

'Long Form' Steps to creating story idea, scenes, etc

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A Whole Bunch of Notes Before You Begin ☺

- ❖ **Note:** I'm not an expert; all the below data is from my personal notes I collected and thought was important. I suggest you take some writing classes or do research of your own to find what resonates as true in your own heart during your quest to become a good writer.
 - ❖ I've read some great stuff Jim Butcher supplied regarding how to write well, I've taken an online course at FSCJ with Steve Alcorn and read other sites information, such as Writers Digest regarding how to write. Below is a compilation of what I've learned; it should not be used in place of your own quest for mastering writing skills, but can be supplemental.
 - ❖ **Blue Font** indicates Notes and **Green Font** indicates examples. I tried to stay true to this.
 - ❖ See the diagram I created regarding how to structure your story in Section 7
 - ❖ You'll need Character Sketches/Attribute Form of all the main characters (see Section 8).
 - ❖ You'll also need Descriptions of each major setting (for Wizard of Oz this would have been descriptions such as the farm, Munchkin land, the Yellow Brick Road, the Emerald City, and the witch's castle).
 - ❖ **Remember, you'll need to create a new file, and save it as the title of your long form (aka your book title).** Each Story idea below will be turned into unique Chapters (with the same goal throughout), or pieces that fit into a Chapter(s) that will, in the end, create the full book.
 - ❖ **Three techniques for enhancing your stories' suspense:**
 1. Starting the clock
 - ❖ **CLOCK** is just a refinement of conflict and should be in the Conflict section (note: Action and suspense both derive from conflict).
 - a. Time: He had only three seconds to reach the reset button. (time)
 - b. Distance: The metal door was ten feet away, and already sliding into place. (distance)
 - c. Limited Resources: Her scuba tank read almost empty, and she was still inside the wreck. (resources)
 2. Hints, and
 3. Misdirection.
 - ❖ **To recap the 3 Acts with their 9 CheckPoints: *Note: I write in First Person.***

Plot (aka ACTION) is your character's physical journey. Action is external to character.

Story (aka REACTION) is your character's emotional journey. Reaction is internal for character.

In general, the EMOTION, THOUGHT and DECISION should be inside the protagonist's head.

Act 1

 - o **Hook:** An event that gets your readers involved in both plot and story.
 - o **Backstory:** Introduces your protagonist and the situation—it's both plot and story.
 - o **Trigger:** An intense plot event that propels your protagonist into crisis. An event occurs that begins the protagonist's battle against change.

Act 2

 - o **Crisis (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue):** A story moment when your protagonist is overcome by her flaw.
 - o **Struggle:** Your protagonist struggles against ever-increasing obstacles (plot) with deeper despair (story) after each setback.
 - o **Epiphany (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue):** A story moment when your protagonist realizes her flaw and decides to change (unless this is a tragedy).

Act 3

 - o **Plan:** Your protagonist, as a result of the epiphany, can now devise a plan (plot).
 - o **Climax:** Your protagonist confronts the antagonist, who is defeated (unless this is a tragedy) in plot-heavy action.
 - o **Ending:** The plot and story conflicts are resolved. - ❖ **To recap Scene and Sequel and their 7 elements:**
 - o **SCENE'S Plot** (aka ACTION) is your character's physical journey. Action is external to character.
 - Plot is what happens, the storyline, the action. Jerome Stern says it is how you set up the situation, where the turning points of the story are, and what the characters do at the end of the story.
 - A plot is a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance. — Jane Burroway
 - o **SEQUEL'S Story** (aka REACTION) is your character's emotional journey. Reaction is internal for character.
- The scene (aka Plot and ACTION) consists of three elements:**
1. GOAL of the protagonist
 2. CONFLICT (external) that results from protagonist's pursuit of the goal
 3. DISASTER or setback for the protagonist as a result of the conflict
 - o Each set back must be progressively worse than the last throughout Act 2's struggle.
 - o But you need to give your readers a breather too. One action sequence shouldn't lead directly into the next, with no time for your protagonist—or reader—to absorb the significance of what has happened.
 - o So escalate, and then ratchet the tension down for a bit. Then take it even higher.

And the *sequel* (aka STORY and REACTION) consists of these four elements:

4. EMOTION (internal) the protagonist feels as a result of the disaster. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
5. THOUGHT process (internal) of the protagonist as the emotion ebbs. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
6. DECISION (internal) made as a result of this thought process. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
7. ACTION taken as a result of the decision. It may be helpful to think of the scene as external, and the sequel as internal.
*The action at the end is often the same element as the goal of the next scene.

0. Decide which plot template you're using for your book. This will help you define the story data that belongs in Step 1 below.

0.1 Notes on Types of Plots (Adventure, General, etc)

Understand the 3 Acts for your selected type of plot template, then you can begin writing the story idea that will span your entire book. The 3 Acts listed below in each type of plot template include the 9 checkpoints. If you need more information on the 3 Acts and their CheckPoints, review section below titled “--OR—Use the below expanded Acts 1, 2 and 3 info:”.

0.2 General plot template:

Act 1 (below are Act 1's three CheckPoints)

1. Hook: A compelling plot event that gets the reader involved in both plot and story.
2. Backstory: A bridge that introduces the protagonist and lays the groundwork for plot and story.
3. Trigger: An intense event that propels the protagonist into crisis.

Act 2 (below are Act 2's three CheckPoints)

4. Crisis: The protagonist suffers an emotional crisis because of the trigger's effect on her flaw.
 - o Note: Flaw can be lack of self-confidence, stubbornness, etc.
5. Struggle: The protagonist struggles against ever-increasing obstacles.
6. Epiphany: The protagonist realizes her flaw and overcomes it (unless this is a tragedy).

Act 3 (below are Act 3's three CheckPoints)

7. Plan: The protagonist does something she couldn't do before her epiphany.
8. Climax: The protagonist confronts the antagonist, the protagonist is defeated by her own flaw.
9. Ending: The plot and story conflicts are resolved, and the reader experiences catharsis (a release of emotional tension).

0.3 Adventure-based plot template, using Raiders of the Lost Ark as our example:

Act 1

1. Adventure Hook: It's best to start an adventure story with some action. An event that gets your readers involved in both plot and story. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* gets the ball rolling—literally—right from the start.
2. Adventure Backstory: The goal or potential adventure is revealed. *We learn about the Ark and its importance.*
3. Adventure Trigger: The protagonist embarks on the adventure, often precipitated by events beyond his or her control. An intense plot event occurs that propels your protagonist into crisis and if adventure based, may or may **not** begin her battle against change. *Indy accepts the assignment and heads for Nepal.*

Act 2

4. Adventure Crisis: This checkpoint, one of the most important in the emotional story, is often subordinate or even omitted in adventure stories. *In Raiders of the Lost Ark, we never really get to know Indy or see his inner battle.*
 - ❖ *And you don't focus on Indy's flaws either. In other plot templates, this would be the moment when the protagonist is overcome by her flaw.*
5. Adventure Struggle: This is the heart of the adventure plot and may make up nearly all of the long form. Your protagonist struggles against ever-increasing obstacles (plot) with deeper despair (story) after each setback. *In Raiders of the Lost Ark, this is more than an hour of thrills, spills, chases, fights, and other action.*
6. Adventure Epiphany: This checkpoint, like the crisis, is very important in the emotional story, but it's often subordinate or even omitted in adventure stories. *Indy never overcomes whatever flaws he may have—including being afraid of snakes!*
 - ❖ *In other plot templates, this is a story moment when the protagonist realizes her flaw and decides to change (unless this is a tragedy).*

Act 3

7. Adventure Plan: In stories with an emotional core, the plan cannot occur until after the epiphany. But in action stories, there may be no epiphany, yet the plan and climax cycle may repeat a number of times until a final, overarching climax completes the tale. *This is the case in Raiders of the Lost Ark.*

8. Adventure Climax: This final climax defeats the antagonist and brings the protagonist's adventure to a close (unless this is a tragedy). In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it is the opening of the Ark.
9. Adventure Ending: The plot and story conflicts are resolved; all emotional and physical issues are resolved. The protagonist is shown post-adventure, often returned to his or her previous life and seldom changed much as a result of the adventure. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indy returns to teaching, and the Ark is put away for safekeeping.

0.4 Change-based plot template:

Act 1

1. Change based Hook: We meet the protagonist in his or her unchanged state. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle is frustrated with her provincial town and is disdainful of the brutish Gaston.
2. Change based Backstory: The groundwork is set for a confrontation between the protagonist and his or her need to change. Belle's father, Maurice, unwittingly stumbles upon the Beast's castle and becomes a prisoner.
3. Change based Trigger: An event occurs that begins the protagonist's battle against change. Belle offers to take her father's place as the Beast's prisoner. She is horrified by the Beast's brutish nature.

Act 2

4. Change based Crisis: The protagonist begins an inner struggle against change. Belle is overcome by her horror of the Beast's brutish nature.
5. Change based Struggle: The protagonist struggles against physical obstacles. These obstacles should be related to the protagonist's need to change so that the outer struggle mirrors the inner one. In *Beauty and the Beast*, we see the difficulties Belle must overcome to adapt to the Beast's brutish ways as they get to know one another. When Belle learns her father needs her, the Beast releases her. Gaston then learns of the Beast's existence and sets out to kill him.
6. Change based Epiphany: The protagonist realizes the need for change. Belle discovers that she has been judging people by the wrong criteria and that Gaston is the true beast.

Act 3

7. Change based Plan: The protagonist embarks on a course of action that will change him or her forever. Belle pursues Gaston to save the Beast.
8. Change based Climax: The protagonist changes. Gaston kills the Beast, but Belle's vow of love brings him back to life in his previous form. This vow answers the question in the opening narration, "But who could love a Beast?"
9. Change based Ending: The protagonist is shown in his or her changed form. In *Beauty and the Beast*, this occurs in the final ballroom scene.

0.5 Love story plot template—and *Casablanca* in particular—fits into our story structure outline:

Act 1

1. Love Hook: The lovers meet, or have already met, but aren't in love at the beginning of most love stories. In *Casablanca*, a relationship between Rick and Ilsa pre-exists but is reawakened by her visit to Rick's Café.
2. Love Backstory: We learn why the lovers should be in love. We discover this about Rick and Ilsa through the Paris flashback.
3. Love Trigger: Something happens to drive the characters apart. Ilsa's unexplained departure at the end of the flashback does this in *Casablanca*.

Act 2

4. Love Crisis: The lovers question their commitment. Rick's crisis has been simmering for a long time but is aggravated by Ilsa's return.
5. Love Struggle: The lovers endure a series of events that drive them further apart. For the sake of brevity, I've omitted most of the plot details from *Casablanca*, but the Nazis' pursuit of Laszlo and Rick's resentment create many setbacks. These make up the middle of the film.
6. Love Epiphany: If the story is not a tragedy, the lovers realize their love is more important than whatever has come between them. If the story is a tragedy, this doesn't occur, and the events of Act 3 go awry. One of the things that makes *Casablanca* memorable is that Rick's decision is unclear. The ambiguous nature of his actions in Act 3 are likely the result of the lack of a finished script, but hey, whatever works!

Act 3

7. Love Plan: The plan may be very simple in a love story. It's often merely the protagonist's resolve to change. In *Casablanca*, Rick's plan is to give the letters to Laszlo and Ilsa, forcing Ilsa to go with her husband.
8. Love Climax: The climax of a love story is often short and sweet. In *Casablanca*, it's short, but not so sweet, as Ilsa weeps over losing Rick a second time.

9. Love Ending: Once the climax is past, there's really nothing left to do except to add "and they lived happily ever after." In stories about sacrifice, that's not the case, so the Casablanca filmmakers added a coda in which Rick makes it clear that he has rededicated himself to the cause.

1. Create and add your nine checkpoints along with the act markers (Act 1: Hook, Backstory, Trigger, etc.). Be sure to write this per the plot template you chose. These are 'high' level story ideas.

ACT 1

- **Hook**: An event that gets your readers involved in both plot and story. We meet the protagonist in his or her unchanged state.
= <add your story's info>
- **Backstory**: Introduces your protagonist and the situation—it's both plot and story (*Plot* (aka ACTION) is your character's physical journey. Action is external to character. *Story* (aka REACTION) is your character's emotional journey. Reaction is internal for character.). The groundwork is set for a confrontation between the protagonist and his or her need to change.
= <add your story's info>
- **Trigger**: An intense plot event that propels your protagonist into crisis.
= <add your story's info>

ACT 2

- **Crisis (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue)**: A story moment when your protagonist is overcome by her flaw.
= <add your story's info>
- **Struggle**: Your protagonist struggles against ever-increasing obstacles (plot) with deeper despair (story) after each setback.
= <add your story's info>
- **Epiphany (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue)**: A story moment when your protagonist realizes her flaw and decides to change (unless this is a tragedy).
= <add your story's info>

ACT 3

- **Plan**: Your protagonist, as a result of the epiphany, can now devise a plan (plot).
= <add your story's info>
- **Climax**: Your protagonist confronts the antagonist, who is defeated (unless this is a tragedy) in plot-heavy action.
= <add your story's info>
- **Ending**: The plot and story conflicts are resolved.
= <add your story's info>

1.1 --OR--Use the below expanded Acts 1, 2 and 3 info:

Act 1's Scene Markers/CheckPoints

Hook:

- An event that gets your readers involved in both plot and story. We meet the protagonist in his or her unchanged state. A hook is something to quickly grab your readers' attention and pull them into your story—right now!
 1. Establish **at least one story question**, ideally on page 1 that will keep them reading. Ex: Leave your reader asking a question – “what was she running from?”, “what is an airbeast?”, “what happens next?”
 2. **Begin with action or dialogue**. You don't need pages of setting to set the scene. You can work that in later. (Yes, I know, 19th-century novels did that all the time, but we're living in the 21st century now!)
 3. Begin with **your main character**. If you start with another character, your readers may form a bond with the wrong person. It's also a great idea to give us a glimpse of your protagonist's underlying character flaw, but you don't need to hit us over the head with it.
 4. Choose a **starting point as late as possible**. When? Certainly not with your protagonist's birth! Your story is about an important time of change in your protagonist's life, so begin as late as possible, right before the events that set that change in motion.
= <add your story's info>

Backstory:

- Introduces your protagonist and the situation—it's both plot and story. The groundwork is set for a confrontation between the protagonist and his or her need to change.
 - Backstory, as I use the term, is a **section that includes the character's history** (the common definition) and what we need to understand the current situation. This can be in the form of dialogue, the character thinking about memories, actual flashbacks inserted into the text, or as a last resort, exposition—that's when you, as the author, just tell us something.
 - With the backstory, you just want to **give us enough to figure out what's going on**. The rest of the background info we can parcel out over the next two acts, as needed, and in spots that give it special relevance and impact.
- = <add your story's info>

Trigger:

- An intense plot event that propels your protagonist into crisis. An event occurs that begins the protagonist's battle against change.
 - It's **one specific thing that happens to the protagonist**. It attacks the protagonist's flaw and sets the stage for the struggle to come. It's the first event to really throw the protagonist for a loop and cause the crisis that will begin Act 2.
 - The trigger doesn't need to be a major plot event; **what's important is that it clearly attacks the protagonist's flaw**.
- = <add your story's info>

Act 2's Scene Markers/CheckPoints

Crisis (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue):

- The protagonist begins an inner struggle against change.
 - A story moment when your protagonist is overcome by her flaw. It's important that she doesn't realize what her flaw is yet—the flaw just overcomes her.
 - Describe the emotional moment when your protagonist is overcome by the flaw. There is no plot in it, just story.
- = <add your story's info>

Struggle:

- The protagonist struggles against physical obstacles. These obstacles should be related to the protagonist's need to change so that the outer struggle mirrors the inner one.
- Your protagonist struggles against ever-increasing obstacles (plot) with deeper despair (story) after each setback.
 - There will be lots of plot here later, but for now just take a few notes. What greater cause will you give your protagonist? What plot complications will arise? How will your protagonist react? Will there be a Black Moment?
- This is the heart of the adventure plot and may make up nearly all of the long form
- The struggle is the longest part of most books. Your job is to keep it intriguing by using plot complications. Each plot complication will leave the protagonist worse off than she was before. And each of these setbacks will result in a brief bit of story, her emotional reaction. **So the struggle is comprised of alternating plot and story, called scene and sequel.**
 - For example, in The Hunger Games, the trigger occurs when Katniss' sister, Prim, is selected for the reaping.
- 3 techniques for enhancing our stories' suspense:
 - starting the clock (time, resources, distance). **Note: CLOCK is just a refinement of conflict and should be in Conflict section.**
 - hints, and
 - misdirection.

