that justifies him going through all the trouble. What will happen to the villain if he fails in his goal? There should be something at stake for the villain that motivates him to oppose the hero.

2. Loathing

While with your hero you need to create likability, with your villain your aim is to do the opposite. You want readers to hate and fear your villain to create an emotional roller coaster as well as a feeling of satisfaction when the hero finally defeats him. But you can't just *tell* us how awful a person your villain is—you must *show* us through his words and actions throughout the story. Here are some tactics for creating fear and loathing in your readers:

1. Intelligent—create a villain who’s always one step ahead of your hero.
2. Skilled—create a villain who’s stronger than your hero and let him win some battles.
3. Hypocritical—create a villain who wears a halo in public and does his dirty deeds in secret.
4. Manipulative—create a villain who uses blackmail or threatens loved ones to control the hero.
5. Sadistic—create a villain who doesn’t flinch at inflicting pain, and maybe even enjoys it.

3. Realism

In order for readers to truly fear your villain, he must feel like a real person. That means layering him strengths, flaws, a past, interests, etc. just as with your hero. The biggest mistake new writers make with their villains is making them too evil. In real life, people aren’t so black and white. You want to make your villain (and hero, for that matter) more grey by giving them a mix of both good and bad qualities.

4. Credibility

Your villain is the main source of conflict in your novel, and therefore also a huge source of tension. You want to keep readers wondering if the hero will be able to win against the villain; if things seem too easy the reader will feel they know the answer and they’ll stop turning pages. There are three steps to achieving credibility in your villain:

1. Create a strong, realistic villain who isn’t a cardboard cliché readers will roll their eyes at.
2. Ensure your villain backs up any and all threats he makes so readers will know he means business.
3. Let your hero lose some battles against the villain to keep readers anxious.

4 “Main Ingredients” of a Villain

1. **Goal**—what the villain wants and why.
2. **Loathing**—why the reader should hate and fear the villain.
3. **Realism**—the layers that make the villain feel complex and human.
4. **Credibility**—why the reader should see the villain as a serious threat.

When you put it all together, creating a hero readers can pull for and a villain they will hate will lay the foundation for the emotional roller coaster that will play out in the plot. When the reader cares about the hero, this creates an emotional investment in the outcome of the story. And when the reader sees the villain as a true and serious threat, this creates anxiety over that outcome and keeps them engaged. This means that for a successful story, you need *both* a strong hero and villain, just as a bicycle needs two wheels.

Exercise 4

Become familiar with the “ingredients” of heroes and villains discussed in this lesson by identifying them in your favorite books or films. Reflect on how the author uses them and how they impact your emotions as a reader.

Exercise 4

Book/Film Title: _____

Hero: _____

1. What is the hero's goal—what does he/she want and why?

2. What is it about the hero's character that makes him/her likable and makes you care?

3. How does the author make the hero feel real/human?

4. How does the hero change by the end of the story?

Villain: _____

1. What is the villain's goal—what does he/she want and why?

2. What is it about the villain that makes you fear and hate him/her?

3. How does the author make the villain feel real/human?

4. What reasons does this villain give you to take him/her as a serious threat?

LESSON 5

CHOOSING THE BEST POV FOR YOUR STORY

Years ago, I remember watching a film called *Vantage Point*. The plot revolved around an assassination attempt on the U.S. President, and in order to catch the would-be assassin government agents had to piece together clues from witnesses.

Each witness had a different point of view of the assassination attempt from their place in the crowd. Each one saw and experienced the moment differently. From a police officer to a news reporter to an ordinary bystander, each had a different story to tell of the same event.

And that, my friend, is point of view--the “lens” or perspective through which a story is told, and in whose voice. But just who is telling the story? In fiction, different points of view use varying techniques to give the reader a different experience. Let’s look at the options available to you as a writer.

Point of View: the perspective and voice through which the story is told.

First Person Point of View

You've probably come across this one before, as it's one of the most popular points of view (POV) used in fiction, especially in Young Adult novels. In this point of view, the main character is the one telling the story. The story is written in the character's voice using the pronouns I/me/my.

The advantage of this POV is that the reader is drawn right into the character's head. We see the world through their eyes and hear their thoughts. It's a very intimate perspective. As such, however, the reader is limited to what the main character knows or sees, which can be either an advantage or disadvantage depending on the story you're trying to tell.

Examples: *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green, *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Second Person Point of View

Second person point of view is when the author speaks directly to the reader using you/your. This places the reader directly into the story as though they are the main character and has a very engaging effect. Let's look at an example from Leo Tolstoy's short story trio, *The Sevastopol Sketches*:

Yes ! disenchantment certainly awaits you, if you are entering Sevastopol for the first time. In vain will you seek, on even a single countenance, for traces of anxiety, discomposure, or even of enthusiasm, readiness for death, decision, — there is nothing of the sort. You will see the tradespeople quietly engaged in the duties of their callings, so that, possibly, you may reproach yourself for superfluous raptures, you may entertain some doubt as to the justice of the ideas regarding the heroism of the defenders of Sevastopol which you have formed from stories, descriptions, and the sights and sounds on the northern side.

As you can see, second person almost turns the reader into a participant in the story. It also makes the events more personal; it makes us feel as though we have a stake in the story and forces more internal reflection on our thoughts and feelings about what is happening.

This point of view is rarely used, and when it is, it's usually found in short stories or parts of a novel. It's extremely difficult to maintain second person throughout an entire novel and do it well. I would only recommend using second person in short stories or literary fiction, which experiments with the art of writing. For commercial fiction written for entertainment, it's best to skip it.

Though it isn't popular, authors can and have used second person successfully. For example, Italo Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* uses second person in alternating chapters, and William Faulkner uses it in sections of his novel *Absalom, Absalom!*. A few brave and talented authors have even written their entire novel in second person, such as Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*.

Third Person Point of View

Another popular point of view which you're probably familiar with is third person. This is the point of view used most frequently in fiction. In this point of view, the reader becomes an outsider looking in on the story as it's told from the main character's perspective using he/she/they.

Although the story is told from the character's perspective, it's told in the author's voice (though there is one exception to this which we'll get to in a moment!). There are three types of third person: Third Person Omniscient, Third Person Limited, and Deep Point of View.

Third Person Omniscient

"Omniscient" means "all knowing" and that's exactly what this point of view is. The story is narrated to the reader in the disembodied voice of an all-knowing, all-seeing god who knows what all of the characters are thinking and feeling at all times. The narrator might even slip into second person occasionally and address the reader (a huge no-no in

modern fiction!) or state his own opinions. Omniscient point of view is completely unlimited, and pretty much anything goes.

Here's a quick example:

"Did you find your keys?" Mary asked, irritated at John's carelessness. He was always losing everything. *Why can't he be more organized?* she thought. *He's always wasting my time.* Her jaw clenched in anger.

John ran a hand through his hair. "No. I could have sworn I left them on the kitchen table." He turned away from her angry face, his own frustration mounting. *She thinks I'm an idiot,* he thought. *Why can't I remember where they are?* Desperation began to creep over him.

Do you see how in omniscient point of view we are in both character's heads at once? This style of writing was most popular in 19th century literature, but since then reader's tastes have changes and it's now less favored in modern-day fiction.

Today, we call this switching back and forth between multiple character's thoughts within the same scene "head hopping," and it's often frowned upon. All of the jumping around can be disorienting to the reader and leave them confused about whose story this is supposed to be.

But what if you need the perspectives of multiple characters to tell your story? There is another technique for this which is more popular and common modern fiction, which we'll get to in the last section.

Examples of third person omniscient novels: *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

Third Person Limited

This is the style of third person that is more popular with modern readers. We remain in one character's head throughout the story, only seeing things from their perspective. This means we only hear their thoughts, feel what they feel, and know what they know. Let's revisit our previous example of Mary and John, for a moment. This time, I'll limit the point of view to Mary's perspective only:

"Did you find your keys?" Mary asked, irritated at John's carelessness. He was always losing everything. *Why can't he be more organized?* she thought. *He's always wasting my time.* Her jaw clenched in anger.

John ran a hand through his hair. "No. I could have sworn I left them on the kitchen table." He turned away from her, his lips pressed in a flat line.

Mary sighed. He couldn't even look her in the eye, he looked like a scolded, cowering dog. Maybe she shouldn't look so angry. She drew in a deep breath and tried to soften her features. *Lord, give me patience.*

Do you see the difference? We don't know what John is thinking or feeling. We experience everything from Mary's POV and only know what's going on inside her head. Unlike omniscient POV which is limitless, in this POV we are "limited" to Mary's perspective.

Examples of limited third person: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, and *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (*Game of Thrones*) by George R.R. Martin.

Deep Point of View

Deep point of view is a style of writing that is beginning to grow in popularity. It uses third person pronouns he/she/they, but instead of using the author's voice the story is told in hero's voice. This brings the reader deep into the hero's head and allows them to experience the story through the hero, feeling what they feel.

Essentially, it's like first person except with he/she instead of I. All "evidence" of the author's hand (phrases like he said, she felt, he wondered, etc.) are also removed to erase the distance between the reader and hero. Let's look at this technique in action.

Example 1 (Third Person Limited):

Kali hurried through the village. She wondered if he was already waiting for her. She lifted her skirts and leapt over a puddle. She knew she should have left earlier, but her mother had kept on talking about the chickens.

Example 2 (Deep POV):

Kali hurried through the village. Was he already waiting for her? She lifted her skirts and leapt over a puddle. She should have left earlier, but her mother had kept on and on about the chickens. Chickens this, and eggs that. Be sure to this, don't do it like that. Kali's fidgety impatience had driven the details from her memory. Hopefully they weren't too important.

Notice the difference between the two examples. The second brings you into Kali's head by removing "interruptions" by the author like "she wondered" or "she knew." The second example also uses more of Kali's voice to reveal her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions—it's almost as though she is the narrator, yet we stay in third person point of view.

This point of view can be challenging to write and is still emerging in fiction, but it's quickly gaining popularity in the writing world because of the intimacy it creates between the reader and character.

Multiple Point of View

When you have a story that needs to be told from multiple perspectives, you have two options: you can either use third person omniscient and head hop, *or* you can use multiple point of view.

Multiple point of view can use third person limited, deep point of view, or first person. It stays in one character's head at a time per scene or chapter. When the writer needs to switch to a different character's perspective, they skip a line between scenes or begin a new chapter to signal to the reader that they are changing to a new character. In modern fiction, this technique is the preferred way of telling a story with multiple characters.

Examples: *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (*Game of Thrones*) by George R.R. Martin, *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, and *The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Meyer.

6 Types of Viewpoint

1. **First Person**—tells the story in the voice of the hero using ‘I.’
2. **Second Person**—the author addresses the reader directly using ‘you’ and places them in the story.
3. **Third Person Omniscient**—an all-knowing narrator moves freely among characters and can reveal anyone’s thoughts or feelings. Uses ‘he/she.’
4. **Third Person Limited**—the author remains in one character’s head and the reader only knows/feels what that character knows/feels.
5. **Deep Point of View**—removes evidence of the author’s hand to create intimacy between the reader and hero. Tells the story in the hero’s voice while still using third person.
6. **Multiple Point of View**—switches between the perspectives of multiple characters. Readers are only in one character’s head per scene or chapter.