= <add your story's info>

Epiphany (shortest checkpoints & internal dialogue):

- The protagonist realizes the need for change.
- The epiphany is the **most important moment of your entire story**. It's a purely emotional moment, when the protagonist finally realizes her flaw and decides to change (unless this is a tragedy). Moreover, she decides to change. And because she does, she'll be able to solve her problem in Act 3.
 - Ex: In The Hunger Games, Katniss' epiphany occurs when she realizes there are some things more important than winning.

- You finally describe the moment when your protagonist realizes the flaw and changes.
- = <add your story's info>

Act 3's Scene Markers/CheckPoints

Plan:

- The protagonist embarks on a course of action that will change him or her forever.
 - What is your protagonist's plan? **Be sure it's something the protagonist couldn't have done before the epiphany.**
 - Your protagonist, as a result of the epiphany, can now devise a plan (plot).
 - The plan is definitely plot. It's where your protagonist comes up with—and begins to implement—a plan she couldn't have before her epiphany. This plan may or may not work. In fact, there might be a whole succession of plans that don't work. This might even be another spot for one of the Black Moments. Whether things go according to plan or not, a final confrontation with the antagonist is inevitable.
- = <add your story's info>

Climax:

*The action at the end is often the same element as the goal of the next scene.

- The protagonist changes.
 - Describe the scene where your antagonist is defeated. Try to make sure it's due to the antagonist's own flaw.
 - The climax is the moment when your protagonist confronts the antagonist, who is defeated (unless this is a tragedy, in which case it's the moment the protagonist fails).
 - It's most effective if your protagonist is an active character and her actions have at least something to do with the antagonist's defeat. It's also most effective if the antagonist is actually defeated by his own flaw, especially if this flaw is similar to (or the opposite of) the protagonist's flaw.
- = <add your story's info>

Ending:

- The protagonist is shown in his or her changed form.
- Wrap things up. Will you have a circular ending? A cliff-hanger? Is there a twist?
- The plot and story conflicts are resolved.
- The ending is where you tie up all the emotional and physical loose ends in a manner designed to satisfy your readers. That doesn't mean every last detail needs to be spelled out—just the important ones.
 - It's fairly easy to categorize endings by type. Your choices include the following:
 - Resolution: Loose ends are nicely tied up. (Unwind)
 - Circular: Right back where we started, perhaps showing how things have changed. (The Outsiders)
 - Reversal: Everything is the opposite of the way it started. (Holes)
 - Bittersweet: The hero got what she wanted, but it didn't turn out to be what she wanted after all. (Looking for Alaska)
 - Open: We are left to our own imagination. (The Giver)
 - Cliff-hanger: Time to buy volume 2! (Leviathan)
 - Twist: Wow, I didn't see that coming! (I Am the Messenger)
 - Revelation: Unexpected information is divulged—but be careful to avoid cliché with this one. (Walk Two Moons)
 - Monologue: The narrator tells us what he's learned. (The Book Thief)
- **Finally, there are a few endings you should avoid.** Here are some that make me groan:
 - . . . and then I woke up. (Aaargh!)
 - . . . and then I died. (Then how are you telling this story?)
 - . . . and then I heard/read that . . . (Please show; don't tell.)
 - It was a guy in a mask. (I call this the Scooby Doo!)
 - Play on words. (Begone, vile pun!)

= <add your story's info>

2. Now, format each checkpoint you created in Step 1 into a heading (you have 9 checkpoints, so you'll have 9 headings). With the checkpoint headings in place, you're almost ready to begin expanding your long form by adding scenes. Copy your 9 heading to item 4 and 6.

❖ Below is an example of what *Raiders of the Lost Ark's* CheckPoint headings could be:

1. Heading 1 - Hook: Starts with a big rolling ball. Adventure begins quick!
2. Heading 2 - Backstory: Show information regarding the Ark and its importance.
3. Heading 3 - Trigger: Indy accepts the assignment and heads for Nepal.
4. Heading 4 - Crisis: We never really get to know Indy or see his inner battle. Since this is adventure, we don't focus on Indy's flaws. In other plot templates, this would be the moment when the protagonist is overcome by her flaw.
5. Heading 5 - Struggle: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, this is more than an hour of thrills, spills, chases, fights, and other action.
6. Heading 6 - Epiphany: Indy never overcomes whatever flaws he may have—including being afraid of snakes!
7. Heading 7 - Plan: This is the case in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.
8. Heading 8 - Climax: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it is the opening of the Ark.
9. Heading 9 - Ending: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indy returns to teaching, and the Ark is put away for safekeeping.

3. Create your story idea. It's an important document to generate at this point because it often reveals logical errors or problems with the flow of the checkpoint outline.

Ensure the story idea captures main character's emotional journey and show how she had to change to solve her problem. Follow the checkpoint outline. Finally, point out any flaws in the logic or flow of the checkpoint outline.

Here's how the story idea might look for *The Wizard of Oz*:

Dorothy is a young girl living in Kansas who has not yet grown up enough to stand on her own and think and act for herself. When her dog is threatened by a mean neighbor, she runs away from home, but a tornado strikes and transports her to a magical land called Oz.

In Oz, Dorothy runs afoul of a wicked witch. She embarks on a quest for the Wizard of Oz, who she hopes will solve her problem. Along the way, she meets three friends who each wish for something they don't have. The Wizard sends them on a mission. When one of her friends is endangered, Dorothy realizes she must stand up and take action to save her friend, and her actions defeat the witch in the bargain.

Through their adventures, Dorothy's friends discover that they had the things they wanted all along. And Dorothy discovers that she has the ability within herself to solve her problem.

4. Add a scene marker/list under each heading copied from item 2. These are 'lower' level story ideas that begin shaping what's really going to happen in your book to satisfy the CheckPoints you wrote in step 2. When item 4 is complete, copy all to item 6.

- 4.1 A scene is an action-and-reaction pair. So there are going to be a lot of them. But you can develop them one by one logically, starting with just your nine-checkpoint story structure. As you work, scenes will tend to split into smaller, better defined steps, until soon you'll have the complete, logical progression of your story and plot.
- 4.2 Open your manuscript file, and type in short scene descriptors to fill in the hook checkpoint. If your hook is very short, then you might also try doing the backstory checkpoint.
- 4.3 Invent scenes to accomplish the action you've planned, but also think about scenes that can fill in story logic, introduce characters, and illustrate your main and any subordinate themes. Make several passes until you have a fair number of scenes planned, perhaps 20 or so.
- 4.4 Note: Each scene marker is quite short—just enough to remind us of the contents. Scene markers don't need to be complete sentences. And remember: these aren't all the scenes! This is your first pass through this process (there will be many more agonizing passes). As you may recall, the final story actually has about 10 times this many scenes, but this is a good start. On the next pass, start asking questions and developing the logic.

Example:

1. Heading 1 - Hook: Starts with a big rolling ball. Adventure begins quick!
 - 1.1. Hook's Scene Marker 1: Introduce Indy in his current life.
 - 1.2. Hook's Scene Marker 2: Send someone to Indy requesting help.
 - 1.3. Hook's Scene Marker 3: Show characters searching for artifact.
2. Heading 2 - Backstory: Show information regarding the Ark and its importance.
 - 1.4. Backstory's Scene Marker 1: Have knowledgeable person explain what the Ark is.
 - 1.5. Backstory's Scene Marker 2: Detail why the Ark is important
 - 1.6. Backstory's Scene Marker 3: Describe importance of why bad guys shouldn't be allowed to get hands on Ark.
3. Heading 3 - Trigger: Indy accepts the assignment and heads for Nepal.
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
4. Heading 4 - Crisis: We never really get to know Indy or see his inner battle. Since this is adventure, we don't focus on Indy's flaws. In other plot templates, this would be the moment when the protagonist is overcome by her flaw.
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
5. Heading 5 - Struggle: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, this is more than an hour of thrills, spills, chases, fights, and other action.
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
6. Heading 6 - Epiphany: Indy never overcomes whatever flaws he may have—including being afraid of snakes!
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
7. Heading 7 - Plan: This is the case in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
8. Heading 8 - Climax: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it is the opening of the Ark.
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers
9. Heading 9 - Ending: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indy returns to teaching, and the Ark is put away for safekeeping
 - ❖ Add Scene Markers

5. Following the scene list you put together, begin writing your synopsis by converting each scene of the hook into a clear and fluid description. You are expanding on the data you added to step 4. You should probably use about one sentence per scene.

5.1 The Synopsis

What does the synopsis look like? Here's a snapshot:

- The synopsis is a summary of your story and plot. It's a valuable tool for working on their continuity and details.
- The synopsis is detailed enough that someone reading it can really imagine the finished product. But it's not written out in fully developed prose, and it contains no dialogue.
- It's also customary to write a synopsis in present tense, regardless of the tense you choose for your manuscript.
- A typical synopsis might run six or 10 pages. Essentially, it's a prose description of every scene.

Here's how the synopsis of *The Wizard of Oz* might start:

Kansas farm girl Dorothy Gale lives with her Aunt Em, Uncle Henry, and three farm hands: Hickory, Hunk, and Zeke. When Dorothy's dog, Toto, bites mean townsman Almira Gulch, Miss Gulch takes Toto away to be destroyed. He escapes and returns to Dorothy, who runs away with him.

Remember, from item 3 - story idea for *The Wizard of Oz*:

Dorothy is a young girl living in Kansas who has not yet grown up enough to stand on her own and think and act for herself. When her dog is threatened by a mean neighbor, she runs away from home, but a tornado strikes and transports her to a magical land called Oz.

In Oz, Dorothy runs afoul of a wicked witch. She embarks on a quest for the Wizard of Oz, who she hopes will solve her problem. Along the way, she meets three friends who each wish for something they don't have. The Wizard sends them on a mission. When one of her friends is endangered, Dorothy realizes she must stand up and take action to save her friend, and her actions defeat the witch in the bargain.

Through their adventures, Dorothy's friends discover that they had the things they wanted all along. And Dorothy discovers that she has the ability within herself to solve her problem.

6. Write your long form = turn each of those 3 Act scene markers into the 7 elements (Goal, Conflict, Disaster, Emotion, Thought, Decision, Action (aka next scene's Goal)).

6.1 Hook: <add your novel's hook>

- Scene Marker <add the 1st lower level item of your novel's hook>
- ❖ Hook: Start with a big rolling ball. Get the reader interested = Adventure begins quick!
 - Scene Marker 1: Introduce Indy in his current life.
 - Protag's Goal: Indy plans to lead his normal life as a teacher.
 - Conflict: Someone disrupts his normal life, speaking of important artifacts and what-not.
 - Set down the other 7 scene/sequel elements.

6.2 Backstory: <add your novel's back story>

- Scene Marker <add the 1st lower level item of your novel's back story>
- ❖ Backstory: Show information regarding the Ark and its importance.
 - Scene Marker 1: Have knowledgeable person explain what the Ark is.
 - Protag's Goal: Learn the Ark's story/'WHY' is it so important.
 - Conflict: Indy learns why the Ark can't be placed in bad guys hands
 - Disaster: Clock is ticking and Indy has to decide whether to help prevent the Ark from being used for ill will.
 - Emotion/Thought: Indy's a scientist, a learned man. He's grumpy but he is a 'good' person. He can't just walk away.
 - Decision: Indy decides to help
 - Action: Indy progresses on his Adventures/Quests

6.3 Trigger: <add your novel's trigger>

- Scene Marker <add the 1st lower level item of your novel's trigger, then input the appropriate data into the below categories (Goal, conflict, etc)>
 - Goal: Goal of the Protagonist. The goal needs to be an ACTIVE, SPECIFIC goal, not just something vague. Good: "go pound Joe Blow for information that might let me save the day.", "take the girl out for a wonderful night on the town with lots of attention to detail and customized surprises for her.", "Get out of the room alive.", "I want breakfast"
 - TENSION **NOTE: Part of Conflict and Disaster is adding in TENSION:
 - CONFLICT: (external) that results from protagonist's pursuit of the goal. Series of obstacles your Point of View (POV) character faces on the way to reaching his Goal.
 - Heighten and prolong conflict. Any conflict can be prolonged, and the major conflicts *should* be prolonged to rack up the tension – if you resolve a conflict too quickly, **suspense disappears**.
 - Suspense comes from your readers' anticipation of what's going to happen next. Therefore, never tell them anything in advance when, by withholding it, you can increase suspense. If a writer can maintain suspense throughout the story, many readers may keep reading even if the characters are undeveloped and the plot is weak. The reader's hope that the hero will succeed, and fear that he will fail, creates rising suspense until the climax, where the hero's goal or problem is resolved.
 - Conflict is what happens when someone, for some reason, up and decides that your character needs to fail in his goal, or else is pursuing a goal which, if met, will prevent your viewpoint character from reaching his goal.
 - In many cases, when people talk about **conflict, they actually mean one of two things – change and obstacles**.
 - DISASTER/Set Back: or setback for the protagonist as a result of the conflict. **Each set back** must be progressively worse than the last throughout Act 2's struggle. A Disaster is a failure to let your POV character reach his Goal. Don't give him the Goal! Winning is boring! See ?Section 13? For example of Jim Butcher's "Answer" sections
 - EMOTION/Reaction (Story) - (*internal/ inside the protagonist's head) How the protagonist feels as a result of the disaster. **A Reaction** is the emotional follow-through to a Disaster. When something awful happens, you're staggering for awhile, off-balance, out of kilter. You can't help it. So show your POV character reacting viscerally to his Disaster.
 - THOUGHT process/Work through logic - (*internal) of the protagonist as the emotion ebbs. If your Disaster was a real Disaster, there aren't any good choices to the **Dilemma**. This gives your reader a chance to worry, which is good. Let your POV character work through the choices. Let him sort things out. Eventually, let him come to the least-bad option.
 - DECISION/ ponder probable outcomes to various choices - (*internal made as a result of the thought process.) This is important, because it lets your POV character become proactive again. People who never make decisions are boring people. Make it a good decision your reader can respect. Make it risky, but make it have a chance of working. Do that, and your reader will have to turn the page, because now your POV character has a new Goal.
 - ACTION taken as a result of the decision (Plot) - Action allows char to set themselves a new GOAL for the next SCENE (so **Action of this sequel is the Goal for the next Scene/Sequel cycle**). It may be helpful to think of the scene as external, and the sequel as internal.