Which POV is Right for Your Story?

So now that we’ve explored your options, which one should you choose? If you're uncertain, try asking yourself these questions:

1. How many perspectives do I need to tell this story?
2. Do I want to create distance or intimacy between the reader and the character?
3. Do I want to tell the story in my own voice, or the character's?

If you need multiple perspectives to tell your story you might use multiple POV or experiment with third person omniscient.

If you want to create intimacy between your reader and character, first person or deep point of view is the way to go. Or, you could create intimacy between the author and reader with second person.

Need a little more distance? Try third person limited or omniscient point of view. If you want your character's voice to really come through in your story, you'll want to employ first person or deep point of view. Or, if you prefer to use your own voice, third person limited & omniscient and second person will all allow you to do so.

As you can see, it all depends upon the story you want to tell and how you want to tell it. I don't think there's a "right" or "wrong" point of view, but for a new writer I would recommend maybe starting with third person limited or first person as those as the most common and easiest of the bunch to write.

Many times, the point of view a writer chooses depends on personal preference. Some writers find first person too challenging or invasive, while others love it. Personally, I've always preferred third person limited (I'm now moving toward deep POV), but I do occasionally use first person. Sometimes the characters "speak" to me in first person, and sometimes I hear their story in third person.

The beauty of point of view is that each method gives the reader a different experience. As the author, it's up to you to decide how you want your readers to experience your story. Do you want to draw them into the hero's head? Make them a participant? Show them different perspectives through multiple characters? The power rests in your hands.

Exercise 5

Experiment with point of view and observe how it can impact the feel of a story by rewriting a passage from your favorite book in a different point of view. For example, if it is written in third person rewrite it as first person, and vice-versa. Alternatively, you can use a piece of your own writing if you prefer, rather than a passage from a book.

Exercise 5

A. Below, rewrite the passage you've chosen in an alternate point of view.



B. How did changing the point of view change the way the story felt? Reflect on your observations below.



LESSON 6

UNRAVELING CONFLICT, TENSION, AND YOUR PLOT

Creating a story is a challenge. Creating one that readers actually complete from beginning to end? That's even more challenging. When I first started writing novels as a teen, it took me years to understand how plot worked and how to wield conflict and tension to keep readers engrossed.

While the concepts of conflict, tension, and plot may seem similar at first, when we look closer it becomes clear each one plays a distinct role in your story. Once you understand how these three elements come together, you're well on your way to designing page-turning fiction.

What is Conflict?

Conflict is the foundation of any novel. Without it, you have no story. So how do you create conflict? First, you must give your hero a goal. Only when you know what he is trying to achieve can you put obstacles in his path to keep him from getting what he wants. This clash between the hero's goal and the forces standing in the way of him achieving it create your conflict.

Conflict: a clash between two opposing sides.

For example, look at the fairy tale *Cinderella*. What does Cinderella want? To attend the ball. What force opposes her? Her evil stepmother. Their opposing goals create the conflict of the story, and the reader will have to keep turning pages to see who wins in the end.

But, here's the thing—a hero with a goal isn't enough to carry your story, no matter how amazing it is. In order for the reader to stick through your entire novel, they must also **care** about your hero. Otherwise, the hero's goal won't matter because the reader won't care whether they succeed or fail.

With Cinderella, we sympathize with her for several reasons—her father's death, her stepmother and stepsister's cruelty, and her days of endless chores. Some readers might even be able to relate to her to some degree. But despite all the abuse, Cinderella remains strong and kind and dreams of a better life. Sympathy for her situation and admiration of her strength and compassion gives us a reason to care. We *want* to see her achieve her goal of attending the ball.

So spend the time developing your hero into a realistic human being we can care about and cheer for!

What is Plot?

When I first started writing, my definition of plot was very vague. I thought a plot was just all the exciting stuff that happened in a story. You know, car chases, kidnappings, murders, sword fights, and all that jazz.

But since then I've learned that you can't string together a bunch of random events together and call it a story, no matter how epic they may be. Your story will lack direction and focus, and it won't be much of a story at all. To better illustrate this point, let's look at an example:

Let's say you have a sci-fi story about a kick-ass rebel heroine traveling around the universe hunting aliens and blowing them to bits with her laser gun. There's lots of

fight, chases, alien guts, and heck, let's throw a cute love interest in there too. It's exciting, adrenaline pumping, and...completely flat.

Sure there's a bunch of stuff happening, but there's no *plot*. There's no meaning to unify the events that occur. Why is she running around space killing aliens? What is she trying to accomplish? If there's no point, there's no plot.

I love how Lisa Cron defines plot in *Wired for Story* as, "the events that relentlessly force the protagonist to deal with her [internal] issue as she pursues her goal."

Read that again. Let it sink in. Right there, we have the four elements crucial for structuring a plot:

1. The heroine's goal (what she wants)
2. The heroine's issue (the internal conflict that's keeping her from her goal)
3. Obstacles in the heroine's path (the external conflict that's keeping her from her goal)
4. The results of dealing with her internal issue (change)

Now, let's go back to our alien assassin. Let's say her parents were murdered by aliens, so she joins a special task force that hunts down rogue aliens throughout the galaxy in the hopes of finding and killing the ones who murdered her family (goal). Because of her bad experience, she's become prejudiced toward non-human species (internal issue) even though the task force is a mix of humans and aliens.

When she's assigned a case that might be her parent's killers she's eager to go...until she learns her partner (and love interest) is a non-human. They'll have to learn to work together to hunt down the aliens (external obstacles) and get justice for her parents. Along the way, she'll have to learn how to overcome her prejudice (change).

Now we have a plot. Our heroine will set off on a mission to seek justice for her parents' killers, but must overcome her prejudice against aliens in order to accept her partner's help. All of the exciting things that happen along the way—chases, shoot-outs, skirmishes—should be obstacles that make it harder for her to get what she wants, or force her to confront that internal issue. And, bonus, her internal issue will serve as even more conflict when she begins to fall for her partner.

Plot: an account of the actions the hero takes to achieve his goal, and the obstacles he must overcome along the way.

Your plot is your hero's journey towards his goal: The steps he takes to attain what he wants, the obstacles he meets along the way, and how he fights to overcome them. But how do plot and conflict relate? Let me paint you a picture. Your plot is like a ship sailing on the churning, choppy waves of conflict. It could go anywhere; it could easily become lost, or even crash upon the rocks of the shore. Your hero's goal is the guiding light, the lighthouse that ensures the ship stays on course and reaches its destination safely.

In other words, your plot is the vehicle through which the conflict plays out, and your hero's goal gives meaning to the conflict and guides the plot. Together, your hero's goal and your story's conflict create *tension*.

What is Tension?

While conflict is the foundation of story, tension is what keeps readers turning pages. Your hero's goal + your story's conflict create a question that must be answered throughout the course of the novel. Broadly speaking, that question is: Will the hero achieve his goal? This question creates your novel's tension, forcing readers to turn pages to find the answer, to discover what will happen to a character they care about.

Tension: the anticipation of what will happen next in a story.
Driven by concern and/or curiosity in the reader for the hero.

But that's very vague, so let's look at a specific example. In *Cinderella*, her goal is to attend the royal ball, but her wicked stepmother is the conflict opposing her. This creates the question (tension): Will Cinderella attend the ball?

But good stories create more than one question, aka source of tension. Your goal is to look for ways to get your hero into trouble—to keep him from reaching his goal—and make the trouble increasingly worse as the story goes along.

Cinderella faces several obstacles. First, her stepmother destroys her gown and forbids her from attending the ball. The situation seems pretty hopeless, causing readers to wonder if the stepmother has won. How can Cinderella possibly attend the ball now?

Then the fairy godmother shows up, and creates a gown and carriage for Cinderella. That could be the end of the story, but there's a catch—Cinderella must return home before midnight or the magic will wear off. Now we have a new source of tension: Will Cinderella make it home in time? Will her stepmother or stepsisters recognize her at the ball?

When Cinderella finally arrives at the ball, she dances with prince. But then the clock begins to strike midnight and she has to make a run for it, leaving her glass slipper behind. Again, a new source of tension is introduced as the prince decides to find the slipper's owner: Will the prince find Cinderella? Will her stepmother manage to trick him into thinking the slipper belongs to one of Cinderella's stepsisters? Will Cinderella marry the prince and live happily ever after?

The reader continues to turn the pages out of both worry for Cinderella, a character they love and who they want to win, and curiosity over what will happen next. To create tension throughout your story you must continually create questions. As soon as one question is answered, create another. This will carry your readers through your story and create a page-turner of a novel!

Exercise 6

Get a feel for how an author uses conflict, tension, and plot in a story by analyzing one of your favorite novels or a novel you have read recently on the following pages.

Exercise 6

Book Title: _____

1. What was the hero's goal—what did he/she want and why? Did you care whether or not the hero achieved his/her goal? Why or why not?

2. What was the conflict of the story? What or who stood in the hero's way as an opposing force?

3. What steps did the hero take to achieve his/her goal (the plot)?

4. What obstacles stood in the hero's path of achieving his/her goal? How did this create tension?

5. When were you most concerned about whether or not the hero would win? How did the author create this tension?

Additional Notes/Observations

LESSON 7

LET'S TALK DIALOGUE

Dialogue is a tricky little beast when you're a new writer. From punctuation to making it sound realistic, there's a lot that can go wrong. When done well, dialogue can be a true delight for the reader and make a story shine. But mess it up and, well...it can really put a damper on things. If you're confused about punctuation, speech tags, or the difference between spoken and written dialogue fear not—keep reading and we'll tackle them together!

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is the spoken words between two or more characters, which is signaled with quotation (“ ”) marks. Most of your story will consist of dialogue. Dialogue not only moves your story along, but it also helps reveal who your characters are.

However, it's important to note that while we want our dialogue to seem realistic, dialogue in fiction is not the same as dialogue in real life. When we write dialogue for a story we are actually creating an artistic imitation of real speech.

Why do we do this? Because no one would want to read real-life dialogue. In real speech, people stammer, um and uh, talk over and interrupt each other, get distracted,

forget what they were going to say, bring up random stuff, chit chat about the weather... Trust me, no one wants to read that! It would be a mess.

To really see the difference between real and written dialogue, take a look at this piece of dialogue I've transcribed from an interview with *Doctor Who* actor David Tennant:

Obviously it's—it's eh every exciting to be around for eh the big celebration episode, you know. Ehm, it—it—it's something that's being talked about (sighs)—I mean the—the expectation has been I—I think since I left eh that I'd end up in this somehow because there is the precedent I guess for old Doctors coming back for a visit around the anniversary time. But ehm, but it was really only relatively recently that—that it-it became a definite thing so uh I-I-I was thrilled cause it's a huge—it's a huge thing for Doctor Who.

You can watch the interview [here](#) if you'd like to hear it spoken. Now, can you imagine reading an entire book like that? And in a conversation with two people there would be even more interruptions and overlapping speech. Things would get frustrating for the reader pretty quickly.

So how might the above dialogue look in a story? Probably something like this:

“Obviously it's very exciting to be around for the big celebration episode. Since I've left the expectation, I think, has been that I'd end up in the episode somehow. There's a precedent for old Doctors coming back for the anniversary but it wasn't until recently it became definite. I was thrilled—it's a huge thing for Doctor Who.”

See the difference? It reads smoother and easier while still sounding like real speech. Some of the wording and sentence structure has been altered, and the stammering and ums have been omitted.

I would highly recommend hopping on YouTube and watching a few interviews, paying close attention to the flow of real conversations. Listen to how people talk in real life, and then grab a book and study the dialogue to see the difference.

In short, dialogue in fiction is an imitation of real speech carefully crafted with purpose in mind. That purpose is to: 1) Move the story forward, and 2) Characterize your hero and supporting cast with what they say and how they say it.

The Function of Dialogue in Fiction

1. Moves the story forward.
2. Characterizes your hero and minor characters with what they say and how they say it.

Speech Tags

A “speech tag” identifies which character is speaking. It usually involves words like said, asked, shouted, or whispered. Like so:

“Can we go to the movies?” Sara asked.

“Not until you’ve finished your chores,” her mother said.

New writers often fall into the mistake of thinking ‘said’ is too boring and repetitive. They try to make their writing more colorful by using speech tags like bawled, affirmed, intoned, inquired, fumed, etc. The problem is, most of the time these words are redundant or unnecessary and only clutter the writing. We should be able to tell from the dialogue itself that a character is fuming, you shouldn’t need to tell us.

I highly recommend using said whenever possible because it’s invisible. It doesn’t draw attention to itself and readers don’t notice it because it’s used so often. If that doesn’t convince you, using said will also make you appear like an experienced writer to publishers since overusing colorful speech tags tends to mark you as a novice.

Punctuating Dialogue

When I first started writing, I was confused and intimidated by how to punctuate dialogue. Since I've always found books to be the best teachers, I would grab books off my shelf and study how the dialogue was formatted. I still remember scouring the pages of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* wondering, does the comma go *inside* the quotations or *outside*?

Ah, memories.

Now I can punctuate dialogue with a thought—and eventually you will be able to do the same. With practice, it will become as natural as breathing. Here are the basic rules for punctuating dialogue:

Rule #1: Quotation marks are for spoken words only. A quotation mark signals to the reader that someone is speaking, so don't use them for a character's thoughts!

Rule #2: Ending punctuation, such as a comma, period, question mark, or exclamation point, always go *inside* the quotation marks. Like so:

"I don't think we should go that way," Jane said.

"Are you sure about that?" Ethan asked.

"I'm positive."

Also, only use **one** punctuation mark at the end of a line of dialogue:

WRONG: "Is that the new dress you bought?," he asked.

Rule #3: Speech tags after the dialogue should be *lower-case*. Since they describe *how* the dialogue within the quotations was spoken, they go along with the dialogue and are not separate. Think of the dialogue and speech tag as part of one sentence. For example:

"Hand me that paint brush," he said.

"You could at least say please," the girl said with a huff.

"Would you just hand it to me already?" he said.

WRONG: "Hand me that paint brush!" He said.

WRONG: "Hand me that paint brush." He said.

What follows the dialogue is *capitalized* as a new and separate sentence if it describes the *actions* of a character and not how the dialogue was spoken. Observe:

“I was just trying to help.” The girl backed away.

WRONG: “I was just trying to help,” the girl backed away.

Rule #4: The dialogue, speech tag, and actions of each character get their own paragraph. If you switch speakers, you begin a new paragraph. Like so:

“Did you see that thing in the sky last night?” Dave asked.

Seth frowned. “What thing?”

“It was moving around like this.” Dave gestured wildly with his arms.

Seth shook his head. “You’re crazy, man.”

Learn from the Pros

The best way to learn how to write great dialogue besides practicing yourself is to read books with great dialogue. Read as many as you can, and read a variety.

Read books set in present-day New York City, Victorian England, and the wild west of the 1800’s. Read books with teen characters or characters who speak in a dialect or with an accent. All of these characters will speak in different ways, which means the author must employ different techniques to make their speech feel real.

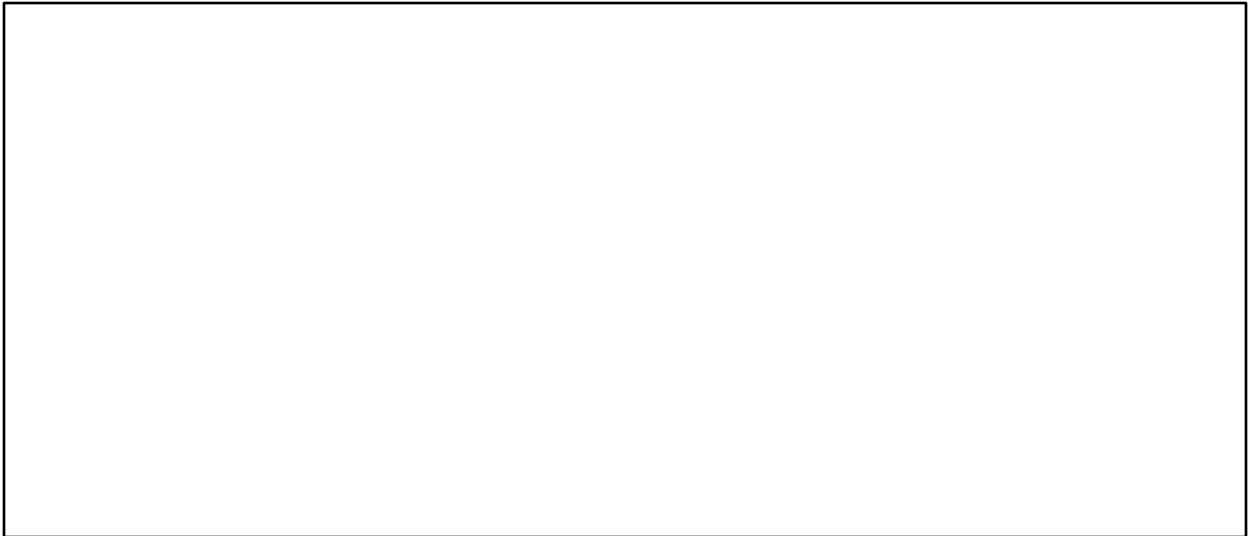
In each story, pay attention to the vocabulary and sentence structure the author uses to create realistic dialogue. Take note on how the author communicates an accent or speech impediment within the dialogue. Observe the sarcasm, subtext, insinuations, and double-meanings behind the words. Then, start practicing these techniques in your own writing and before you know it you’ll be writing realistic, engaging dialogue!

Exercise 7

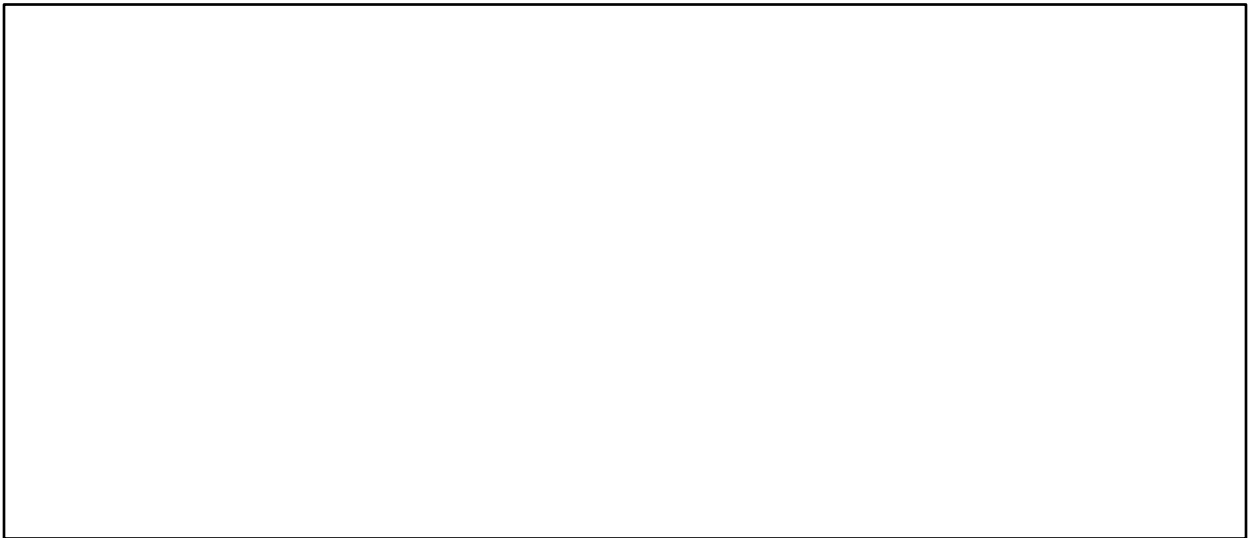
Observe the difference between dialogue and real speech by watching an interview on YouTube and transcribing it word-for-word with stammering and interruptions included. Then, rewrite the transcription how it would appear if it were dialogue in a book.

Exercise 7

A. Watch an interview on YouTube and transcribe it word-for-word below with stammering, interruptions, etc. included.



B. Rewrite your transcription of the interview as it would appear if it were dialogue in a book.



LESSON 8

SETTING AND WORLDBUILDING

What was the setting of the last book you read? New York City? Dublin? The wilds of Africa? Outer space? Where did the author take you? Now, let me ask you another question: Did the author succeed in taking you there?

Sometimes I read books where the setting is such an integrated part of the story and so detailed that I feel as though I'm really there. But other times, I'll read a book that *says* it takes place in Montana but the setting is so empty that it feels as though it could be taking place anywhere. Or, even worse, I'll pick up a book and have no idea where the setting is or forget where I'm supposed to be halfway through.

When we read, we love to be taken on a journey to faraway lands we've never seen so we can experience that place and culture without ever leaving the comfort of our homes. So it's a shame that we writers often tend to neglect setting in our stories.

Maybe it's because we're overwhelmed with all of the other details we need to juggle like plot and characters. Or, maybe it's because we don't think that setting could be that important or make that big of a difference. But don't be fooled—just like your plot and character, setting, too, plays an important role in your novel!

What is Setting?