6.4 Conflict/Disaster/Obstacle/Struggle: <add your novel's Set Back>

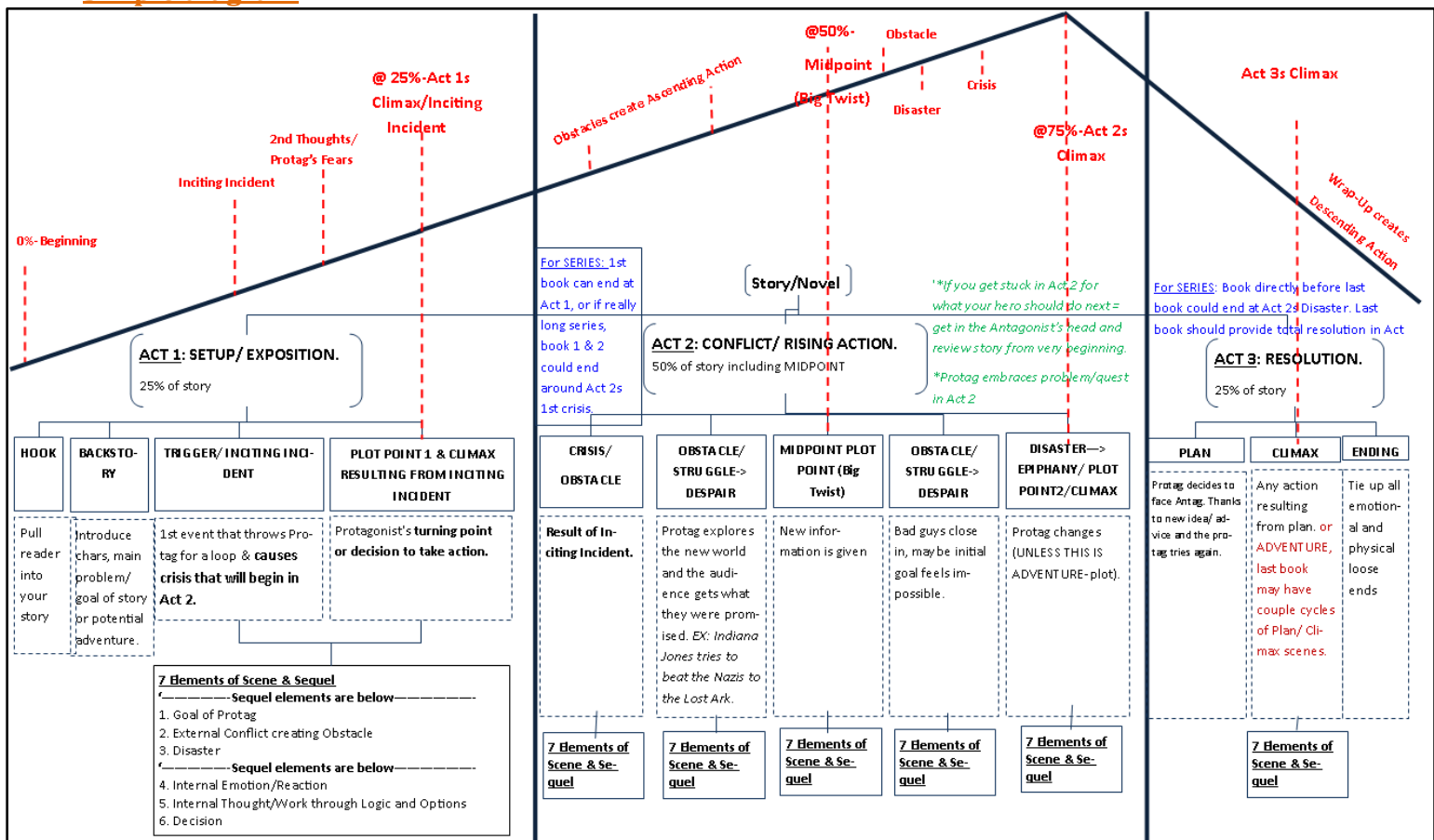
- Scene Marker <add the 1st lower level item of your novel's Conflict/Set Back>

- Goal
 - Conflict
 - Disaster
 - -
 - Emotion
 - Thought
 - Decision
 - Action
- Scene Marker < add the 2nd lower level item of your novel's Conflict/Set Back>
- Goal
 - Conflict
 - Disaster
 - -
 - Emotion
 - Thought
 - Decision
 - Action

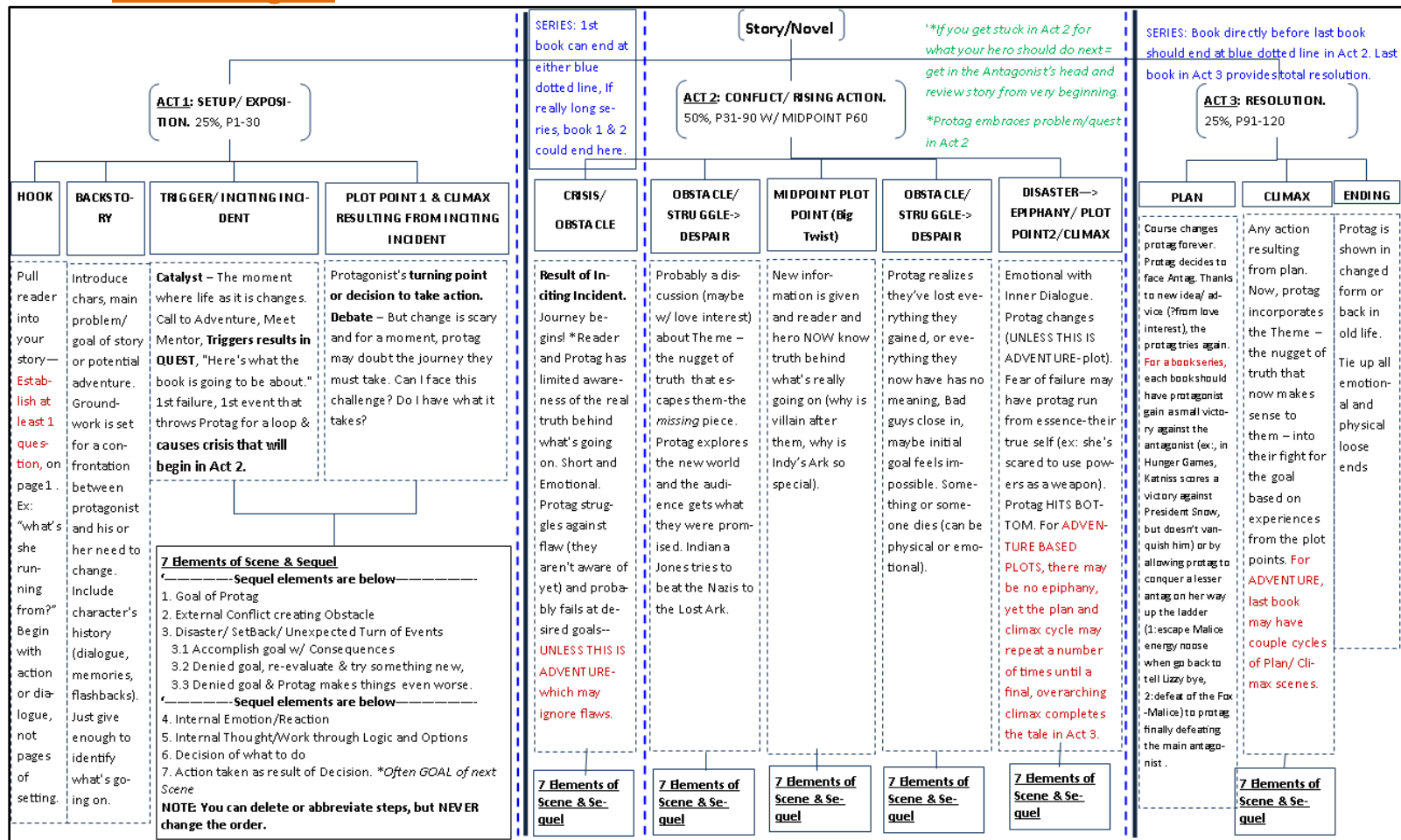
6.5 KEEP ADDING ALL SECTIONS/CheckPoints OF THE 3 ACTS UNTIL YOU COMPLETE THE ENDING SECTION. (Prob a lot of Conflict/Disaster/Obstacle/Struggle)

7. Diagram of Story Structure I created. Note: I'm not an expert; these are just from my notes.

Simple diagram



Detailed diagram



8. Character Attribute Form

You should really **REALLY** know your characters so you can write them, the language they use, the non-verbal body language they'll use throughout your story, quirks and things that may them unique. Note: Below is an example of a few Character Attributes I populated into an Excel Spreadsheet. I listed the items horizontally and then listed each character vertically in its own row and filled in the blanks. That way I had everyone on 1 page, albeit a very large page ☺

Character	Character info	Character Description	Archetype / Temperament / Strengths	Powers	Flaws	Neuroses / Habits	Any habitual phrases they use	What words they don't / wouldn't use.	How eloquent they are – or how taciturn they are.	How polite they are – or not!	Likes	Dislikes	Unusual Traits	Other info	How old is char? (And how old is she mentally?)	Did char have a happy childhood? Why/why not?	Past/present relationships? How did they affect her?	What does she care about?	What is she obsessed with?	Biggest fear?	What is the best thing that ever happened to her? The worst?	Most embarrassing thing that ever happened to her?
Char 1																						

50 Questions for each Character

- Type of character (protagonist, antagonist, sidekick, etc.): _____
- Character's name: _____
- Goal: _____

- Flaw: _____

5 Age: _____ Sex: F / M Height: _____ Weight: _____ Race: _____

6 Hair color: _____ Eyes: _____ Grooming: _____

7 Clothing: _____

8 Health issues: _____

9 Physical abilities: _____

10 Speech (accent): _____

11 Parents: _____

12 Siblings: _____

13 Friends: _____

14 Best friend (or person closest to): _____

15 How would friends describe character? _____

16 _____

17 Least favorite people: _____

18 Enemies: _____

19 Pets: _____

20 Residence: _____

21 Neighborhood: _____

22 Cultural background: _____

23 Religion (and attitudes about religion): _____

24 Memberships: _____

25 School: _____

26 Grade: _____ GPA: _____ Attitude toward school: _____

27 Popularity: _____

28 Favorite subjects: _____

29 Least favorite subjects: _____

30 Favorite teachers: _____

31 Least favorite teachers: _____

32 Mentors: _____

33 Heroes: _____

34 Extracurricular activities: _____

35 Favorite sports: _____

36 Work experience: _____

37 Passions: _____

38 Hobbies: _____

39 Other interests: _____

40 Likes and dislikes (music, movies, TV, books, etc.): _____

41 Fears: _____

42 What irritates, embarrasses, bores him or her? _____

43 Dreams: _____

44 Life goals (in 5 years): _____

45 (in 10 years): _____

46 (in 30 years): _____

47 Behavior habits: _____

48 Nervous habits: _____

49 Foibles: _____

50 Character traits: _____

51 Reasoning style: _____

52 How would your character complete this sentence? "My life is _____

"

9. If you're writing YA - When you're done writing, (your current book is finished), test your young adult story using the "Manuscript Evaluation Checklist." You'll be ready to publish only when you can answer "Yes" to all of the following questions.

Manuscript Evaluation Checklist		Yes
Character		
• Is my main character a young adult?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is my character sympathetic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is my character believable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does my character change in a positive way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does my character have a flaw?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does my character have a cause for the greater good?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does my character act believably (not like a puppet)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Story		
• Does my story start at the last possible moment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Have I established a story question on page 1?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is my character's goal clear from early in the story?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does my character overcome a flaw to solve the problem?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Are things most hopeless right before my character's problem is solved?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is my protagonist the active character solving the problem?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Did my protagonist achieve the initial goal or a suitable substitute?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Did I answer most story questions (not necessarily all of them)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Plot		
• Is my protagonist the first one on stage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is there plenty of conflict?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is there plenty of suspense?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Does dramatic tension steadily increase until the climax?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is there the likelihood of the wrong outcome?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Do things wrap up quickly after the climax?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is there a feeling of catharsis after the climax?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Is the ending believable, but not predictable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Writing Big and Writing Well		
• Does each scene advance the plot or story?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

• Are the scene transitions fluid?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Are the chapter breaks suspenseful?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is there a strong sense of setting?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Have I avoided viewpoint errors and used viewpoint consistently?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Have I done a good job of showing, rather than telling, whenever possible?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is my long form mostly dialogue and action, with little exposition?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Does the ending work well with the beginning?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is my long form the correct length?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Is my spelling, grammar, and punctuation perfect?	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Does my long form represent my best possible writing?	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Know your ViewPoint/Point of View Character and stick with it throughout the Story.

- There's a universal question that most writers struggle to answer: how to choose a point of view for your novel. There are, obviously, several different points of view available to you—and, less obviously, several advantages and disadvantages to each.
- Fortunately, there's a simple rule of thumb for people getting started. **ALWAYS pick the person with the MOST AT STAKE, emotionally, in the scene.** If you do that, you help build in additional tension, you get to show more emotion (aka, create greater empathy in the reader), and you help ensure that the conflict is real, that it matters.
- ❖ **When you're in a character's viewpoint, the words *see* and *hear* are mostly dead weight.** Just show us what the character experiences. For example, don't say:

She could hear the babble of the river and see it sparkling.

Instead, you could say:

The river babbled and sparkled.

This same approach can often eliminate words like *look*, *listen*, *feel*, and so on.

○

1. First person

First person POV refers to the I, we, me, my, mine, us narrator, often the voice of the heroic character or a constant companion of the heroic character.

"There I was, minding my own beeswax when she up and kissed me. I nearly passed out."

ADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- It feels natural to most writers because we live in an 'I' world.
- You have to deal with only one mind: the narrator's.
- You can create a distinctive internal voice.
- You can add an element of craft by creating a narrator who is not entirely reliable.

DISADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- You are limited to writing about what the narrator can see or sense.
- The narrator must constantly be on stage or observing the stage.
- You can't go into the minds of other characters.