A setting is the place where the story's events unfold. When done well, setting will make a story colorful and memorable. This is because the author is creating a place that feels real and that the reader wants to return to over and over again each time she picks up the book. You don't want your setting to be blank in the reader's mind because this takes away from one of the pleasures and expectations of reading—to be taken to another place. Novels contain multiple layers of settings, which we can categorize a little something like this:

- **Big-Picture Setting**—the country, state, fantasy world, etc. inside of which your primary and small picture settings are contained.
- **Primary Setting(s)**—location(s) where most of the story takes place.
- **Small-Picture Setting(s)**—additional locations where scenes take place.

Let's look at a couple examples. First, from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*:

- **Big-Picture Setting**—The United Kingdom
- **Primary Setting**—Hogwarts
- **Small-Picture Setting**—The Dursley's house, the shack by the sea, Diagon Alley, Platform 9 ³/₄, the Forbidden Forest, the Gryffindor dormitory within Hogwarts, etc.

What about *The Hunger Games*?

- **Big-Picture Setting**—Panem
- **Primary Setting**—The Arena
- **Small-Picture Settings**—District 13, the Tribute's train, the training center, the Capitol, the cornucopia within the arena, etc.

When you're trying to figure out where to set your story, start with the big-picture setting. This could be a real place like Russia or California, or somewhere fictional like Westeros or Middle Earth.

Next, narrow your focus to the primary location. Where within this big picture will most of the story take place? A university in Moscow? A ballet studio in Sandiego? The Shire? This might be tricky to pin down if your story is split between locations, or if you have multiple story lines with characters in different locations.

For example, in *Lord of the Rings* the characters are on a journey to destroy the One Ring and visit a variety of settings along the way. And in *Game of Thrones* you have many different story lines with characters spread out across a number of primary settings like the Night's Watch, King's Landing, Meereen, etc. Ask yourself where characters will spend most of their time and those locations will be your primary settings.

After you figure out your primary setting, start exploring other small-picture settings your characters might visit during your story. These could be both within the primary setting, and beyond it. A small-picture setting is one where characters spend a brief amount of time (maybe a scene or a couple chapters), such as the Forbidden Forest in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* or the Tribute's training center in *The Hunger Games*.

When you've chosen your settings, you should begin treating them the way you would treat any other character in your story. Characters need to be developed or they will end up feeling like flat pieces of cardboard. The same goes for your setting! Take some time to sit down and get to know your setting, researching or thinking about things like:

- The layout/geography
- What's beyond in the outlying areas
- Politics, laws, and governing system
- Culture and traditions
- Weather
- Local plants and animals

- Jobs, economy, imports/exports
- History, enemies, and allies
- Folklore, urban legends, etc.
- The hero's feelings and opinions about the place

But now this brings us to the second point I wanted to talk about concerning setting: worldbuilding.

Worldbuilding

The term “worldbuilding” is usually used when talking about fantasy and sci-fi novels. It's the process of creating a fictional world from scratch that feels realistic. This process could include creating races, religions, histories, currencies, mythologies, cultures, traditions, and so on.

Worldbuilding is an important part of the fantasy genre because the reader is being taken to an unfamiliar place that doesn't exist. That means the author needs to make it feel realistic by weaving a web of details so complex that we begin to feel that there's no way the author could be making this all up, that this place must really exist somewhere.

One example of fantastic worldbuilding is J.K. Rowling's wizarding world in the *Harry Potter* series. Her attention to detail is phenomenal—she gives the wizarding world its own currency (galleons and knuts), sweets (Bertie Botts Every Flavor Beans, anyone?), newspaper (The Daily Prophet), drinks (Butterbeer), transportation (The Knight Bus), and sport (Quidditch), just to name a few of the many details.

Rowling creates a world so fleshed out that you can become completely engrossed to the point where if someone came along and told you she made it all up, you'd probably call them a liar (let's admit it, how many of us are still waiting for our Hogwarts acceptance letters?).

That is how powerful worldbuilding can be, when done well. But a word of warning: although you can get away without too much damage from lack of setting in most genres, in fantasy and sci-fi worldbuilding is critical to your story. It's an

expectation of the genre since readers turn to fantasy to be taken to a new, magical world. If you only have a cardboard world to offer, your story is going to suffer.

Worldbuilding Isn't Just for Fantasy

Now, even though we mainly associate worldbuilding with fantasy and sci-fi, this doesn't mean it doesn't apply to other genres. There is an element of worldbuilding within any story you write. The only difference is, when the story is set in the real world rather than a fantasy world, we are working with fact rather than fiction.

What do I mean? To use my own hometown as an example, let's say your story is set in Louisville Kentucky and your hero is a jockey who will ride in the Kentucky Derby. You have two "worlds" to explore and build here: 1) The physical setting of Louisville Kentucky and the Churchill Downs racetrack where the Derby takes place, and 2) The subculture of jockeys and horseracing.

First, your physical setting. Whereas in fantasy you would make everything up, in this type of story you'll need to do research to learn about the layout of the city and Churchill Downs, the history of these places, famous landmarks, the climate of Kentucky, how the locals speak, and so on. You'll also need to uncover little details that will bring your story to life.

For example, there are details about my hometown that outsiders likely wouldn't know. Like we're very picky about how you pronounce Louisville (it's Loo-uh-vul, not Lewis-ville or Looey-ville, in case you were wondering). And even if you're a local and you've never been to the Derby, you still know that Derby hats and Mint Julips are a big deal because the local news will inevitably run stories on both of these topics every year around Derby time.

Your job as a writer is to uncover all these quirky little details to bring the setting to life. Every place has its own culture, and your readers want to experience it. These are the details that are going to give your setting character and make it stand out.

The second "world" you'll need to delve into is that of the horse racing subculture, and also the life of a jockey. You would need to get inside information about these worlds so they're accurate and believable.

“Worlds” like these exist all around us, and everyone belongs to one world or another. For example, you and I belong to the “world” of fiction writing. We have our own lingo, jokes, processes, etc. that outsiders wouldn’t know. Your job is to bring the reader into whatever specialized world your character belongs to so that by the end of the story, they feel like an insider.

Either Way, There Will be Work Involved

As you can see, it doesn’t matter whether you’re writing a fantasy, contemporary, or even historical fiction novel—there’s going to be a fair amount of work involved to develop a realistic setting, whether you’re making up all the details or researching them.

Having written both fantasy and historical fiction, I don’t know that one or the other is really “easier.” With research it can be challenging to find the information you need, especially if you’re writing about something set in the past where you can’t visit the place at that time period or ask locals for inside information. On the other hand, creating an original, interesting fantasy world that’s detailed and realistic is no small task.

Whatever genre of story you write, take the time to put the extra effort into worldbuilding. Not only will it help your story come alive, but it will make readers want to return to your book time and time again for a visit.

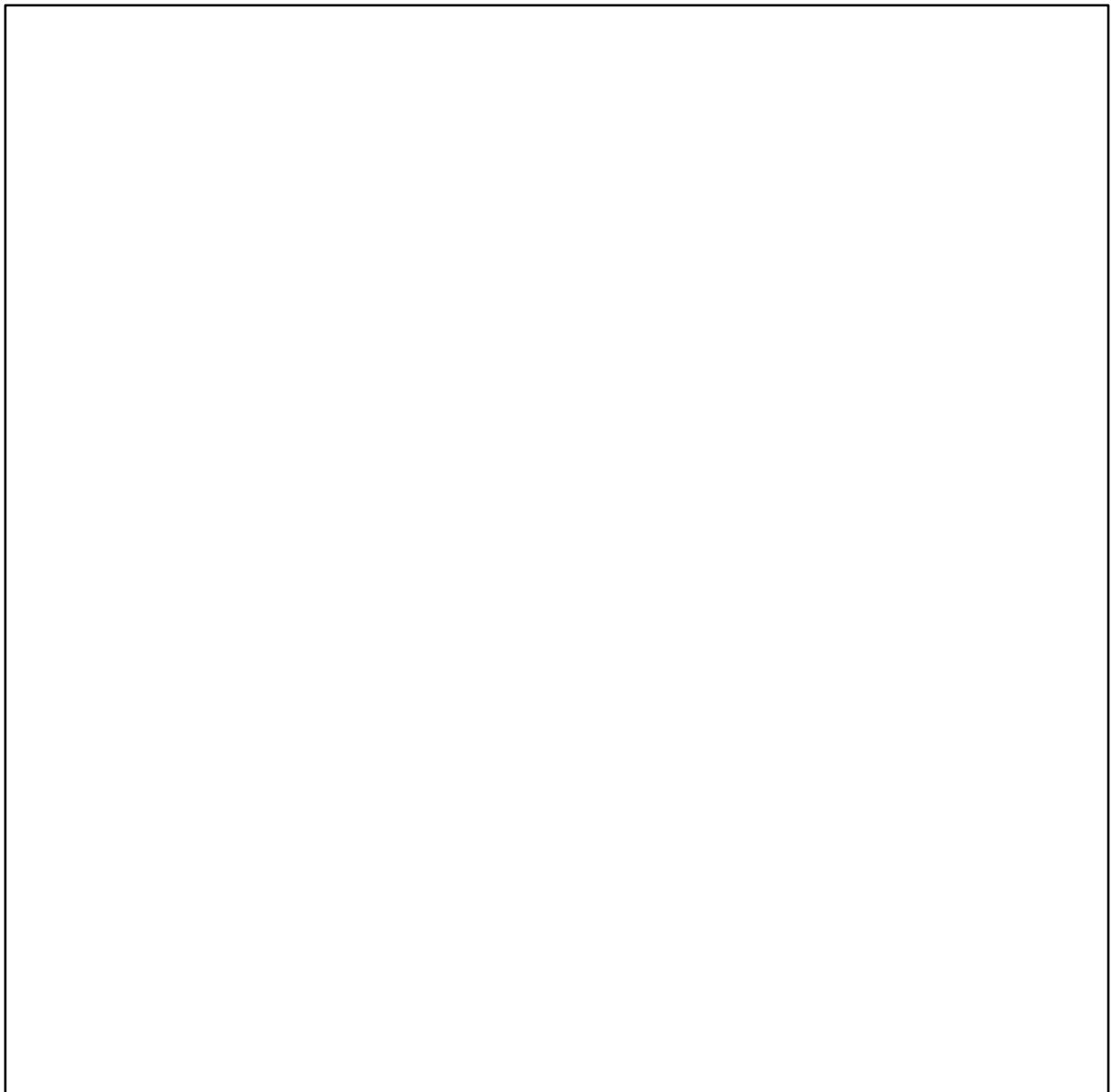
Exercise 8

Choose a book where the setting felt richly detailed and drew you in. On the next page, reflect on what techniques the author used to make the setting feel real.

Exercise 8

Book Title: _____

Reflect on the setting of your chosen book. What details about the setting really stood out to you? What details did the author include that made it feel as though you were there? For fantasy, what made it feel like a real place? Can you use any of these techniques in your own story?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their reflection on the book's setting.

LESSON 9

CREATING EFFECTIVE DESCRIPTION

The purpose of description is to help readers experience your story both with their senses and emotions. Contrary to popular belief, it's not there to look pretty or be flowery. Sure some writers can write very beautifully, but pretty prose isn't necessary to bring your story to life. Sometimes, beautiful writing can even get in the way of or distract from the story itself!