2. Second person

The you narrator, this POV is rarely successful, and even then works best in shorter books. For an example of second person POV, check out Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*. But know that most publishing professionals advise against using this tricky approach.

You're just standing there. She comes along and kisses you, and you nearly faint.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- It gives you the power to be different, even eccentric in the way you can speak to the reader so directly.

DISADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- It begins to feel quirky, whether you're reading it or writing it.

- It can say to a publishing professional: "I'm a Jay McInerney knockoff. Reject me!"

3. Third person

The he, she, it, they, them narrator, third person is the most common POV in fiction. It offers a variety of possibilities for limiting omniscience: information that the narrator and reader are privy to in the telling of the story.

THIRD PERSON UNLIMITED OMNISCIENCE: In this POV, the author enters the mind of any character to transport readers to any setting or action.

He stood stiff as a fence post, watching her come his way. What did she want? he wondered.

She had decided to kiss him, no matter what. So she did. She could see the effect of her kiss at once. He nearly fell over.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- It can enrich your novel with contrasting viewpoints.
- Both you and your reader can take a breath of fresh air as you shift from one character's POV to another's.
- You can broaden the scope of your story as you move between settings and from conflicting points of view.

DISADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- You can confuse yourself and the reader unless every voice is distinctive.
- You can diffuse the flow of your story by switching the POV too often. (Notice how the last passage about the kiss jolts you from one POV to the other.)
- It's easy to get lazy and begin narrating as the author instead of as one of your characters.

4. THIRD PERSON LIMITED OMNISCIENCE: The author enters the mind of just a few characters, usually one per chapter or scene.

He stood stiff as a fence post, watching her come his way. What did she want? he wondered, as she approached. Then he saw the determination in her face. Good crackers! She was going to kiss him, no matter what.

She did, too, and he nearly fell over.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- It has all the advantages of third person unlimited POV.
- You can concentrate the story by keeping to major characters' (and strategic minor characters') thoughts.

DISADVANTAGES OF THIS POV:

- There aren't any, really; by imposing POV discipline, you minimize the downsides of unlimited omniscience.

11. **Select your Tense. Tense sets the 'mood'.**

- **After deciding on a viewpoint and a voice, you'll need to select a tense.** This is another major decision, because tense affects the mood of every sentence in your long form. You have many options to choose from, but only a couple are particularly useful.
- **Note: Present tense** simplifies our handling of tenses. Whereas **past-tense** stories often contain the majority of our language's 12 tenses, most present-tense stories employ only four—the simple present, the present progressive, and a smattering of the simple past and the simple future—and many consist almost entirely of the simple present tense. Using fewer tenses reduces our ability to convey the full complexity of time relationships, of course, but there's something to be said for this kind of simplicity. For example, when we're writing in present tense, we can simply shift into the simple past when a flashback starts and then return to the present when it's finished.

1. **Past Tense**

Past tense is the most popular for modern fiction, even though a significant portion of what publishers like to call "serious fiction" is written in present tense.

You could write your story outlines in present tense and then switch to past tense for your the long forms.

Benefit? Using present tense for the outline reminds us to be brief, while using past tense for the long form is more standard.

Here's an example from Steve Alcorn's novel *Ring of Diamonds*:

Jessica counted silently to five, then made her move. She slid the window up further and slipped into the room, holding her finger to her lips to keep the child quiet.

"Sarah, it's Jessica. Remember me?"

Sarah shook her head, her pigtails bouncing on her shoulders.

"We have to get you out of here, away from that bad man. Your father will meet up with us. We must be very quiet."

"That man said he would hurt me if I moved," whispered Sarah.

"He will, if you don't come now. Quickly," she urged.

2. Present Tense

How would this work in present tense?

Jessica counts silently to five, then makes her move. She slides the window up further and slips into the room, holding her finger to her lips to keep the child quiet.

"Sarah, it's Jessica. Remember me?"

Sarah shakes her head, her pigtails bouncing on her shoulders.

"We have to get you out of here, away from that bad man. Your father will meet up with us. We must be very quiet."

"That man said he would hurt me if I moved," whispers Sarah.

"He will, if you don't come now. Quickly," she urges.

You may want to avoid present tense unless you feel really REALLY comfortable with it.

Still, despite its dangers, there's nothing like present tense for creating a nervous energy, a sense of impending doom. After all, the narrator doesn't know what happens next. Here's how Sally Keen does it in *I Am Regina*:

The corn must be gathered. I move from stalk to stalk watching the surrounding woods from the corner of my eye. Watching for movements that don't belong to trees and wild creatures. Indian movements.

"Aren't you finished yet?"

The words startle me and I jump.

It is my sister, Barbara, standing now before me. She balances a corn-filled basket on her hip.

"Don't creep up on me like that," I tell her.

She laughs. "Did you think I was an Indian?"

"It's not funny."

If this were in past tense, it would be pretty clear the Indians are about to attack. Otherwise, the narrator wouldn't have created this sense of impending doom. But because it's in first person, the narrator doesn't know whether the Indians are about to attack or not. So all we perceive is the tension, which becomes our own.

Sometimes the interplay between different tenses can work to heighten the feeling of immediacy within a scene. In this example from *The Siege*, by Helen Dunmore, the narrator recalls comforting a dreamer. The flashback begins in past tense, but somewhere, artfully hidden by a dialogue exchange, it transitions to present tense.

He had a dream one night. He dreamed he was lying in bed and someone clamped a hand over his mouth and nose. A firm, fleshy, well-fed hand. The fingers were thick and greasy. They squeezed his nostrils until he couldn't breathe.

'What did you do?'

'I twisted my head from side to side to try and shake him off, but he pressed harder. And then I—'

'What?'

'I bit his hand. I could taste his blood.'

'Whose hand was it?'

And then his whisper, in the frightened room that held only the two of them: 'Koba's.'

Anna didn't answer. She knew there was more.

And then I woke up. I looked in the mirror and there were marks on my face. Dirty fingerprints. I tried to wipe them off but they wouldn't come off. I filled a basin with water and dipped my head into it and when I looked in the mirror my face was streaming with water, but the marks were still there.'

3. TENSE SWITCH FROM PAST TO PRESENT

He looks at her. She half-expects to see the fingerprints rise to the surface of his skin and show themselves. But there's nothing. 'It was a dream, that's all.'

'I know that.' He raps it out. There she goes again, stating the obvious, not thinking before she speaks.

'A nightmare,' says Anna.

'Don't shut the door.'

'No, I'll leave it open.'

Did you catch the tense transition? It's pretty subtle, but "He looks at her" makes the scene much more immediate, don't you think?

12. Voice and Style

1) Voice

Voice is what the reader hears when reading the story. Voice is the narrator of the story.

After viewpoint, no single choice has a greater effect on the way you tell your story than your choice of voice. Do you remember what voice is? It's simply the words, ideas, and intentions of your narrator.

Your narrator? Who's that? It may simply be you, the author. Or it may be your protagonist (like with First Person). Or it could be another character in your story.

Writers use several types of voices to narrate their stories. The important thing to remember is to keep the voice of the story consistent. Here some of the more common voices that writers use:

- **Conversational voice.** As you read the story, you feel like the narrator is engaged in a conversation with the reader. The **story is told using the POV of first person**. J.D. Salinger uses this voice to tell the story of “Catcher in the Rye.”
- **Informal voice.** It’s not as conversational. The narrator of the story uses everyday language. The story is **told using first person or third person POV**. Raymond told the story of “Cathedral” with an informal voice.
- **Formal voice.** The narrator is detached from the main character as the story is told. The narration uses fancy prose and language. Both the stories of “Lolita” and “The Great Gatsby” were told using the formal voice.
- **Other voices.** Writers have put into use many other voices to tell short stories or novels. For instance, Virginia Woolf used stream of consciousness. Other writers have used a lyrical voice like as though writing poetry.

CAUTION: One of the places that it is easiest to slip up and forget to remain in Deep POV is in descriptive narrative. Writers get carried away in describing a scene and start writing lyrical passages that their thirteen-year-old skateboarding hero would never say or think.

1. One great thing to remember about voice is that sometimes **a vivid voice can replace pages of exposition** about a character. **Think about how that person should speak in order to best tell the tale.** Should she be well-educated or illiterate? Should she **shade the truth or outright lie**? Making the right choices can have a tremendous impact on your readers' experience.
2. **FIRST, get to know your characters.** It’s so important to get to know your characters *before* you attempt to discover their voices. Close your eyes. Pretend, for a moment, that you are your character. What’s it like to be them? How does it feel? Is it exciting? Scary? Difficult? When something happens, how does your character process it, how do they respond, etc? What does their non-verbal body language express—what do your characters do with their bodies while they’re thinking/talking?
 - 2.1. **Now, write down details of your character while they are in your mind.** See section ‘8. Character Attribute Form’.
 - 2.2. **HINTS on writing their speech:**
 - ✓ **Add humor to one character**
If you can write humor, let one character be the jokester. Maybe create puns for a character. Maybe give him really bad puns.
 - ✓ **Let a character ramble**
Some people can’t get to the point. Create characters who ramble or beat around the bush or just take forever to say what they need to say.
 - ✓ **Have one character always interrupt and one character never interrupt.**
 - ✓ **One character could always assign nicknames**
 - ✓ **Note: Body language can help reveal a character’s voice as well.**
 - ✓ **Let at least 2 characters rant, be passionate/frustrated or be obsessed with something** (but what they care about is different for each character). Maybe your character lives in a time of war and is sick of the violence, or maybe it’s something as simple as your teenage protagonist pissed off at his lazy brother. Whatever it is, make sure they care and go for it.
 - ✓ **Now, push the boundaries. Do some writing exercises and include your characters rantings. Write ‘BIG’ go for ridiculous—you can’t go overboard enough when trying to know your characters.**
 - **The goal is to discover the limits of your character—the quirks, the weaknesses, the phrases she likes and passions she hides.**
3. Some sample exercises writing characters (aka chars): Work on it until you hear it different from your own voice, or any other chars voice. The goal is to get a handle on your characters reactions and decisions/choices.
 - 3.1. **Create a chat or begin composing emails back and forth between you and your char:**

[Me] “Hey Krista. What’s up?”
 [Krista] “Haven’t Molly-Whopped anyone today...guess I’m doin pretty good.”
 [Me] “Don’t be so hard on yourself. No one is perfect.”
 [Krista] She put her hand on her hip. “Pffftttzzz. Obvi. I’m not even tryin anymore.” Her foot kicked the ground.
 [Me] “I think you’ve been very brave and accomplished a lot.”
 [Krista] “Chie-lit, you *love* everyone. I could steal your favorite puppy and you’d find a reason to forgive me.”
 [Me] I waved my hands. “Whoa! I get mad. I just don’t always react with my first response.”
 [Krista] “I’d pay to see you pissed off. Like, I could sell tickets to that meltdown.”
 [Me] I smirked. “It’s not pretty when it happens. That’s why I work to control it.”
 [Krista] She looked down at the ground. “I’m still strugglin to manage my explosive *tendencies*. But I look to you for who I should model myself after.”

[Me] I laid my hand on her shoulder. "And I wish I was half as brave and fun as you are. It's good we adopt each other's best traits." She looked into my eyes, and then wrapped me in a tight hug.

3.2. Each char write social media post (If Dragon abodes had internet):

[Tangi] So like, this place is such a log cabin. There are NO servants and they can't even accomplish a decent cappuccino. What-ehs! The Dragons are on fleek, and the sticky-cakes are good WHEN Krista doesn't eat all of them!!

[Blazz] Today was rad brah! We fought all day. I slayed it. Then I flew to Krista's room, moved her shit around again and hid her oils. Oh man, she's gonna go ballistic!! I'm goin to hide now. Ha ha ha ha

[Krista] Hey peeps! We practiced FLB day. My team is so awesomazin!! But seriously, I got pretty ripe, like moose smelly ripe. All I wanted was to shower and then soak til I pruned up...BUT some jerkoid (aka Blazz) had to act like a *child* and steal my bath oils!!

So...how do you guys think I should get him back? Maybe get Jasper to drop him in the cold ocean and leave him???? Or maybe 'jump' him into a pile of Dragon dung?!! (My favorite so far) He he he he.

[Ash] Hi. Learned new fight maneuvers today. Krista's fire beat my earth magic...again.

3.3. Chars speaking to each other-They Meet Micky Mouse:

[Krista] I point. "Guys! It's Micky Mouse! It's Micky Moooussssse." My hands cup my cheeks. "I've always wanted to meet him!" I wave my team forward. "Come on! Come on! Let's get a picture!"

[Tangi] "Oh Lawd girl. It's a sweaty, pimply teen in a costume crawlin with bacteria." Her nose crinkles and fingers wiggle. "Plus, I ain't getting anywhere near those little germmy, seramin kids." She shoos me. "You go."

[Blazz] He shook his head. "No. I let you talk me into eating basil. I'm not huggin 'Fat Mo Mouse'." His jaw clamps down on his toothpick.

[Ash] Ash steps forward. "I'll go with you to meet the mouse."

3.4. Put char in difficult situation (walking down the street and accident happens, arch-enemy is in grave peril and char is the only one around to save him, a best-friend or family member betrays or really hurts your char):

3.5. CONVO where 1 char is trying to persuade the others:

3.6. CHAR is in an emotional crisis and is overcome by anger/rage, shame/guilt, jealousy, grief, etc:

3.7. CONVO where car cuts them off in traffic, Krista is driving:

[Krista] I laid on the horn. "Fuk-Nut! Learn how to drive!" Fire sprang from my fingertips. I blew it out and took a deep breath.

[Ash] "You okay?" He laid a hand on my arm.

[Blazz] He stuck his head out the window. "Asshat! Come back so I can pound some sense into you!"

[Tangi] Tangi leaned over Blazz and shouted out the window. "Come back and let me twirl your fat ass in a hurricane! Help ya lose some weight!"

EX with Rosie, a six-year-old child as narrator . . .

Mama didn't even tell me where we were going, but I knew. My stomach felt like I'd eaten too much. I wanted to rub it, but my arms wouldn't work right.

The doctor raised my arm and asked me to hold it up. I tried, but I couldn't. It wouldn't stay up.

"How long has she been like this?" he asked Mama.

"Since this morning," she said. "Maybe last night. I don't know." She was crying.

The doctor hit my knee with his little rubber hammer. I watched for my leg to jump in that funny way it always did, but nothing happened.

He whispered to Mama, "I'm afraid it's P-O-L-I-O."

He spelled it. But I knew what it was.

2) **Writer's Voice versus Narrator's Voice (narrative voice of protagonist, first person)**

The narrator of the story is not the author or writer of the story. Yet, it is easy to confuse because some narrators do speak in a voice that resembles the author of the story. This confusion can also occur when a story has a first-person point of view or narrative. You need to be aware that **the narrator or voice of the story is a construction, a technique used by the writer, to tell the story.**

To decide whether to refer to the author or narrator of the story, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you quoting the text of the novel or short story? If so, you are referring to the narrator or voice of the story.
- Are you asking questions about writing style, choice of diction, literary devices, such as simile, metaphor, symbolism? Then you are referring to the author's voice.