So what tools do writers possess for bringing a setting to life through description? Let's break down the different techniques.

Sensory Details

First, the senses. You're probably familiar with them: sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound. Sight is the easiest to write and the one we think of first when setting up a scene, but you want to get into the habit of putting yourself into a scene and feeling it with *all* your senses.

What might your character be hearing? The whistle of a kettle or a dripping faucet? What about physical sensations, like the warmth of the sun on his skin or the squish of damp sand between his toes?

Readers want to experience what your hero is experiencing. Going beyond sight grounds readers in the story and makes the setting feel rich with detail in their minds—and this in turn makes your fictional world feel more realistic.

Manipulating Mood through Word Choice

Now that we know how to make readers experience a story with their senses, how can we make them experience it *emotionally* using description? This writer's magic trick is accomplished through the subtle power of word choice.

That's right, friend, by being intentional about the words you choose you can make the reader feel whatever you want them too—without them even realizing it! Pretty neat, huh?

But you don't want to choose *any* mood for your scene. Whenever you introduce a setting, your hero should have an emotional reaction to it, and this should influence the words you use to describe it. After all, readers want to experience what the hero is experiencing, right? This means his feelings about his surroundings too.

Does the hero find this place scary? Beautiful? Peaceful? Choose words that communicate what the hero is feeling—or even better, ask yourself, “What words would my hero use to describe this?”

Let's take a look at the power of word choice with this quick example:

The castle loomed atop the cliff, its sharp spires slicing through the clouds. The iron bars of the gate had been wrenched open and now resembled the mangled ribs of a skeleton.

Notice how I didn't say the castle was scary or creepy, though that's likely the impression/feeling you got. Instead, I used words like loomed, sharp, slicing, wrenched, and mangled, and together with the comparison of the gate to a skeleton's ribs, it all helps to create a creepy, foreboding mood.

This is also an example of showing vs. telling. Instead of *telling* you the castle was creepy, I *showed* you through my word choice. Whenever you can, opt for showing over telling when appropriate.

Film Shots

“Wait, why are we talking about film?” you ask. “What does this have to do with writing?”

Allow me to explain.

A story plays out like a film in the mind, yes? Because of this, we can steal a few film tricks and apply them to our descriptions.

When you watch a movie and a new setting is introduced, it will usually be done with an extreme long shot that includes a large amount of the landscape such as a city or farm so the viewer can see where the action will take place. This is also called an *establishing shot*.

Then, the camera will narrow its focus to a normal long shot, which might show something like a house, kitchen, train station, etc. where the scene will take place.

Narrow the focus again to a full shot, and this allows the viewer to see more details of the character’s costumes and their surroundings.

Narrow the focus yet again to a mid-shot and we see the characters from the waist-up, allowing us to focus on their facial expressions and emotional reactions.

Narrow the focus one more time and we have a close-up of characters’ facial expressions or important objects.

So how does this translate into writing? We can use this technique to organize our descriptions and help them flow clearly in the reader’s mind. You do this by starting your description with a wide “establishing” shot, and then narrowing your focus. For example:

The barn was tucked away in a meadow between two oaks, its tin roof rusted and black paint peeling. Sam shoved open the door and glanced over the rows of empty stalls and then upward at the vaulted loft filled with moldy hay. He kicked

aside a rotting bucket and a mouse darted into the shadows. Wrinkling his nose, he crouched to examine the droplets of blood soaked into the earth among the spilled grain and mouse droppings.

Notice how I started with an establishing shot and kept narrowing the focus until we had a close-up description of the blood splatters. This not only helps the reader get their bearings in the scene, but it follows the natural way we experience a place—we notice the overall picture before we begin to zero-in on tiny details.

Specific Nouns

Getting as specific as possible with nouns in your description will create a much sharper image in the reader's head. Instead of "red flowers" say "poppies," and instead of "fancy car" say "Lamborghini."

This technique also requires you do your research. You should be able to specifically name things in your story no matter the culture or time period, such as the character's items of clothing, the food they eat, the weapons used, etc.

If you're writing a sci-fi story and your hero walks into a room full of "scientific equipment" not only is this a lousy mental image for the reader, but it's lazy writing. What sort of equipment are they using? What is it called? What does it look like? It's your job to find out.

Balance

Finally, one of the important parts of good description is balance, or knowing what to describe and when.

For example, the middle of an intense action scene is not a good time to unload a bunch of description. The reader simply won't care and it will just get in the way. Save the description for the slower parts of your story where you are setting up a scene or introducing a new setting, character, important object, or what-have-you.

Also, you need to be discerning about *what* you choose to describe because you can't (and shouldn't!) describe everything. You'll end up overwhelming the reader and

weakening the impact of the description because they won't be able to remember it all. So what should you focus on? Here are three things to consider:

1. Choose the most important details, or the details that make the setting interesting or different.
2. Choose specific details in order to set a certain mood.
3. Choose the details your character would notice. (For example, in the same room, a hunter might admire a collection of rifles while a bookworm might admire a bookshelf. Different people notice different things).

Techniques for Effective Description

1. Use sensory details to enrich the setting and let the reader fully experience the story.
2. Use word choice to manipulate what you want the reader to feel about a setting.
3. Use film shots to organize descriptions by establishing the overall setting and then narrowing the focus.
4. Use specific nouns to create a sharper image in the reader's head.
5. Balance your description by discerning what you should describe and when.

But how much description is too much? This will vary based on your writing style and the type of story you're telling. For example, literary fiction can have longer passages of description because readers of that genre will expect and even enjoy it. But in a Young Adult action novel you're going to want to go light on the description because your audience will have less patience.

A good rule of thumb is to tell the audience just enough to give them a clear picture and avoid any confusion. How much detail that entails, however, is up to you as the author.

Exercise 9

A. Practice using your other senses besides sight by describing a scene from the perspective of a blind person.

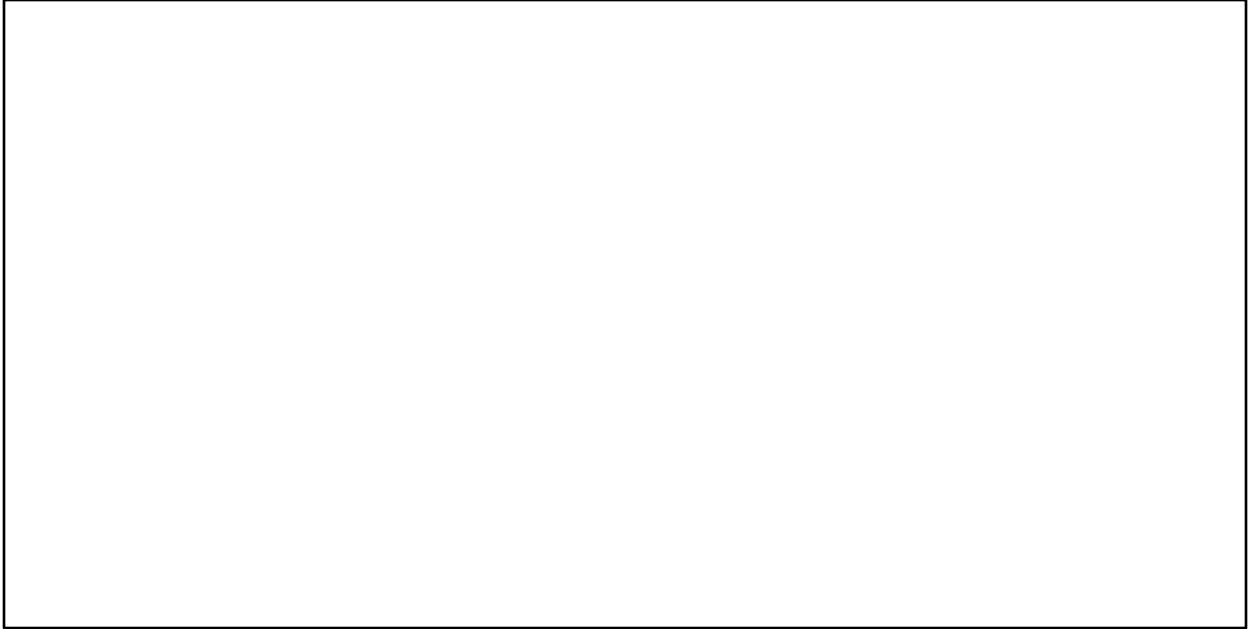
B. Practice setting mood through word choice and filtering details through a character's perspective by describing the same place twice through the eyes of two different people.

Exercise 9

A. Below, describe a scene from the perspective of someone who is blind.

B. Describe the same place through the eyes of two different people. Focus on their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about the place, as well as what details they would recognize or words they would use to describe it.

Character #1



Character #2



LESSON 10

WHAT IS THEME? DECONSTRUCTING AN ELUSIVE CONCEPT

You know what used to drive me insane? Theme. I hated it because I could never quite understand it. I would stress over theme and research it obsessively but I could never get it to click for me. I'd think I finally grasped the idea, but then, nope. Theme was such an elusive concept.

That was, until I finally had a breakthrough. (Cue metaphorical light bulb). I realized I needed to change the way I was defining theme. Everyone kept saying that theme was “what the story is about.” Well what does that even mean? Isn't the plot what the story's about? It was just too easy to get confused, and it wasn't working for me and my way of thinking. I needed something more specific.

After mulling over it, I finally had my aha moment. Here's my new definition:

Theme: a thesis (theory) that the story sets out to prove.

Some of you probably winced at the word “thesis.” “How is this more helpful?” you ask. “Theses are confusing!” I used to think so too (God knows I struggled with them in college), but they’re actually pretty simple. Observe:

Thesis: a theory that is presented as a premise to be proved.

Any light bulbs going off yet? No? All right, well just sit tight and keep these things in mind as we take a more in-depth look at theme.

What a Theme is (And isn’t)

So, what is theme exactly? It’s such a hard concept to grasp because it’s very subtle. So subtle, in fact, that it’s invisible in your story. Your theme is what your story is saying about humanity—about human nature, human behavior, what it means to be human. All that good stuff. It’s basically the “point” you’re trying to make. Some might call this the “lesson” or “moral.”

Now, you’ll often hear people say that the theme of X story was love, loyalty, betrayal, or something along those lines. The problem is, these are **not** themes. I think that this misunderstanding is where a lot of the confusion lies. I know this in part is where I kept getting confused. A noun is not a theme. A theme is *what you have to say about* love or loyalty or betrayal. It’s very specific.

I love how screenwriter Brian McDonald puts it in his book *Invisible Ink*:

“Competition” is not a theme. A theme might be, “Competition is sometimes a necessary evil.” Or, “Competition leads to self-destruction.” Saying that your theme is competition is like saying your theme is “red.” It really says nothing at all.

Cue the light bulbs.