The writer's voice consists of the writing style and writer's view of the world, such as his/her beliefs, opinions, values, personal experiences. **Essentially, the writer's voice is everything he/she embodies and puts into use to write the story.**

Remember: The voice of the story is the voice of the narrator.

If you get the narrative voice right from the very start, everything has a much better chance of falling into place like magic. The narrating character himself is the foundation for your story's narrative voice. You're only going to be able to write the voice insofar as you first *understand* the character. **For me, my protagonist, Krista should be my narrator—every description, etc. should be written how she would think, talk, perceive a landscape. Your story's fuel is your narrating character's emotion.** He needs to be "heated up" about something pretty much all the time. He needs to be experiencing driving emotions: desire, anger, frustration, fear. These big emotions—which are inevitably created by conflict—are what give you the opportunity to really go wild within your character's voice.

If you are writing in first person, for example, the narrative voice is the narrator's voice (which means it is not the voice of the writer, but the voice of a character) and involves the narrator's manner of speaking, word choice, dialect and so on.

CAUTION: One of the places that's easiest to slip up and forget to remain in Deep POV is in descriptive narrative. **Writers get carried away in describing a scene and start writing lyrical passages that their thirteen-year-old skateboarding hero would never say or think.**

Writing Deep POV is a humbling experience. With every word, you are trying to make readers forget that you, the author, exist. If you succeed, kids won't even remember your name. Your goal is to convince them the main character is the one telling them the story, not you.

The POV glasses the writer sets on her first-person narrator's face should have clear lenses, as if the hero were a scientist recording "just the facts, ma'am." And who of us sees and responds to life in such a completely neutral fashion? It's *the way* a first-person narrator shares plot events and her observations of other characters that reveals to us what kind of person the narrator really is. There is color to the narrator's lenses.

Let every word your narrator says—even if that is about something as ordinary as the weather, the menu in the school cafeteria, or the shoes his sister is wearing—reveal more about your hero than perhaps he'd like to admit.

Of course, you won't write *precisely* how you speak...

- The descriptive passages, in particular, will be a little more "poetic" than your normal voice.
- And you will need to polish the words a little - iron out any grammatical slip-ups, substitute weak and abstract words for concrete ones, cut out any unnecessary words, and so on.

But the purpose of this polishing is to make the prose sound more *natural*, never more *literary*.

if you get the narrative voice right from the very start, everything has a much better chance of falling into place like magic.

3) **Style, Language and Tone**

Style is an almost intangible quality of fiction, which arises largely from language and tone. The writer's diction, the choice of words, the kind of dialogue, the sentence structure, all these create the **style**, which can be anywhere from baroque detailed to extremely minimalist.

Tone, on the other hand, refers to the *attitude the narrative seems to take toward its subject matter*, which can be influenced by word choice as well as the outlook of the narrator. On a relatively uncomplicated level, a story can convey intense and serious interest in its characters and events, or it can signal, through use of humor or

irony, that the reader is not to take these particular characters as seriously as they take themselves. Between these two extremes, there are many shadings of tone.

13. Deep POV | Be in Char's head

If not done with the utmost care, Deep POV can actually drive readers away.

Deep POV techniques can be applied to first or third person point of views with effectiveness. The reason that Deep POV is on the rise because **readers love feeling lost in their entertainment**.

1. You must **know your character better than you know yourself**. Take the time to flesh out your character's ENTIRE life (birth to now). You must understand their motivations, relationships, and personality.
2. **Remove Telling words like 'thought', 'wondered', 'saw'**. These take your reader out of Deep POV. No one thinks these words in real life, so you don't include them in your writing.

Out of Deep POV:

At last the tremors subsided and the earth stilled. Maggie **wondered** how bad the earthquake had been. She looked around and **saw** the deep black gashes in the ground where the pavement of the road had cracked. She **knew** that it must have been at least a 7.0.

In Deep POV:

At last the earth stilled, the **trembling ground sighing into complacency**. *How bad had this one been? Around her, wide gashes in the pavement revealed the quake split the road as though it were soft as flesh. Maggie shivered despite the heat. A 7.0 at least, perhaps even higher.*

3. **Place dialogue next to the action** instead of using dialogue tags.

Out of Deep POV:

She found John on State Street. A stream of blood flowed down his forehead as he stood on trembling legs. "Are up you okay?" **she asked**.

"I'm fine," **John whispered back** as he tore off a strip of his t-shirt to dab away the blood. Then they felt it, the ground shaking to life once again. **Maggie shouted**, "Get down!" and flung herself to the earth.

In Deep POV:

Maggie turned down State Street and **sighed with relief**. She drew up beside John as he **stood on trembling legs and frowned**. His head bled. "Are you okay?" She reached up to examine the wound. John **flinched away**.

"I'm fine." He tore off the hem of his shirt to dab away the blood.

Her **legs throbbed and shook**. She reached to steady herself on the street lamp and gasped as though it had shocked her. The lamp shook, too. "Get down!" She pulled John to the ground with her. "It's another quake."

4. **Show, Don't Tell. Note: There's more written on this in the next section**
 - Deep POV is all about getting inside your character's head, so avoid as many instances of *telling* as you can.
 - If you want to stay in the character's mindset, you can't write lengthy exposition, backstory, and description. All of that must be worked in naturally throughout the piece using only the POV character's thoughts, actions, senses, and conversations.
5. **Use strong, Active verbs...**don't be passive
 - Passive voice is when you write that an action is being done unto someone rather than being done by someone.
 - For example, writing "My cheek **was hit**," rather than "**He hit my cheek**," would be utilizing passive voice.
 - Being passive goes against what you are trying to achieve when writing in Deep POV, so it's time to ditch that passive voice.
 - Side Note: I love the tip that says **if you can write 'by zombies' after your sentence and have it make sense then you are writing in passive voice**. Case in point? "**My cheek was hit by zombies**." Haha!
6. **Write vividly**
 - Utilize the POV **character's five senses (and sixth sense)**, as well as their memories and emotions. When you are done, read back over your work and see how your scene jumps off of the page. Your readers will be astounded!

14. SHOW, Don't Tell | Elicit emotions from Reader

Showing Action

1. **When you're in a character's viewpoint, the words *see* and *hear* are mostly dead weight.** Just show us what the character experiences. For example, don't say:

She could *hear* the babble of the river and *see* it sparkling.

Instead, you could say:

The river *babbled and sparkled*.

2. **Be in Chars head = Don't tell feelings or explain actions, SHOW!** Rewrite sentences or paragraphs using stronger verbs instead, or how you could exhibit what is really going on in the character's head without telling feelings or explaining actions.

Instead of:

"The *cold wind blew against her*,"

Try something like:

"*Shivers ran up her arms* as she *braced herself against the wind*. Why hadn't she remembered a jacket?"

==See how showing the cold by virtue of her actions actually added length? Plus it made us feel so much more on behalf of the character.

Instead of:

Paul *hurried* out the door. He *brushed the snow off his car* and *revved up the engine*. He was *still so angry* about his talk with Anna that *he spun mud and snow up as he took off out of the driveway*.

Write this:

Paul *slammed the door and stomped down the walk*, heedless of the slush slopping around his ankles and soaking through his shoes. Snow covered his car. *He swiped it away with the sleeve of his shirt, muttering under his breath*. When would spring come anyway? The door creaked as he jerked it open. The seats cold and *stiff, just like the engine*. *It moaned when he turned the key*. "Come on, start!" *Another try and the car sputtered*. He *stomped on the gas and revved it*. Leaning forward, he scratched his fingertips across the frost inside the window. Paul *threw the car into reverse and roared backward down the drive, the tires spraying mud and snow, his heart skidding raw along his nerves*.

3. First, avoid writing anything that distances readers from your POV character in any way. Here's an example.

She jumped when *she heard* the door slam.

==The phrase *she heard* is a tiny little wedge driven between the narrator and the reader. Do some quick and simple word-surgery, and you've gone a little deeper into your character's head.

The door slammed. She jumped, her heart ping-ponging in her chest.

You don't tell readers that she heard the slamming door, you simply show it happening—followed immediately by the character's response.

4. **Telling** is narration that gives the reader information. Telling summarizes events that aren't important enough to dramatize and create detailed imagery for. Just the facts, ma'am, but with creativity.
5. **Showing** is dramatizing. Showing is often achieved through dialogue, direct and indirect thoughts, and strong point of view. It's interactive, making the reader think and imagine, engaging her at a deeper level than just being told information passively.

Example #1:

Telling: After walking for miles, Emily was exhausted [Really? So how does exhausted *feel*: Feet ache, mind numb, body doesn't feel like it can move another step. "I'm weak and my body is trembling."] and hungry [How do you *feel* when you're hungry: Stomach growls, emptiness in belly, smell of bacon makes your mouth water with anticipation] and stopped at a farmhouse. When the farmer offered her breakfast, she gratefully sat down at the table and enjoyed every bite.

Showing: Emily's weakened body trembled as she pulled her chair closer to the stranger's table. Her nostrils quivered as the smoky aroma of bacon wafted upward, and she almost swooned as the rumbling in her stomach amplified. Plunging her fork into a glistening egg yolk, she crammed it into her mouth as the farmer observed her with a gentle smile. *I couldn't have gone another step*, she thought, glancing shyly at the stranger and marveling at her good fortune at discovering his farmhouse.

Can you see the differences? In the first paragraph, the telling prose is dull and flat (I've done that deliberately), giving out simple statements of fact. You know Emily is hungry, but as a reader, you can't viscerally feel her desperation, hunger, and gratitude. This is not to say that telling shouldn't be imaginative and lively, but I've kept it plain to demonstrate the point.

In the second paragraph, I didn't specifically tell you that Emily was exhausted, hungry, and grateful. I dramatized the scene by showing the food, the smell, the appearance, and her reactions, and you worked those things out for yourself.

And showing does double duty here. a) Vivid imagery inspires the reader's imagination and makes you engage in the story by deducing for yourself that Emily is exhausted, hungry, and grateful. b) By showing her feelings using direct thoughts, I'm delving into deeper point of view to help you feel a closer connection to Emily.

Example #2:

Telling: Jacques felt old [How does old *feel*: Back aches as I shift in my chair, knee feels like a bomb exploded in it when I stand, etc] He was tired, frightened, and despairing now that Myrna had died.

Showing: Jacques' arthritic bones ached as he tried to stand. He wobbled slightly, his cane groping for solid ground on the ward's slippery floor. *Oh, Myrna, he thought, his mind flitting from one scenario to another, all of them unimaginable. How do you expect me to live a day longer without you?*

In the first paragraph, the telling is devoid of any real emotion. In the second paragraph, even though I haven't told you that Jacques is old, tired, frightened, or in despair, you can figure it out for yourself. Showing invites readers to participate in the story, deducing things on their own, rather than passively taking in "told" information. Moreover, in this example, I showed Jacques' emotions by using direct thoughts to help the reader feel what Jacques is feeling and form a closer connection with him. And helping readers form a deep, close connection with main characters should be an author's primary goal for most modern fiction.

6. Balanced Writing = 1 statement + 2-3 Descriptions

Not so good: "His eyes were like the sea during a storm, dark blue and tumultuous. His jaw was chiseled like marble, his nose sharp and strong. His golden locks glimmered in the sunlight as he carried the boxes, ropy arm muscles rippling beneath the crimson fabric of his t-shirt."

Better: "His dark blue eyes (statement) as tumultuous as a storm at sea (description), a stark contrast to his cheery crimson shirt (description). He portrayed a classic Adonis look so many girls admired (statement). Chiseled jaw (description), strong nose (description), ropy muscles (description). I admired them all as he carried his box of belongings into the office (statement)."

7. Examples of Showing VS Telling:

Telling: From the way she behaved in the crowded restaurant, *you could tell Sally was attracted to the cute stranger* in the black shirt. She *tried a few things to get his attention*, and eventually she thought she succeeded.

==The author wastes no time providing the information, but the story is very thin... nothing interesting seems to be happening.

Showing: That stranger scanned the room, and this time, *Sally thought his eyes flickered in her direction*. Wait — a half smile? Did his hand lay over his heart? Or maybe just brushing something off his shirt? *That shirt looked soft*. Sally smiled.

"He's kind of cute," her roommate giggled.

Sally *casually looked away, twirling a curl*. "Oh, I don't know," she said, letting her eyes rest on the artwork, the flowers, a random face in the crowd, and *found another excuse to laugh*. Carefully turning her profile, *she crossed her legs* like her friends had practiced in middle school.

That ought to do it, she thought.

Telling: All the kids *knew that Lucinda was the meanest kid* in the third grade. She was prissy and cute, and she thought that meant she could get away with anything. She would *always go out of her way to torment me*. I wasn't one of the "cool" kids, and the few kids I knew were just the guys *I played chess* with during recess — they weren't really friends. Plus, *I was clumsy*. So I was a good target. *She tormented me* so much she made the third grade a living hell.

==Okay, we understand the author wants us to think Lucinda is mean, but we don't actually see her do anything. Does the narrator have a good reason to fear Lucinda, or is the narrator a whiner-baby? There's not enough information for us to know (or care).

Showing: When the recess bell rang, I *grabbed my chess set* and dashed to freedom, eager to win the daily tournament of outcasts. I didn't look, but *I knew Lucinda watched me*. I felt her curly locks swaying as her head tracked me. Of course, *I tripped in the doorway*. Tennis shoes and sandals stepped around me as I scrambled after pawns and bishops. Lucinda stood, waiting for me to notice her. *She smiled, lifted her shiny patent-leather shoe, and slowly, carefully ground her heel right on the head of my white queen*.

Telling/informing: The *temperature had fallen overnight* and the heavy frost reflected the sun's rays brightly.

Showing/evoking: The morning air *bitter ice in her nose and mouth*. The *dazzling frost* lay on every bud and branch.

Telling/informing: The taller man was a *carpenter*, complete with the tools of his trade.

Showing/evoking: A *saw and hammer dangled from his belt* and an adze hooked into it. *One thumbnail black*, when he bowed several long wood-shavings caught in his curly hair.

Showing Emotion

Many writers lean on a clever trick to show emotions—they describe a character's physical reactions to emotions. So characters are often crying, yelling, and slamming doors. Their stomachs are twisting, their hands are trembling, and their cheeks are burning. We hear exasperated breaths and soft sighs. Goodness! And all the varying heartbeats. Bleh!

1. **How to improve your showing writing:**

Avoid telling readers that a character is angry, sad, frustrated, tired, bored, hungry, or any other basic human need or emotion. Ditch those boring feeling words. Instead, **show the character's behavior using evocative imagery that conveys all the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, (and 6th sense if they have it).** This way, you allow the reader to experience all those senses too, helping her become more deeply connected with your characters.

Think in terms of drama—what you would see in a stage play, TV show, or film. These mediums are, by their nature, 100% showing. In a written story, **Before you write, close your eyes and visualize in detail what your characters are experiencing and sensing, as if they were performers on a stage.**

2. **Be more specific.** Dig deep to get into the detail. Question every line in your story to see if it's worth expanding. Don't just write, "Harry was lonely." **Ask who, what, when, where, how, and why, is your character feeling this way –and then describe the answers in detail. WHAT does the stimulus do to your CHARs body, mind, etc?**

- **Use physical symptoms** the character might experience
Emotions trigger physical reactions, and these are clues readers can use to determine how a character feels. Racing heart, shaking, numb fingers, sweaty palms all signal fear (or possibly love in the right circumstances). Also consider involuntary reactions, such as blushing or gasping.
Instead of: He turned away, his face bright **red in embarrassment**.
Try: They laughed and he turned away, **face burning, yet fingers icy cold.**

3. **EXAMPLES:**

❖ **BEFORE revision to SHOW emotions:**

Mary opened her eyes and looked at the clock. Her **heart nearly leapt out of her chest**. The baby had slept nearly eight hours. But little Jane never slept more than four hours at a time. Something must be wrong.

Not again. **Her stomach rolled over** when she remembered the last time a child of hers had slept too long.

Mary **flipped the covers** back and **stood on weak knees**, forcing herself to her feet **despite the fear overwhelming her**. She shoved her arms in her bathrobe, slipped into her warm slippers, and **rushed for the door**. Her **hands were shaking so badly** she could hardly turn the doorknob. Finally, she got the door open and ran down the hallway toward the nursery.

She threw open the door and lunged at the crib. She peered inside and saw the beautiful pink cheeks of her newborn daughter. She **placed her trembling hand** on Jane's back, felt the even breaths, and **let out a long sigh**. **Tears of gratitude filled her eyes** as she realized her baby was alive.

==Our character is definitely feeling emotions. Do you think I can get the reader to experience a few of them? I'll give it a try.

AFTER revision to SHOW emotions:

Mary opened her eyes and **squinted in the sunshine** streaming in through the open window. **She stretched, feeling more relaxed than she had since . . .**

She sat up and looked at the clock. After eight. Little Jane slept through the night. For the first time.

Just like Billy.

Mary flipped the covers back and stood. She **snatched her robe** from the back of the chair and slipped it on. She wouldn't think about Billy.

Billy had been nearly six weeks old. Jane was almost two months. **Different this time. It had to be.**

She slipped her feet into her fuzzy slippers, ticking off all the ways the situations were different. Billy had been sick. Jane had never even had a sniffle. Billy had been fussy. Jane was nearly the perfect baby, only crying when she was hungry or wet.

She must be both hungry and wet right now, but little Jane was silent.

Just like Billy.

No, God wouldn't do that to her again. **She couldn't bury another child. She wouldn't.**

She stepped toward her bedroom door, remembering Billy's skin, how gray and cold it had been. At first, she'd thought maybe someone was playing a mean trick on her. But then she'd lifted him. Seen his face. **Those gray lips and lifeless eyes.**

Maybe it would have been different if she hadn't been alone when she'd found his tiny body. Maybe if John had been there. But John had been gone on a business trip.

Mary turned and looked at the empty bed. Her side was a jumble of blankets. John's side was untouched. He was on a business trip. Again.

He'd rushed home that day two years earlier, assured her it wasn't her fault. How could she have known?

How indeed? How did a good mother sleep through her own child's death? How did she dream of beaches and butterflies while her son passed into eternity?

If Jane was dead, Mary would join her. Somehow. She couldn't live through this again.

She stepped into the hallway and took a first step. **A good mother would run, but she could hardly force herself to walk. She inched her way down the hall.**

She glanced at the stairs. What if she went to the kitchen, made some coffee? Never found out the truth?

She pushed the thought away and continued past the staircase, **paused at the nursery door, and laid her hand on the cold metal doorknob. The clock ticked loudly in the hallway, like a steady heartbeat.**

She stepped into the room and approached the crib. And there, sprawled on her back, lay the most beautiful sight she'd ever seen.

Jane's eyes opened at the sound of Mary's approach, and she smiled.

==I hope you had at least a twinge of emotional reaction to that. I know I did. Please notice, there's not a single beating heart or trembling hand in that example. Her stomach doesn't clench, and her eyes don't fill with tears. Yet she felt a lot of emotions.

❖ **Instead of:** I **wiped the sweat** from my brow with a **trembling hand**, **fear from my narrow escape** coursing through my veins.

==Do you feel her fear? Probably not, because even she's not feeling it. Scared people don't typically think about what's coursing through their veins or why it's doing it, they just feel and think and react.

Revised:

Still trembling, I **stumbled to the closest bench** and **popped down before I fell down**. **Sweat stung my eyes**. I wiped my face on my shirt. *Way too close. If I hadn't run when I did... I shuddered.*

==This shows how the narrator feels, what she's thinking when she feels it, how her body is reacting, without making her conscious of it. It's looking outward from within her skin, not inward at her skin. We don't have to explain she's just had a narrow escape, because we've given enough clues so the reader can easily surmise the why.

❖ **Instead of:** **Fear made her quicken her steps**. Someone was following her.

Try: It wasn't just footsteps behind her—the **stench of cheap cologne, stale beer, and desperation crept ever closer**. **She picked up her pace**.

❖ **Instead of:** **He was so handsome** I couldn't take my eyes off him.

Try: The world fell away, **drained of all color but him, standing in the sunlight**.

❖ **Telling/informing:** They stood close and wrapped their arms round each other in a **passionate embrace**, so that she **became aware that he had been riding**, and then that he was as **nervous as she was**.

Showing/evoking: They **gripped each other**. The tweed of his jacket **rough under her cheek**. His hand came up to stroke her hair; she **smelled leather and horses on the skin of his wrist**. He trembled.

❖ **Telling:** The little girl **looked so tired**, she clearly **needed a nap**.

==This sentence gets right to the point, but nothing about it engages the imagination or makes the reader want to keep reading.

Showing: Her **sleepy brown eyes hardened into red-rimmed slits**. She **cocked her plastic Viking helmet** aggressively, the horns sticking out only a little more than her curls. One fist clutched a decapitated lollipop, the other a cardboard sword. She leveled the point at my chest. "You mean dragon!" **she growled**. "You'll never make me nap!"

❖ **Consider this initial passage, about a man systematically stripping his ex-wife of everything important to her. Does it engage your emotions or feel flat?:**

"You actually thought I'd agree to this?" He laughed. "You 're an idiot." Deliberately, he tore the custody papers in half.

Lynn stared at him in anguish. He'd gotten everything else. Now he was going to take her daughter.

His voice was soft. "What court would give a young girl to a woman so irresponsible as to lose her job, spend her savings, and go into debt with every friend? A woman living in a place like this, a place fit only for whores and addicts?" He tore the papers again and, **with satisfaction**, let them fall to the carpet. He turned away, in his tailored suit and Italian shoes, and strode out of the apartment.

Lynn's knees hit the bare wood floor. **She was devastated**, and her tears blinded her. She didn't even hear the phone as it began to ring behind her.

Reworked, to avoid the qualifiers and let the scene create the anguish for you:

"You actually thought I'd agree to this?" He laughed. "That I'd let you keep my daughter? You're an idiot." Deliberately, he tore the custody papers in half, **then in half again**. Without taking his gaze from her stricken face, **he opened his fingers and let the ragged strips fall**.

Lynn heard his words, but they seemed to have no meaning. **All only heard the sound of paper ripping. The broken wings of the custody contract fluttering to the floor**. Two years, three lawyers, and every dime she'd saved and borrowed, and he'd led her on like a calf to the slaughter, made her think she could keep her child if she made just this one more concession. Oh God. Her stomach twisted. Oh, God, God. She couldn't seem to breathe.

He said softly as he watched her, "What court would give a **three-year-old girl** to a woman so irresponsible as to lose her job, spend every penny of her savings, and go into debt with every friend? A woman living in a place like this, with drug addicts on the outside steps and roaches on the rugs -- a dump fit only for whores?" He **watched with savage satisfaction as her face went bone-white at the implication**. Then he turned away in his tailored suit and Italian shoes, and strode out of the apartment.

Something was wrong with Lynn's body. It was trembling, almost shaking, and she stared blindly at the scuffed, dinged-up door for seconds before **she realized that she was trying to sob, but could make no sound. There was a roaring in her ears, and something was cutting her hands. Her nails -- they'd bitten into her palms, and blood had started to well out under her fingertips**. She **barely felt the pain** when her knees hit the bare wood floor. She didn't hear the phone as it began to jangle behind her.

==Check that reworked passage. There are only two emotional qualifiers ("stricken" and "savage satisfaction") which work because the rest of the scene has built up the villain's attitude. You're never told that Lynn is anguished or devastated. Instead, you simply live through her responses. When she reaches the point of actual anguish, you don't need someone to say "anguish." Instead, you should be right there feeling your own emotions with her.

❖ **Telling:** Bob **felt scared**.

Showing: Bob's **face went ashen**. His **breathing came in ragged gasps**.

Delete: 'heard', 'saw', 'thought', 'guessed', 'surmised', 'supposed'. etc

Search for telling of thought tags such as: 'heard', 'saw', 'felt', 'thought', 'surmised', 'guessed', 'supposed', etc

1. First, avoid writing anything that distances readers from your POV character in any way. Here's an example.

She jumped when she heard the door slam.

2. The phrase **she heard** is a tiny little wedge driven between the narrator and the reader. Do some quick and simple word-surgery, and you've **gone a little deeper into your character's head**.

The door slammed. She jumped, her heart ping-ponging in her chest.

You don't tell readers that she heard the slamming door, you simply show it happening—followed immediately by the character's response.

Just write the thought directly. For readers, this creates the sense that they are in the narrator's mind, hearing her thoughts by some kind of literary telepathy.

Search for feeling tags such as: 'angry', 'sad', 'mad', 'frustrated', 'tired', 'bored', 'hungry', 'exhausted', 'happy', or any other basic human need or emotion.

1. **Avoid telling readers what a character feels. Show them with description.** Ditch those boring *feeling* words. Instead, **show the character's behavior using evocative imagery that conveys all the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch.** This way, you allow the reader to experience all those senses too, helping her become more deeply connected with your characters.

Telling: After walking for miles, Emily was exhausted [Really? So how does exhausted *feel*: Feet ache, mind numb, body doesn't feel like it can move another step. "I'm weak and my body is trembling."] and hungry [How do you *feel* when you're hungry: Stomach growls, emptiness in belly, smell of bacon makes your mouth water with anticipation] and stopped at a farmhouse. When the farmer offered her breakfast, she gratefully sat down at the table and enjoyed every bite.

Showing: Emily's weakened body trembled as she pulled her chair closer to the stranger's table. Her nostrils quivered as the smoky aroma of bacon wafted upward, and she almost swooned as the rumbling in her stomach amplified. Plunging her fork into a glistening egg yolk, she crammed it into her mouth as the farmer observed her with a gentle smile. *I couldn't have gone another step*, she thought, glancing shyly at the stranger and marveling at her good fortune at discovering his farmhouse.

Showing does double duty here. a) Vivid imagery inspires the reader's imagination and makes you engage in the story by deducing for yourself that Emily is exhausted, hungry, and grateful. b) By showing her feelings using direct thoughts, I'm delving into deeper point of view to help you feel a closer connection to Emily.

Telling: Jacques felt old [How does old *feel*: Back aches as I shift in my chair, knee feels like a bomb exploded in it when I stand, etc] He was tired, frightened, and despairing now that Myrna had died.

Showing: Jacques' arthritic bones ached as he tried to stand. He wobbled slightly, his cane groping for solid ground on the ward's slippery floor. *Oh, Myrna*, he thought, his mind flitting from one scenario to another, all of them unimaginable. *How do you expect me to live a day longer without you?*

15. Tension, Suspense, Conflict

❖ To recap Scene and Sequel and their 7 elements:

- SCENE'S Plot (aka ACTION) is your character's physical journey. Action is external to character.
 - Plot is what happens, the storyline, **the action**. Jerome Stern says it is how you set up the situation, where the **turning points of the story** are, and what the characters do at the end of the story.
 - A plot is a **series of events** deliberately arranged to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance. — Jane Burroway
- SEQUEL'S Story (aka REACTION) is your character's **emotional journey**. Reaction is internal for character.

The scene (aka PLOT and ACTION) consists of three elements:

1. GOAL of the protagonist
2. CONFLICT (external struggles/obstacles) that results from protagonist's pursuit of the goal
3. DISASTER or setback for the protagonist as a result of the conflict
 - Each set back must be progressively worse than the last throughout Act 2's struggle.

- But you need to give your readers a breather too. One action sequence shouldn't lead directly into the next, with no time for your protagonist—or reader—to absorb the significance of what has happened.
- So escalate, and then release the tension down for a bit. Then take it even higher.

And the sequel (aka STORY and REACTION) consists of these four elements:

4. EMOTION (internal) how the protagonist feels as a result of the disaster. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
 5. THOUGHT process (internal) of the protagonist as the emotion ebbs. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
 6. DECISION (internal) made as a result of this thought process. * should be inside the protagonist's head.
 7. ACTION taken as a result of the decision. It may be helpful to think of the scene as external, and the sequel as internal.
- *The action at the end is often the same element as the goal of the next scene.

Conflict

Conflict produces **tension** that makes the story begin. Tension is created by **opposition** between the character or characters and **internal** or **external** forces or conditions. **By balancing the opposing forces of the conflict, you keep readers glued to the pages wondering how the story will end.**

Yourke's Conflict Checklist

- **Mystery.** Explain just enough to tease readers. Never give everything away.
- **Empowerment.** Give both sides options.
- **Progression.** Keep intensifying the number and type of obstacles the protagonist faces.
- **Causality.** Hold fictional characters more accountable than real people. Characters who make mistakes frequently pay, and, at least in fiction, commendable folks often reap rewards.
- **Surprise.** Provide sufficient complexity to prevent readers predicting events too far in advance.
- **Empathy.** Encourage reader identification with characters and scenarios that pleasantly or (unpleasantly) resonate with their own sweet dreams (or night sweats).
- **Insight.** Reveal something about human nature.
- **Universality.** Present a struggle that most readers find meaningful, even if the details of that struggle reflect a unique place and time.
- **High Stakes.** Convince readers that the outcome matters because someone they care about could lose something precious. Trivial clashes often produce trivial fiction.

Scene Disasters/Conflicts:

1. Death.
2. Physical injury.
3. Emotional injury.
4. Discovery of complicating information.
5. Personal mistake.
6. Threat to personal safety.
7. Danger to someone else.