How Theme Works

Since the beginning of time, stories have been used to teach lessons. Think of Aesop's fables, Grimm's fairy tales, or Jesus' parables in the Bible. Though we don't realize it, when we read a story, we are unconsciously looking for guidance, advice, or a revelation about life. That's why stories with themes resonate so strongly with readers. We get something deeper out of it than entertainment.

Your story's theme is what you're trying to "teach" people. But first off, you have to figure out what it is you're trying to say in your story. What do you want to make readers think about? How do you want to change your reader's perspective of the world? What do you have to say about humanity?

"But what if I don't have anything to say?"

Nonsense! Everyone has something to say. Especially writers. You have something to say, you just haven't found it yet.

Now, remember how I said I like to think of theme as your story's thesis? This is where that comes into play. First, you develop your thesis (your theory about humanity). For example, true love never fades. Now your goal is to set out to prove this to your readers through your story.

I love this way of thinking so much more because not only does it explain what a theme is, but it shows you what to do with it; a thesis must be proven.

So how do you get your point across to your readers without sounding preachy? You show instead of tell. No one wants to be preached at, but everyone loves a good story. Show us your theme through the events of your story and the actions and decisions of your characters. Everything in your story should support your theme, just as you would use evidence to support a thesis.

"It's the story's job to show us the theme, not the theme's job to tell us the story."

-Lisa Cron, *Wired for Story*

This is why theme is so tricky. We're implying our point rather than stating it outright. But this is so important to do! You want your theme to be subtle, not in-your-face and clunky. Don't worry that readers might not "get it." Some readers might not see the theme. Others might see something different from what you intended. And you know what? That's okay! Art will be interpreted in different ways by different people, and that's part of its beauty.

Exercise 10

Choose a book and reflect on its theme using the questions on the next page to get a feel for how an author builds theme into a story.

Exercise 10

Book Title: _____

Instructions: Choose a book and reflect on its theme with the questions below (this will probably be easiest with classic literature; feel free to use SparkNotes.com or CliffsNotes.com if you're stumped and need to cheat. Also keep in mind that a novel can contain multiple themes).

1. What was the theme of the story? What was the author trying to say about humanity?

2. How did the events of the story and the characters actions, words, decisions, etc. support the theme? What was the "evidence" the author used to prove his point? (Additional space to write provided on next page).

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their response to the question above.

3. How did you feel about the way the theme worked in the story? What do you think the story would have been like if it hadn't had a theme?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to write their response to the question above.

LESSON 11

HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR UNIQUE WRITING VOICE

Voice is another writing term that can be difficult to explain; after all, the term “voice” suggests something spoken, yet novels deal with the written language. (No wonder new writers get so confused!) In the simplest of terms, voice is *how you write*. Just as you have your own distinctive way of talking, you should also have a distinctive way of writing.

So what do I mean by “how” you write? I believe that there are two components that make up a writer’s voice: *style* and *perception*.

I think that style often gets confused with voice. While style does influence your voice, style is not voice on its own. So what exactly is style, then? It’s your own personal preferences and choices in the way you write. It’s *how* you say what you have to say. It’s composed of word choice, figurative language, metaphors, imagery, etc. Do you use poetic language or are you more straightforward? Do you prefer long sentences or short, choppy ones? Do you use speech tags or avoid them whenever possible?

All of these decisions work together to create your personal style. For example, I prefer to write in a more descriptive style. This means lots of imagery, figurative language, and sensory details. Think of style as a sort of “accent” for your writer’s voice.

Now, on to perception. By perception, I mean the way in which the narrator of the story views the world. What are his/her opinions, views, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, beliefs about the world around him? This will influence the narrative. For example, a pessimist will perceive the world more negatively, while an optimist will have a more positive attitude. A soldier will have a different perception of war than a citizen. A child sees the world differently than an adult.

See where this is going?

The narrator's perception will in turn influence the *tone* of the writing and give it *personality*. Now, this brings us to the next important point: Who is the narrator? Is it the author, via third person, or is it the hero via first person?

If you're writing in third person, your voice will be "louder" than the hero's. On the other hand, if you're writing in first person, your voice will be "muffled" by the hero's. He will be the one speaking, and all of the thoughts and opinions will be his. Some of the stylistic choices such as word choice will also reflect how the character would speak rather than what words you would use. Deep point of view is the middle ground between these two, using the third person but maintaining the character's voice.

Whichever you choose, the voice telling the story should reveal a distinct way of looking at the world.

What Does Voice Look Like in Writing?

Now that you have a better understanding of what voice is, let's take a look at some examples to compare style, tone, and perception.

Example #1: Style

Excerpt 1:

"On two chairs beneath the bole of the tree and canopied by a living bough there sat, side by side, Celeborn and Galadriel. Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes;

for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory.” -J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Excerpt 2:

“The bill comes on a silver tray. Hodges lays his plastic on top of it and sips his coffee while he waits for it to come back. He’s comfortably full, and in the middle of the day that condition usually leaves him ready for a two-hour nap. Not this afternoon. This afternoon he has never felt more awake.” -Stephen King, *Mr. Mercedes*

Analysis

Tolkien’s style is more poetic and descriptive. The passage moves more slowly because of the long sentences. On the other hand, King’s style is more sparse and straightforward, and he uses short sentences. Also notice the wording—Tolkien’s style is more archaic/romantic, while King’s is more modern. What other stylistic choices do you notice?

Example #2: Tone

Excerpt 1:

“Conventional wisdom says the key to looking good is building your outfit around just one trend at a time. Forget that! Wearing multiple trends at once not only makes you look more stylish, it also stops any one piece from dominating your look. That way the focus stays clearly on you and not just on your trendy new jacket.” –[Seventeen Magazine](#)

Excerpt 2:

“The new Coke bottle is part of the company’s efforts to make its containers from renewable ingredients. Coca-Cola debuted “PlantBottle” packaging in 2009, which is 30% comprised of plant materials. The new PlantBottle that Coke debuted this week is its first to be made 100% from sugar cane plastic.” –[CNN](#)

Analysis

The tone in the first excerpt is more casual and personable, while the second is more dry and factual. Your tone will depend on your (or your character's) perception, your audience (are you writing for teen girls or adults?), and what you want to say (are you trying to convey humor or are you writing a horror piece?).

Example #3: Perception

Excerpt 1: “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit...[Joseph] had no union with her until she gave birth to a son.” -Matthew 1:18, 25

Excerpt 2: “In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...[Joseph] went [to Bethlehem] to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.” -Luke 2:1, 5-6

Analysis

These accounts are two different points of view of the same event—the birth of Jesus. In the first, Matthew focuses more on the virginity of Mary; Luke, on the other hand, focuses more on the location of the birth. Each author focused on the details he thought were most important.

This is why perception is so important to your voice—everyone will notice something different about the same event! This is because we all have different experiences, opinions, preferences, thoughts, and beliefs. Fascinating stuff, right?

Here's another way to think of it: Three people witness a crime and give their testimony to the police. Each story varies a little, though all three cover the main events. Even though the accounts are different, that doesn't mean the witnesses are lying—they just each saw the crime from a different angle, thus providing a unique point of view to what happened.

Your job with your voice is to provide a unique point of view on the world and your story's events.

How Do I Develop My Own Voice?

I remember being a new (and young) writer and stressing over voice in my writing. I didn't understand what it was or how to make my writing stand out. Looking back now, I was probably over-thinking it too much. Everyone has a voice—you have one right now, though it may still be emerging or developing. Your voice will develop naturally as you write and grow. Stephen King gives this advice:

The best way to develop you writer's voice is to read a lot and write a lot. There's really no other way to do it.

Sena Naslund, author of *Ahab's Wife*, also offers some wise advice for developing your voice:

Aim not for distinction, but, instead, aim to write well...We each have distinctive ideas about what "writing well" means... Realize that a distinctive voice for a writer emerges from a sense of being a distinct, unique—that is, "different"—person.

I know a lot of new writers will try to imitate their favorite authors when they begin writing stories. It's okay to experiment with and "try on " different voices as you're finding your own. When I first started writing I imitated J.K. Rowling's style and used lots of colorful speech tags and adverbs. Now I can't stand either.

As we learn the craft of writing we will likely imitate our "teachers" (favorite authors). As we mature and become more confident in our writing abilities, however, we should start to develop our own voice. Please don't strive to mimic another author—the

world needs *your* voice! We don't need another Tolkien or Hemingway or Jane Austen. We need *you*. Because no one can “do you” as well as you can. So why try to write like anyone else?

Write a lot, read a lot, and learn as much as you can about yourself. Grow not just as a writer, but as a person. Discover what stylistic choices you prefer, and discover your thoughts and opinions about the world. Embrace your voice.

Exercise 11

Get a “feel” for voice by choosing a book from two of your favorite authors. Study their writing styles, and then choose a passage from each book. Next, re-write each passage in the voice of the other author. (So, for example, if you chose *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Shining*, you would re-write the *Lord of the Rings* passage in the voice of Stephen King, and vice-versa). This exercise will work best if you choose books written in third rather than first person.

Exercise 11

Book Title and Author #1: _____

Rewrite your chosen passage below in the voice of the second author you've chosen.

Book Title and Author #2: _____

Rewrite your chosen passage below in the voice of the first author you've chosen.

LESSON 12

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR THE GRAMMATICALLY CHALLENGED NOVELIST

Ah, grammar. The red-headed stepchild of the novel-writing process we would much rather forget about. Yet our dangling modifiers and askew apostrophes glare up at us from the page like brilliant eyesores, demanding we admit defeat.

Talk about sucking all the fun out of your creativity.

Writers want to be free to frolic through the fields of their imaginations, not chained down by the stuffy rules your English teacher droned on about. Who cares about past participles or semicolon placement? But our readers expect flawless grammar. And at times, it's enough to make even the most seasoned of writers want to bash their head against their keyboard and hope for the best.

Please don't bash your head against the keyboard.

Though a lot of anxieties and frustrations can arise over grammar, I don't want you to let it stand between you and the novel you want to write. Fear not my grammatically challenged friend—you can learn how to wield grammar just as you can learn how to write a story. Shall we begin?

Do You Need Good Grammar to Write a Novel?

First, I feel that there is a misconception I must clear up. I've had several new writers express their concerns to me about their lack of grammar savvy. They'll say things along the lines of: "I suck at grammar, I'm worried I won't be able to get my story published" or, "My grammar is awful, can I still write a book and become an author?"

Sound familiar? Well, I have some good news for you, friend! You don't have to be a grammar whiz to write—and publish—a novel. I think new writers often tend to confuse good grammar with good writing, but one does not necessarily equal the other!

Good writing is knowing how to choose the most effective words, write descriptively, vividly, and concisely, and create realistic worlds, characters, and dialogue. Sure, correct grammar and spelling help, but they're not what I use to judge the quality of a story. Why? Because mistakes like that usually don't survive to see the published draft.