<http://www.adventuresinyapublishing.com/2010/06/scene-conflict-worksheet.html#.VqaBVJorLIU>

- CONFLICT:** (external) that results from protagonist's pursuit of the goal. Series of obstacles your Point of View (POV) character faces on the way to reaching his Goal.
- ASK YOURSELF:**
1. How can you make it even harder for the POVc to achieve her goals?
 2. Did I make the situation so bad that my character totally flips cookies/freaks out/hyperventilates/gets pissed off?
 3. Does my conflict scene happen at the worst time? Is there a more uncomfortable place?
 4. Is there another character you can add who would make the situation worse?
 5. How does what happened in the scene make the POVc's situation and the overall situation worse?
 6. Isolate your hero, rob him of powers/his weapons, his allies and his means of escape, or injure him.
 7. How does that decision go against her needs, desires, or moral principles?
 8. What questions does this scene raise that force the reader to continue reading?
 9. How can you twist the setting to make it unexpected?
 10. Heighten the sense of menace in everyday objects by focusing on sensory detail (Kleins).
 11. What impossible decision does the POVc have to make after this scene?
 12. When in doubt, go big. Drop a plane wing, add a zombie, have them realize that the two things they want most in the world can't both be had at the same time. Your characters may hate you for it, but readers will love it.
 13. How can you take each of your goals and satisfy them in a way that pits the characters against each other or underscores the conflict between the POVc's internal and external goals?
 14. What does your character stand to lose if they lose this conflict? What is at risk?
 15. When the story begins, what morally significant action has your protagonist taken towards that goal? (Your protagonist should already have made a conscious choice, good or bad, that drives the rest of the story.)
 16. What unexpected consequences — directly related to the protagonist's goal-oriented actions — ram up the emotional energy of the story? (Will the unexpected consequences force your protagonist to make yet another choice, leading to still more consequences?)
 17. What morally significant choice does your protagonist make at the climax of the story? (Your reader should care about the protagonist's decision. Ideally, the reader shouldn't see it coming.)
 18. What details from the setting, dialog, and tone help you tell the story? Things to cut:
 - i. Travel scenes. (Save words. "Later, at the office, L.")
 - ii. Character A telling character B about something we just saw happening to character A. (Cut the redundancy.)
 - iii. Facial expressions of a first-person narrator. (We can't see what our own faces look like, so don't write "A smile lit my face from ear to ear.") See Writing Dialogue.
 19. Insert one or two pauses — eg the cry of a night-bird, or something that seems menacing turns out to be everyday — that allow the reader to relax momentarily. This makes the real confrontation much more powerful, when it finally comes;
 20. What do each of the other characters want that is in opposition to the POVc's internal and external goals?
 21. Who are the allies and opponents among the other characters? Who are they each rooting for?
 22. What physical obstacles can you place in front of your characters?
 23. What setting would make those physical obstacles even more obvious?
 24. How can you make that setting more unique and memorable?
 25. What memories and emotions does the setting bring out in the POVc?
 26. What oblique objects or details in the setting will help you underscore the POVc's emotions?
 27. What kind of weather would highlight the mood of the scene?
 28. Can you make the weather work against the POVc in any other way?

- **TIPS:**
 - **Heighten and prolong conflict.** Any conflict can be prolonged, and the major conflicts *should* be prolonged to rack up the **tension** – if you resolve a conflict too quickly, **suspense disappears**.
 - **Suspense** comes from your readers' anticipation of what's going to happen next. Therefore, never tell them anything in advance when, by withholding it, you can increase suspense. *If a writer can maintain suspense throughout the story, many readers may keep reading even if the characters are undeveloped and the plot is weak.* The reader's hope that the hero will succeed, and fear that he will fail, creates rising suspense until the climax, where the hero's goal or problem is resolved.
 - Conflict is what happens when someone, for some reason, up and decides that your character needs to fail in his goal, or else is pursuing a goal which, if met, will prevent your viewpoint character from reaching his goal.
 - In many cases, when people talk about **conflict**, they actually mean one of two things – **change and obstacles**.
 - The fact is that many stories don't actually arise from conflict, but from change. A character may wake up one day to find that the world has magically altered. A change is enough to instigate the story, and the character's curiosity or wandering is enough to begin it. *The character will then be faced with various obstacles.* It is quite possible for the entire story to contain no enemies, no antagonist, no arguments or fighting, and no opposition.
 - **The two most obvious kinds of conflict are arguments between characters and physical fights.** But conflict doesn't have to mean aggression, and it would be a mistake to believe that simply shoe-horning in another battle will magically fix a failing story.
 - **Most conflict in a story arises from obstacles.** *A character wants something, but something else is stopping her from getting it. She might be after a physical object, or pursuing love or knowledge, or trying to save a kingdom. She might simply want to stay alive and sane. Her obstacle could be real or imagined: a person or a thing, the weather...anything.* The conflict arises from the fact that the character cannot get what they want and so must find a way to acquire it, or that they are in danger of losing what they value and so must find a way to protect it. **Conflict means not letting the protagonist win too easily. Make them work for their goal.**
 - A new world with strange creatures and customs provides all kinds of opportunities for obstacles, problems and conflict. <http://fantasy-faction.com/2013/writing-rules-and-fantasy-stories-need-conflict>
 - **5 Ways to increase Conflict:**
 - #1 Pick the Right Atmosphere:**
 - In real life you want to choose the right environment to have a difficult conversation. You want to choose a place where the individual can focus on what you are saying and not instantly feel defensive or uncomfortable. In fiction, *try and have the conflict happen in the most uncomfortable place possible for your characters.*
 - *Imagine a man telling his fiancé he doesn't think he can go through with the wedding. Now imagine him telling her in the back of the church just before the wedding, or worse yet, right after the ceremony, or as the flight takes off for their honeymoon.*
 - Look at your manuscript's conflict scenes. Do they **happen at the worst time? Is there a more uncomfortable place?**
 - #2 Allies, enemies, and the art of bringing others into the fight**
 - In real life we don't want to pull others into an argument. In fiction *ask yourself, is there another character you can add who would make the situation worse?*
 - Who does your character want on their side in an argument?
 - Who is the person your character least wants to oppose?
 - In the wedding example above it's bad if the groom is in love with someone else, it's worse if it's the maid of honor, or her sister, or his best man.
 - #3 Avoid Accusations:**
 - In conflict resolution we encourage people to focus on what is said, not what they assume is the meaning behind the words.
 - What meaning does your character put on things? We all filter what happens to us through our experiences. For example, there are two teen girls. One finds out that the other went to a party with another group and didn't tell her. What might she accuse her of? *You don't want to be my friend. You're embarrassed by me.*
 - Look at your manuscript, what meaning does your character put onto what is said/done? What can they accuse the person of?
 - #4 Don't Hit Below the Belt:**
 - Why do we hurt the one's we love? Because we can. We know the hot buttons. We know what will rile them up. Fighting dirty always increases conflict.
 - What do your characters know about each other? How can that be dragged into the current fight?
 - Look at your manuscript and make notes where the characters can have an "oh no you didn't" moment.
 - #5 Creating Win-Win Situations:**
 - In real conflict resolution situations, we try to search out areas of common ground. This allows each party to gain something from the solution. In fiction, we want to keep our character's focus on not what they have in common, but what sets them apart. If your character perceives giving ground means they lose something, they will fight to win rather than compromise.
 - What does your character stand to lose if they lose this conflict? What is at risk?
 - When in doubt, go big. Drop a plane wing, add a zombie, have them realize that the two things they want most in the world can't both be had at the same time. Your characters may hate you for it, but readers will love it.
 - Can you set up two characters with opposing goals?
 - Do you have a character that wants two opposing things at the same time? I want the big promotion at work and I want to spend more time with my family.
 - Readers aren't interested in happy people leading content lives. Readers read for drama. To see characters in difficult situations who either triumph (or don't) over those conflicts.

PACING

Micropacing--how it flows line by line (each sentence)

When editing my work: If a sentence's pacing is slow, if it's flat and doesn't engage my senses, ill constructed and I stumble over the words, it doesn't flow well, if there's weak verbs, or it displays any characteristics that do not help to move the story along == To me, all these examples are passive (maybe lazy is a better describer for some, but that's just rude). Therefore, I criticize myself for writing "passive" sentences and challenge myself to be more imaginative, to write tight, **engaging "action" sentences == active pacing on a line-by-line basis.**

So, that's how my brain works. If a sentence doesn't move things along positively, it's passive. So, there are passive words and passive sentences. Passive info is in a different section

- **WORD CHOICE AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE.** The language itself is the subtlest means of pacing. Think concrete words (like prodigy and iceberg), active voice (with potent verbs like zigzag and plunder), and sensory information that's artfully embedded. If you write long, involved paragraphs, try breaking them up.
- Fragments, spare sentences, and short paragraphs quicken the pace. Crisp, punchy verbs, especially those with onomatopoeia (crash, lunge, sweep, scatter, ram, scavenge) also add to a quick pace. Invest in suggestive verbs to enliven descriptions, build action scenes and milk suspense.
- Harsh consonant sounds such as those in words like claws, crash, kill, quake, and nag can push the reader ahead. Words with unpleasant associations can also ratchet up the speed: hiss, grunt, slither, smarmy, venomous, slaver, and wince. Energetic, active language is especially appropriate for building action scenes and suspense, and for setting up drama and conflict.
- A fast pace means trimming every sentence of unnecessary words. Eliminate prepositional phrases where you don't need them: For example, "the walls of the cathedral" can be written as "the cathedral's walls." Finally, search your story for passive linking verbs and trade them in for active ones

Macropacing of the whole book – there's more on pacing in the subsequent section

Pacing is another way to **create tension** within a novel. However, there are very few tricks an author can use to temper a reader's pace. Length of words and complexity of sentences are two ways, another is where the author builds in "pauses." Sometimes this is accomplished by a chapter break. Maybe it has to do with that little bit of white space after a paragraph, or the bold typography of the capitalized "Chapter." Any which way, a pause, a break of pacing, may happen between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next.

It could be said that building tension is more important than sustaining tension. It is the notching up, the tightening of the belt, which keeps readers engaged. In order to continually build tension, the author must create the vicissitudes of tension – the ebb and flow. Chapter breaks are one way Dashner builds tension:

Another mechanical squeal screeched through the Maze, close now, followed by the surge of revved machinery. Thomas tried to imitate Alby's lifeless body, hanging limp in the vines.

And then something rounded the corner up ahead, and came toward them.

Something he'd seen before, but through the safety of thick glass.

Something unspeakable.

A Griever.

-Chapter break-

Thomas stared in horror at the monstrous thing making its way down the long corridor of the Maze.

It looked like an experiment gone terribly wrong – something from a nightmare. Part animal, part machine, the Griever rolled and clicked along the stone pathway. (pg 120-121)

Dashner builds tension by introducing the scariest threat in the book. A threat that neither the reader nor the protagonist/narrator have ever seen clearly. Then STOPS before we know what we are looking at. He doesn't write out a description of what the Griever looks like, instead he cuts to a chapter break, waylaying the moment, intensifying our fear. In an uncommon moment, the reader and the narrator/protagonist split. The protagonist/reader sees the Griever but in the narrator's shocked state, he cannot describe the creature. As our interest peaks Dashner cuts the reader off, dropping to a lower level of action and tension just to build it back up. Dashner is a literary tease. And we fall for him every time:

Seconds passed. Minutes. The ropy plant dug into Thomas's flesh — his chest felt numb. He wanted to scream at the monster below him: Kill me or back to your hiding hole!

Then, in a sudden burst of light and sound, the Griever came back to life, whirring and clicking.

And then it started to climb the wall.

-Chapter break-

The Griever's spikes tore into the stone, throwing shredded ivy and rock chips in every direction. Its arms shifted about like the legs of the beetle blade, some with sharp picks that drove into the stone of the wall for support. A bright light on the end of one arm pointed directly at Thomas, only this time, the beam didn't move away.

Thomas felt the last drop of hope drain from his body. (pg 119-121)

This chapter break is slightly different from the previous. It is a classic “cliff hanger” and another useful way to build and release tension.

TENSION ***NOTE: Tension helps Conflict and Disaster*

- **End chapters with a question.**

- Chapter endings are fantastic points for creating cliffhangers that compel your readers to turn the page. These moments don't necessarily have to be life-or-death. They can introduce a character to a moment of danger, uncertainty, confusion or excitement.
- For instance, say you plan to have a life-changing character suddenly enter your protagonist's life at some point in the story arc. Putting that moment at the end of a chapter will cause the reader to wonder what will happen next — and read on further to find out.
- Or, if your main character has a light bulb moment that leads to a turn of events, plan to position it at the end of a chapter.
- Or, simply leave a question hanging. Even better: don't immediately answer that question in the following chapter.

- **Use pauses**

- creates pauses, through chapter, section and paragraph breaks, which heighten readers' anticipation.

- **Control with claustrophobia**

- The small room where Bardem and Jones stand has several windows. Yet, the viewer still feels the room become smaller as the coil tightens.
- We can see the outside world behind Jones, and his separation from it has psychological benefits. If their conversation took place outside, it wouldn't be as frightening because Jones could flee in any direction. Yet inside he is alone with a predator.

- **Create a hint of escape.**

- The only crack in Bardem's icy composure is when he appears to choke on a nut. For a fleeting second, the viewer hopes that the victim will escape. Build too much hopelessness into a scene, and it becomes a spectacle instead of suspense.

- **1. SKIP the action**

- Some of the most effective writing about physical conflict (whether it involves some major battle, or a duel outside a saloon, or a scuffle in the playground after school) actually SKIPS the action scene entirely.
- With this approach, you give the reader the intimacies of what happens just before and just after. There's the suspense, the build-up, the fear, the hope, the nervous and crazed excitement. Then, of course, the aftermath: the elation or depression, the denial, relief, shock, grief, or celebration — or some combination of them all — that would follow such a heightened moment. Only in this case, you're heightening through omission.
- When you skip the action scene, you get to retell it in a more complex way later on. You can come to the events after-the-fact with all the emotional, ideological, or philosophical implications clinging to the present like barnacles.

- **2. Stick to JUST the action**

- If Character X is in the middle of a fight to the death, that scene should probably have a flurry of fists, bayonets, arms, pounding hearts, choked breath, spilt blood, wide eyes, the feeling of a rock slamming into the back of the head, etc. He's not going to be reminiscing in vivid detail about times gone by ... or questioning the ramifications of an oath he swore... or doing much else, besides trying to win the fight!

- **3. Show us what's at stake**

- It's often more important to know WHY someone is fighting than to know how/when/where. If we feel connected to a character and know what they stand to gain or lose, even an average description of an action scene can take on added dimensions.
- This is particularly true in cases where the reader already knows the outcome. Many fiction stories these days begin at the ending, jump back in time, and then work their way towards the conclusion. If the end is certain, then the meat of the story is in WHY that ending is important.
- In the case of The Killer Angels, the outcome was set in stone. Names, dates, places. You know how it's going to end. Hell, I'd even been to Gettysburg and toured the battlefields. I knew which side “won,” which generals made strategic blunders, which regiments succeeded at which engagements. But getting a glimpse inside their motivations, their regrets, and what they'd sacrificed up until that point — it gave some give to the givenness of history.

- As readers, we have to feel the characters' fear and always smell a hint of their victory, even if we know those hopes are futile.