You see, bad grammar can easily be fixed with editing; bad storytelling, however, can't. Your skills as a storyteller are far more important than your grammar skills. An agent or publisher may overlook poor grammar if you have a fantastic story—after all, that's why they have editors.

So my advice is this: Don't stress yourself out over your grammar. Do the best you can, but put the majority of your efforts into building your storytelling skills.

Now, that being said, of course this doesn't mean you shouldn't try to improve your grammar! Good grammar *does* help. Agents and publishers like to see well-polished writing because it means less work for them (or rather, their editors). Good grammar also helps make you look more professional, intelligent, and experienced.

So how can you improve your grammar skills? Keep reading for my favorite grammar resources and tips!

1. Have a Grammar Guide for Review and Reference

Buying a book (or two) on grammar to refresh your memory is a great starting point. It also helps to have one on hand for reference for those moments when you get hung up on tricky words or sentences! Here are some fantastic grammar handbooks to consider:

- [The Elements of Style](#) by Strunk and White
- [Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing](#)
- [Merriam Webster's Guide to Punctuation and Style](#)
- [The McGraw-Hill Handbook of English Grammar Usage](#)

2. Use a Grammar/Spelling Checker

Most word processing programs have a built-in grammar and spelling checker that does all the work for you—underlining your mistakes and then providing suggestions for corrections which you can then fix in a couple simple clicks.

So make sure these options are turned on and you're taking advantage of them! To turn on your grammar and spelling checker in Word, go to File>Options>Proofreading and check the boxes according to your preferences.

Another grammar and spelling checker worth looking into is [Grammarly](#). This program claims to catch even more errors than Word's built-in proofreader!

A word of warning, however: these automatic proofreaders are a fantastic help, but they're not perfect. I've noticed that occasionally they make incorrect suggestions, or miss a mistake. It doesn't happen often but it does still happen, which is why it's good to know your stuff and proofread your story on your own!

3. Put Your Dictionary to Use

A dictionary is a good resource to have if you find yourself frequently needing to check the spelling, definition, and proper usage of various words. My favorite dictionary resources are:

- [Dictionary.com](#)
- [The Dictionary.com app](#)
- [The Merriam Webster Dictionary](#)

3. Be Aware of Common Mistakes

Everyone has trouble with different words. Know which words you tend to mix up, misspell, and misuse, and be on the lookout for them. Better yet, make yourself a “cheat sheet” of your trouble words for easy reference so you can look up the correct usage quickly. Here are some resources to help you out:

- [Common Errors in English Usage](#) compiled by English professor Paul Brians of Washington State University, and also available in [e-book format](#) for Kindle
- [Commonly Misused Words and Phrases](#)
- [Commonly Misspelled Words](#)

4. Grammar Girl is Your Friend

Stuck and need a quick answer? Search for your answer on [Grammar Girl](#) to get an easy-to-understand, simple yet thorough explanation with examples! This is my go-to resource when I get hung up on confusing things like whether to use who or whom, or where to place a tricky apostrophe or hyphen.

5. Hire an Editor

If you’ve done the best you can and you’re still worried about the grammar in your novel, you may want to consider hiring an editor before submitting it for publication. I would only recommend this if your novel is extremely rough as these services are pricey, and if your novel gets picked up by a publisher their editors will clean it up anyways.

The only exception to this is if you are self-publishing instead of going through a publisher who will provide the editors for you. Then hiring a professional editor is a must. The last thing you want is to publish a book riddled with grammar and spelling errors. Not only will it frustrate readers, but it will make you look sloppy and unprofessional.

6. Read, Read, Read! Write, Write, Write!

Finally, keep reading and writing as much as you can! The more you write and put your grammar into practice, the more you will learn. And the more you read, the more you will begin to develop a “feel” for how sentences should be constructed. Eventually, writing grammatically correct will become instinctive.

What’s Holding You Back?

Don’t let poor grammar stand in the way of you writing your story. As you can see there are lots of resources out there you can use to improve your skills, and you can even hire professional help if need be. But far more important than good grammar is good storytelling. Don’t let bad grammar become an excuse that holds you back. Write your story from the heart, and enjoy the process of telling it.

LESSON 13

WHY YOU NEED A WRITING COMMUNITY

Writing a novel is a solitary task, and we writers tend to be introverted creatures who enjoy the seclusion and silence of our favorite activity. But sometimes, even introverts get lonely. It's part of human nature; it's our instinct to seek out the company of other human beings. It's not good for us to be alone.

When I first started writing I didn't know any other writers. My friends and family, though they supported me, didn't understand my fascination with building plots or my enthusiasm for my characters. They didn't understand the frustrations of plot holes and the misery of feeling as though my writing wasn't any good. They didn't understand why I would rather spend my evenings writing than going out to social events.

They just weren't *like* me; I was a penguin among flamingos, waddling around awkwardly and feeling very out of place.

Though I loved writing, my flock of one was very lonely. I felt as though I was the only one who had experienced the excitement of writing a first novel, along with all of its fears and struggles. For years, I shuffled along this way on my own.

That is, until last year, when I entered the world of blogging and started Ink and Quills. It wasn't until then that I discovered a community of fellow bloggers and writers—people who understood writing, understood *me*, were *like* me. An entire flock of beautiful, awkward, introverted penguins.

For the first time since I had started writing at the age of fourteen, I felt as though I had found a community where I belonged. And let me tell you, friends, it has changed my writing life! Just because the act of writing itself requires solitude doesn't mean you should navigate your novel journey solo. No sir! This introvert will be the first to tell you—writing is so much better with community!

Benefits of a Writing Community

So why do you need a writing community? Meeting and befriending other writers online has been one of the best things to happen to me as a writer, and I wouldn't trade these newfound friendships for anything. I've also been able to connect with writers from all over the world, which is pretty darn cool. But allow me to share some the benefits of building a writing tribe of your own.

1. Support and Encouragement

Writing is hard. Not just hard work, but hard emotionally and mentally. We're plagued with all kinds of doubts, fears, and insecurities. Having writing friends I can express these concerns to—friends who have also experienced what I'm feeling and understand what I'm going through—makes a world of difference. Their kind words and encouragement help me pick myself back up again when I'm feeling down and keep writing.

2. Friendship

Having writing friends is just so. Much. Fun!

I finally have people I can nerd out with over how to construct perfect plots and characters and share my passion for story. It's so nice to talk to people I have things in common with, and who can laugh at writing jokes and understand writer pet peeves

(Such as being asked “What are you going to do with that Creative Writing degree?” Or “What’s your story about?” Or my person favorite, “How long is your story?”).

There’s nothing like being able to confide in, complain to, and converse with a fellow writer who just *gets you*.

3. Feedback

One of the best parts about having writing friends is having people who can give you constructive criticism about your novel (Because let’s face it, as much as your mom loved it, she doesn’t understand how to construct a story like a writer).

I was nervous when I asked my writing friends to beta read my current novel, as I had never let anyone outside of close friends and family read my work before. But it was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had as a writer, and the feedback I received was invaluable!

4. Advice

Whether you’re uncertain if you should pursue traditional or self-publishing, or debating which direction you should take your plot, it’s great to have other writers to turn to for advice. Having writing friends who are more experienced, or who have experience in areas you don’t, is especially helpful since you can ask them for their expertise. Being able to turn to a friend for help is a great comfort to a writer!

How to Build a Writing Community

So where can you find fellow writers? Personally, I met all of my friends on Twitter. I had no idea what I was doing when I first joined Twitter or how to make friends, so I just started talking to people who seemed friendly, and who I was interested in getting to know. Some people chatted for a while only to vanish back into the Twitterverse, and that was that. Others I really hit it off with, and we continued to talk and haven’t stopped since!

It might feel awkward at first, but I’ve found that most people are friendly and enjoy talking about writing and meeting new people. You just have to be brave and take that leap to put yourself out there, which I know can be so hard for us introverts. But I

promise you, the friendships you will gain are so worth stepping outside of your comfort zone! Here are some ideas for places to meet other writers.

1. Local Writing Events

Is there anything writing-related going on near you like workshops, festivals, or conferences? What about any local meet-ups or critique groups? A quick Google search should help you uncover opportunities to meet writers in person in your area.

2. Twitter Chats

If you're a little shy about chatting up random writers on Twitter, you could try participating in writing-related Twitter chats. That way, you can "meet" writers during the chat and then connect with them afterward if you like. A couple of chats I recommended (which are hosted by some of my own friends) are [#StorySocial](#) and [#StoryCrafter](#), though there are many others out there!

3. NaNoWriMo

If you've never heard of it before [NaNoWriMo](#) (or National Novel Writing Month), is an annual "contest" held every November where participants try to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days. There's also [Camp NaNoWriMo](#), which is held in April and July, and allows participants to work on a project of any length.

You can connect with participants on Twitter with the hashtags [#NaNoWriMo](#) and [#CampNaNoWriMo](#), and the websites for both contests offer forums and groups where writers can connect as well.

4. Writing Community Sites

Finally, there are lots of websites out there especially for writers where you can chat in forums, join groups, share your writing, and receive feedback. Sometimes these websites even run writing contests (One of which I've entered in the past, and won a signed copy of Sarah J. Mass' *Heir of Fire*. Mass also got her start writing fiction on similar community sites. So they can be very worthwhile!).

Here are a few to check out: [Wattpad](#), [Penana](#), [Figment](#), [Story Bird](#), [Booksie](#), and [Story Wars](#).

Don't Go It Alone!

I am so grateful for all of the amazing friends I've made online. My writing life feels so much more full because of them, and when I look back to the lonely beginnings of my novel journey I wonder how I survived so long without them. If you only ever follow one piece of writing advice, I ask you to make it this: Find a community, and journey with them as you write your novel.

HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL IN 20 STEPS

(FOR THE WRITER WHO DOESN'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN)

- STEP 1: Find an idea.
- STEP 2: Brainstorm on your idea (includes thinking about ideas for steps 3, 5, 7, & 11).
- STEP 3: Decide on your setting, time period, and genre.
- STEP 4: Decide on your audience.
- STEP 5: Discover the goals of your hero and villain, and develop their characters. Also, begin to brainstorm your secondary characters.
- STEP 6: Choose your point of view and view point character(s).
- STEP 7: Create a rough draft of your plot outline.
- STEP 8: Do market research. (Has anyone written anything similar to your story? What did readers like or hate about it?)
- STEP 9: Tweak your plot outline as needed from your research results.
- STEP 10: Develop your story's settings or begin worldbuilding for fantasy.
- STEP 11: Research your setting and/or time period and any other necessary details.
- STEP 12: Tweak your plot outline as needed with any new ideas you may have gotten from your research and/or worldbuilding.
- STEP 13: Choose your theme. Tweak plot outline as necessary.
- STEP 14: Write your first draft.
- STEP 15: Edit your draft focusing on major issues.
- STEP 16: Fine-tune your story by editing 2-3+ more drafts.
- STEP 17: Hand off your story to beta readers.
- STEP 18: Revise your story according to beta reader's suggestions.
- STEP 19: Begin querying literary agents for publication, or self-publish.
- STEP 20: Pat yourself on the back, take a breather, and then repeat it all again!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Basic Supplies

- Writing software such as Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, Scrivener, etc.
- Notebook paper + binders OR journals for story notes
- Mini notepads & pens for purse, car, & bedside for jotting down ideas OR a note-taking app on your phone such as Evernote
- Index cards for plotting/organizing scenes
- A large binder to hold your printed novel for hard copy editing
- A red pen for editing
- Various colored highlighters for editing
- Post-it notes and flags for editing
- File folders to store novel notes after your story is complete (if you want to keep them)
- File folders, binders, journals, OR Word Documents in a designated folder for storing/organizing ideas for future stories you are not currently writing

Books on Writing

- [*Writing with Emotion, Tension, and Conflict*](#) by Cheryl St. John
- [*Wired for Story*](#) by Lisa Cron
- [*Writing the Breakout Novel*](#) by Donald Maass
- [*The Fire in Fiction*](#) by Donald Maass
- [*The First Five Pages*](#) by Noah Lukeman
- [*Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*](#) by Renni Brown
- [*Description and Setting*](#) by Ron Rozelle
- [*Plot & Structure*](#) by James Scott Bell
- [*How to Write Dazzling Dialogue*](#) by James Scott Bell
- [*Characters, Emotion, and Viewpoint*](#) by Nancy Kress

Reference Books and Organizers

- [*The Emotion Thesaurus*](#) by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi
- [*The Negative Trait Thesaurus*](#) by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi
- [*The Positive Trait Thesaurus*](#) by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi
- [*Master Lists for Writers*](#) by Bryn Donovan
- [*1,000 Awesome Writing Prompts*](#) by Ryan Andrew Kinder
- [The Story Binder Novel Organizer](#) from Ink and Quills

Apps for Writers

- [Evernote](#)
- [Pomodoro Timer](#)
- [Index Card](#)
- [Lists for Writers](#)
- [The Brainstormer](#)
- [Writing Prompts](#)

Software for Writers

- [Scrivener](#)
- [Grammarly](#)
- [Freedom](#) or [StayFocused](#)

Websites for Writing Advice

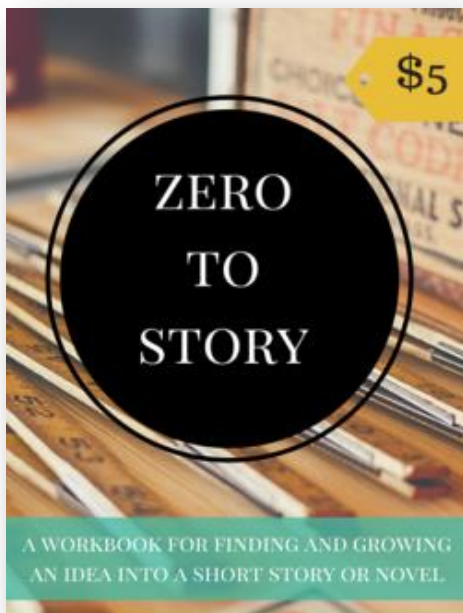
- [Helping Writers Become Authors](#)
- [Now Novel](#)
- [She's Novel](#)
- [Writerology](#)
- [Mythcreants](#)
- [The Write Life](#)
- [The Lionhearted Writing Life](#)
- [The Creative Penn](#)

Websites for Writing Community

- [NaNoWriMo](#)
- [Camp NaNoWriMo](#)
- [Wattpad](#)
- [Penana](#)
- [Figment](#)
- [Story Bird](#)
- [Writer's Cafe](#)
- [Booksie](#)
- [Story Wars](#)

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GLOSSARY OF WRITING TERMS

Active Voice: when the subject of the sentence performs the action, rather than being acted upon (Ex. “He kissed her” rather than “He was kissed by her”).

Antagonist: the villain of the story; the opposition to the hero.

Anti-hero: a dark hero who is riddled with flaws instead of the positive, noble traits we come to expect from heroes (Ex. Han Solo, Wolverine, Jack Sparrow).

Archetype: a recurring type of character in fiction found across multiple cultures, such as a trickster, mentor, healer, etc. (Ex. Yoda, Haymitch, and Dumbledore are all mentor archetypes).

Backstory: the details and background about a character’s past.

Beta Reader: someone who reads a writer’s story and provides them with feedback before publication.

Beat: the thoughts and actions of a character which comprise a scene. Often used between lines of dialogue for dramatic pause and to increase the emotion/tension of a scene.

Cardboard Character: a character who hasn’t been developed to feel realistic or like a unique individual.

Character Arc: the character’s inner journey throughout the story, and how they transform in some way by the end. Can either be a positive change or a negative change.

Character Trait: characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes that create a character's personality. Can either be positive or negative (Ex. Brave, pessimistic, honest, loyal, greedy, stubborn, etc.).

Character Quirk: a strange/interesting behavior, habit, hobby, or mannerism.

Characterization: the act of creating the specifics of a character such as traits, quirks, backstory, goal, etc.

Cliché: something that has been overused. In fiction this can mean a phrase, plot, character type, or dialogue.

Climax: the height of the story's action before the ending. The final conflict where it is decided whether or not the hero will win and achieve his goal.

Conflict: any opposition that keeps a character from getting what they want. The main conflict of a story is that between the hero and villain.

Deep Point of View: a style of writing that strives to bring the reader deep into the hero's head by eliminating "evidence" of the author's hand such as speech tags, words like "felt," "wondered," and "thought," and using more of the hero's voice in the writing.

Denouement: the ending of a story where any loose ends are tied and all questions are answered.

Dialogue: the spoken conversation between characters, signaled by quotation marks.

Dialogue Tags (or Speech Tags): the verb after a line of dialogue that signals how it is being spoken and who is speaking (said, exclaimed, shouted, asked, etc.)

Epilogue: a section after the main ending of the story that reveals what happened to the characters afterward.

External Conflict: the struggle between the hero and an outside force such as nature or the villain.

Falling Action: when the story begins to slow down after its climax as it heads into the ending.

First Person: when the character uses “I” to tell the story (Ex. I walked along the bridge at noon).

Fleshing Out a Character: the act of creating a realistic character with traits, quirks, backstory, goal, etc. (See also, Characterization).

Genre: the type of story (Fantasy, Historical, Romance, Science Fiction, etc.)

High Concept: a story with a unique or fresh premise that grabs attention and appeals to a large audience.

Hook: the first sentence of your novel, designed to grab the reader’s attention and arouse curiosity.

Info Dump: when the writer reveals a large amount of information or backstory all at once instead of spreading it out.

Imagery: descriptive, visual writing that often uses figurative language such as similes or metaphors.

Inciting Incident: the event that is the cause of the story. Without this event, no story would follow. (Ex. Katniss’ sister getting chosen at the reaping is the inciting incident of *The Hunger Games*).

Internal Conflict: the struggle of the hero against his own self. (Ex. a struggle against a fear, flaw, or vice).

Manuscript: a term used to refer to an unpublished novel.

Minor Character: characters who appear in the story but don't play a large or significant role (Ex. Prim and Cinna in *The Hunger Games*).

Mood: the emotion a scene evokes in the reader.

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo): an annual contest held during the month of November in which participants try to write a 50,000 word novel in 30 days.

Narrative: the written events of the story, as told by the viewpoint character in either first or third person.

Narrator: the person telling the story, either in first or third person.

Novel: a written work over 40,000 words in length.

Novella: a written work between 17,500-40,000 words in length.

Omniscient Point of View: a point of view where the narrator is god-like in that he knows the thoughts, feelings, secrets, backstories, etc. of all other characters and reveals them to the reader.

Pantsing: the act of writing a novel “by the seat of your pants” without any planning.

Passive Voice: when the subject is acted upon, rather than performing the action (Ex. “He was kissed by her” rather than “He kissed her”).

Plot: the events that unfold in a story as the hero overcomes obstacles to try to achieve his goal, and how he changes along the way.

Plot Device: an object or character that moves the plot forward. Can sometimes be created in a way that feels too deliberate and unrealistic.

Plot Hole: an inconsistency, contradiction, or issue with the plot that makes it illogical or unbelievable.

Plot Point: 1) a significant event that moves the story forward; 2) a turning point; 3) the two moments of action and/or decision that lead from Act 1 into Act 2, and from Act 2 into Act 3 in a story.

Premise: a story's main idea or concept (Ex. The premise of *The Hunger Games* is 24 teens forced to fight to the death in a televised event).

Prologue: events that take place before the main story, but have a significant connection to or impact upon the main story so that it is important for the reader to know them.

Point of View (POV): the perspective of a certain character who is telling the story.

Prose: ordinary, written language without rhyme or meter (Ex. What you're reading right now is prose).

Protagonist: the hero of the story.

Purple Prose: writing that tries too hard to be descriptive, and in doing so overloads the reader (Also called flowery prose).

Rising Action: the events of the story leading up to the climax.

Secondary Character: characters who appear in the story but don't play a large or significant role (Ex. Prim and Cinna in *The Hunger Games*).

Scene: a single event that takes place in a single setting in a set amount of time. A story is made up of many scenes.

Scene Break: the writer's way of signaling a change in scene to the reader by leaving a blank line between the scenes or three asterisks centered in the page. The break signals a passage in time and/or a change in setting.

Setting: the place where the story and scenes occur.

Stakes: the consequences or reward for the hero's success or failure of their goal.

Stereotype: a flat, undeveloped character that focuses on a single widely perceived trait or misconception associated with them

Subplot: a mini storyline in addition to the main plot. (Ex. In *The Hunger Games* the romance between Katniss and Peeta is a romantic subplot while the surviving the games is the main plot).

Subtext: the underlying meaning in writing or dialogue that is hinted at but not plainly expressed.

Suspension of Disbelief: the willingness of the reader to set aside their judgement and believe the story they are being told.

Synopsis: a summary of the novel's events, including its ending.

Tone: the attitude the writing expresses (Ex. Could be sarcastic, pessimistic, cheerful, etc.).

Theme: what your story is trying to say/prove about a topic (Ex. Love conquers all, the strong will always crush the weak, etc.).

Three Act Structure: the most common structure for plotting a story, with Act I representing the beginning, Act II the middle, and Act III the end.

Three Dimensional Character: a character who is realistic and has dimension like a real person.

Trope: another term for a cliché.

Twist: an unexpected revelation or turn of events in a story.

Two Dimensional Character: a character who is flat and doesn't feel real, and seems only to exist in the confines of the page.

Voice: the expression of the writing through the narrator, revealing their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes.

Word Count: how the length of a novel is measured. (The type of font, font size, line spacing, and page margins can all vary, which can add to or subtract from the number of pages. Word count doesn't lie and is always accurate).

Word Sprint: a 30 minute writing session in which the participant writes as fast as they can.

World Building: the act of creating a world so that it resembles our own with details such as culture, government, geography, politics, religion, etc.