- **When emotions escalate in a story, it means tension.**

- The character has more to lose and readers are glued to the page, frantic to find out what will happen. They are invested, they care, and more than anything else, they want things to turn out well for the hero.
- Now, a possible character situation to illustrate how emotions can fluctuate (I'll name the emotions just to make them easier to spot!):
 - Sixteen-year-old Josh is sitting down to write his final exam in Science. The test begins and he opens the booklet. He blinks, pulls back, then brings his nose right up to the paper, baffled. All he sees are physics questions, yet his friend Erik said the teacher told the class to concentrate on studying notes from their chemistry unit.
 - Then it dawns on him. Maybe Erik didn't mention that he should study physics too because it's a small part of the test, just the first question or so. After all, Erik knew Josh really needed to kill this exam or he might fail the class. Hope emerges and he flips a page. Then another.
 - Four pages later, he's still seeing physics questions. Uncertainty lays heavy in his gut, tangoing ominously with the burrito he ate for lunch. Finally on the last page, a single chemistry question appears. *Now what?* he thinks, completely overwhelmed.
 - He glances over at the next row, where Erik is pounding on the keys of his calculator and then scribbling answers on the page. This surprises Josh, because if they both studied the wrong things, shouldn't Erik be upset too?
 - His friend looks up and catches Josh's gaze. Then he smiles and mouths, *Payback*.

- That smile is a punch to the gut. Josh remembers how days earlier, he left the class to go to the washroom, and when he returned, Erik was all too quick to fill him in on what the teacher had said about the exam. The same Erik who caught Josh making out with his ex-girlfriend the week before.
- Realization dawns, and Josh's face heats up in a flash of anger. He's been duped! Well okay, maybe he had it coming, but still. Now he turns back to his exam and all he can think is, *I am so screwed*.

- A small, simple scene, but look at the range of emotions: Josh is *confused* by the test, then *worried*. But then he begins to *hope*, and the reader thinks it all might turn out. That hope is quickly dashed and soon Josh feels *overwhelmed*. Then comes *surprise* at Erik's lack of worry, then *shock* of being duped. This escalates to *anger*. Finally we have *resignation* over his situation and how his own actions helped cause it.
- The reader's emotions are pulled up, then down, then up. No emotion overstays its welcome, we avoid melodrama and the emotions escalate right through to the end of the scene. **A range of emotions allows the reader to experience more, and keep things interesting.**
- **Use micro-tension**
 - The **moment-by-moment tension** that keeps readers in doubt about what will happen in the next minute. Micro-tension comes from the 'emotional friction' **between characters** as they try to defeat each other. **The characters aren't necessarily enemies, though.** There should be tension between any two characters, whether they are opponents, servants, friends, allies or lovers. To see this done brilliantly, watch any episode of Seinfeld. There should also be tension within the character due to inner conflicts.
 - In dialogue, **show: the hero's doubt or disbelief** about what the other character is saying; the **disagreement about goals** or plans; the disdain, dislike, contempt or concealed hatred; the **power struggles**, and **ego and personality clashes**. Bring out **inner conflicts** in what each character says and does;
 - Often action can be lacking in tension because we've seen it a thousand times before – there are only so many ways two people can have a sword fight. **To make action suspenseful, get inside the head of the hero to show his conflicting feelings and emotions during the struggle.** Then, break the action cliché by giving subtle visual details that enable your readers to picture, clearly and vividly, this unique and dramatic scene;
 - Use similar techniques when writing sex or violence. Show the key moments with a handful of striking visual images. Bring out the hero's conflicting feelings and emotions at each moment, focusing on subtle emotions rather than the obvious ones such as (in sex scenes) passion, lust or tenderness;
 - **When the character is thinking or emoting, create suspense by (a) cutting restated thoughts, feelings and emotions and (b) making thoughts and emotions realistic.** For instance, the hero may be outwardly happy, but is concealing or fighting some *niggling worry*. Or struggling with an inner conflict (justice versus vengeance, duty to a bad leader vs personal honour);
 - In descriptive passages and quiet moments, **show little details that make the setting vividly real and establish the mood of the place.** Describe the hero's conflicting feelings and emotions, focusing on subtle emotions rather than obvious ones.

SUSPENSE:

- **Build suspense by:**
 - **Foreshadowing the coming event to raise worrying questions and create reader anticipation.** This can be done via characters thinking about or debating the possibility (eg of war), and making plans and preparations for the worst, as well as by omens, foretellings, signs and symbols. Repeat this worrying sign several times, then make sure it's paid off at the climax;
 - Writing a small scene or moment which **hints at the coming critical scene** (a burning house hints at the violence and ruin of war); a shouting match foreshadows the murder to come;
 - Then a reversal – a moment that's the opposite of the coming critical scene. Eg, in a trial, the overconfident defence lawyer has a lavish lunch with friends before returning to hear a shattering guilty verdict; immediately before the joyous wedding, the couple have a furious argument; the soldier relaxes with his family before going to bloody war. This contrast makes the critical scene far more powerful;
 - Show the setting where the climax will take place before the climax begins, so you don't have to stall the story with description at the climax (Klems);
 - In the critical scene, use all the dramatic techniques at your disposal to raise the scene to a higher peak of suspense than anything that has gone before:
 - Heighten the sense of menace in everyday objects by focusing on sensory detail (Klems)
 - **Isolate your hero, rob him of his weapons**, his allies and his means of escape, or **injure him**;
 - Insert one or two pauses – **eg the cry of a night-bird, or something that seems menacing turns out to be everyday – that allow the reader to relax momentarily.** This makes the real confrontation much more powerful, when it finally comes;
 - **Make the stakes more personal:** it's not just his country that's in mortal danger – it's his little sister.
 - **Run the peak of the scene in slow motion to prolong the hero's agony.** From her viewpoint, show every step of the killer's approach as he breaks in and forces his way down to the cellar where she's hiding. Show it through all her senses. You can slow it down further by using long, complex sentences, camera close-ups, quietness, stillness and darkness;

- Alternatively, or additionally, **get inside your hero's head** as she waits to show her heightened emotions in this desperate moment: make her hyper-aware; show how she experiences the scene in detail – the sweat running down her face, the ticking clock, the shake in her hand, the chills – and expose her terror as she anticipates what the killer is going to do to her;
- **Afterwards, make sure the hero emotes about all that has happened**, reviews how the event has made his problems worse, and reformulates his plans.

Disaster (Includes Jim Butcher's notes)

- **DISASTER/Set Back:** or setback for the protagonist as a result of the conflict. **Each set back** must be progressively worse than the last throughout Act 2's struggle. A Disaster is a failure to let your POV character reach his Goal. Don't give him the Goal! Winning is boring! Below are Jim Butcher's "Answer" sections
 - There are a number of ways you can end a scene--or phrased another way, there are a number of ANSWERS to the SCENE QUESTION. Let's go over them, beginning with the least desirable, from the standpoint of a writer trying to keep a reader glued to the story:
 - **Scene Endings/Scene Answer to goal:**
 1. **ANSWER 2: YES . . . BUT.** Your hero accomplishes his scene goal all right--but **there's a complication of some kind**, and one that might have **consequences down the line**. Generally, the more dire and/or disastrous the potential consequence, the better.
 - (*"Trapped in the pit of starving, diseased wolverines, our hero struggles to get free! He leaps up to climb to safety, the wolverines raging and foaming beneath him--but just as he reaches the edge of the pit, and freedom, he is savagely bitten on the leg! He is free! But it is only a matter of time before Mad Wolverine Syndrome reduces him to a snarling, foaming monster!" See there? Way more interesting than getting away without a mark to show for it.*)
 2. **ANSWER 3: NO!** Another solid scene resolution, from the writing standpoint. The hero sets out to attain his goal, but is **flatly denied**. Maybe he gets shut down by the antagonist. Maybe he makes a mistake and blows it completely. Either way, he gives it his best shot and is slapped down. Now he'll **have to back off, re-evaluate the situation, and try something else**. Use this scene answer with some caution, because it can have the effect of bringing your story to a halt. Too many of them can become frustrating for the reader, and can make your character look foolish and/or impotent, thus reducing reader empathy and the tension of your overall story.
 - (*"Trapped in the pit of starving, diseased wolverines, our hero struggles to get free! He leaps up to climb to safety, but the crumbling edge of the pit gives way, dropping him back down among the foaming monsters! He reaches for his communicator and shouts, "Red! I may have a problem here!" See? This can be a good way of getting other characters involved, dropping in some more character interaction, what have you--but you're still stuck in the pit of wolverines. Unless you are writing "Wolverine Pits of Madison County" or something, you don't want to stay stuck in the wolverine pit forever, so use your NO answers carefully.*)
 3. **ANSWER 4: NO! AND FURTHERMORE!** My personal favorite scene answer. **Not only does your hero NOT attain his goal, but he manages to make matters even WORSE along the way**. It's best if the worsening of the situation is your protagonist's fault, because that's just FUN, but it doesn't necessarily have to be.
 - THIS answer is really the one that gives you the most interesting scenes, provides the meat for the most interesting and endearing sequels, and is **generally the Big Gun you pull out when your plot is slowing down**. Warning: it does force you, as the writer, to get a little creative, because it multiplies the problems your hero has to solve. But hey. If you weren't at least a little creative, you wouldn't be here.
 - (*"Trapped in the pit of starving, diseased wolverines, our hero struggles to get free! He leaps up to climb to safety, seizing onto the trailing end of a vine! But the vine gives way, sending our hero sprawling back down among the slaving beasts! He stares at them in horror, and only THEN realizes that the "vine" he seized was no such thing! He is now holding the tail of a thirty-foot long Peruvian Acid Cobra--and the incredibly deadly serpent is NOT happy to have been suddenly seized in the middle of its siesta. It opens its deadly jaws and lunges for our hero's throat!" Mmmmm. Now that's good fallout.*)
 - Granted, these examples are pulp fictiony, but they're meant to serve as broad illustrations. In one way or another, every scene in every story where a character is pursuing a goal will fall into one of those four outcomes.

Questions to ask yourself when writing Scenes/Sequels:

1. DID YOU REMEMBER: Conflict is a series of obstacles your Point of View (POV) character faces on the way to reaching her Goal. Conflict produces tension that makes the story begin. Tension is created by opposition between the character or characters and internal or external forces or conditions. By balancing the opposing forces of the conflict, you keep readers glued to the pages wondering how the story will end.
 - 1.1. Possible Conflicts Include: The protagonist against another individual / nature / technology / society / God/ himself or herself

- 1.2. **Internal conflicts:** Think of five different things that stand in the way of her getting what she wants (one for each desire.)
EX: insecurity, denial, stubbornness, clumsiness, awkwardness, refusal to believe, abandonment, mistrust, emotional deprivation, dependence, social exclusion, or whatever vulnerability you create. **What may she want/her goal:** *She might be after a physical object, or pursuing love or knowledge, or trying to save a kingdom. She might simply want to stay alive and sane. Her obstacle could be real or imagined: a person or a thing, the weather...anything.*
- 1.3. **Interpersonal conflicts:** Think of five people who want your CHAR to NOT get what she wants, what will each of them do to stand in your char's way. EX: They may cry, lie, faint, fake being sick, hide weapons, etc.
- 1.4. **External conflicts:** Drop something physically/tangibly BIG on your CHAR. Hurt her. Do something your CHAR can't ignore — and that no one else with any sense can either. What's her reaction & decision to act or not act? Who's gonna help her/oppose her? Does she have to overcome fears/claustraphobia/insecurities/inability to accept help?
 - 1.4.1. EX: An earthquake, a tornado, a torch-carrying mob from Cinnamon town, food-shortages, plague, drought, a million dollars missing from the Library Fund tip jar. Something powerful/big. Aliens from Bulgey eyed aliens might drop in on Boringville for a smash-n-grab and little snack of brains. Terrorists/Malice might kidnap Krista's best friend and hold him hostage. A comet might be headed right for the Dragon abode or Boringville. Parents get audited for taxes. Critter thought distinct shows up at the building site.
 - 1.4.2. The *Enterprise* encounters the slime monster. It attacks the ship. **(Crisis!)** Kirk kills it by freezing it. **(Resolution)**
 - 1.4.3. The *Enterprise* encounters the ice beast. It attacks a peaceful planet. **(Crisis!)** Kirk kills it by melting it. **(Resolution)**
 - 1.4.4. The *Enterprise* encounters the crystal demon. It attacks a strategic Federation base. The only way to stop it is to shatter it with sound waves — but doing so will deafen an entire city of the galaxy's finest musicians. Doing nothing would mean that the Romulans *might* occupy the planet, shatter the demon and deafen the city anyway. Kirk has to **decide** what to do. **(Conflict!!)**
2. **Did I Heighten and prolong conflict?** Any conflict can be prolonged, and the major conflicts *should* be prolonged to rack up the tension — **if you resolve a conflict too quickly, suspense disappears.**
3. **Suspense** comes from your readers' anticipation of what's going to happen next. Therefore, **never tell them anything in advance** when, by withholding it, you can increase suspense.
4. **Am I in Chars head** = Don't tell feelings or explain actions, SHOW!. Rewrite sentences or paragraphs using strong verbs without telling feelings or explaining actions.
5. **How can you make it even harder for the POVC to achieve her goals?** Tell her 'NO!' you can't have your goal. Use their internal issues/conflicts against them.
 - 5.1. A story is *feelings*. The more that's at stake for your character, the more *emotions* he *feels* about events and situations=more the reader cares about. **Internal and external conflict and character motivation must be in place to create tension.**
6. **Did I make the situation so bad that my character totally flips cookies/freaks out/hyperventilates/gets pissed off?**
 - 6.1. Take the VERY worst thing that can happen a step further. For emotional intensity, **conflict should be directly related to the character's internal goals and to his backstory.** Don't rely on "incidents"—events that could happen to anyone and don't have emotional importance to this particular character—to carry scenes or conflict.
7. Does my conflict scene **happen at the worst time?** Is there a more uncomfortable place? EX: *Imagine a man telling his fiancé he doesn't think he can go through with the wedding. Now imagine him telling her in the back of the church just before the wedding, or worse yet, right after the ceremony, or as the flight takes off for their honeymoon.*
8. **Is there another character you can add who would make the situation worse?** EX: 2 teen girls: 1 finds out the other went to a party with another group & didn't tell her. What might she accuse her of? *You don't want to be my friend. You're embarrassed by me.*
9. **How does what happened in the scene make the POVCs situation and the overall situation worse?**
10. **Isolate your hero, rob him of powers/his weapons, his allies and his means of escape, or injure him;**
11. **How does that decision go against her needs, desires, or moral principles?**
12. **What questions does this scene raise that force the reader to continue reading?**
13. How can you twist the setting to make it unexpected?
14. Did I **end the chapter with a question?** Cliffhangers compel your readers to turn the page. EX: introduce a life-changing char, new light bulb moment that leads to a turn of events, leave a question hanging, don't immediately answer a question in the following Chap. Note: These moments don't necessarily have to be life-or-death. They can introduce a character to a moment of danger, uncertainty, confusion or excitement.
15. Heighten the sense of menace in everyday objects by focusing on sensory detail (Klems)
16. What **impossible decision** does the POVC have to make after this scene?
17. When in doubt, **go big. Drop a plane wing, add a zombie, have them realize that the two things they want most in the world can't both be had at the same time.** Your characters may hate you for it, but readers will love it.
18. How can you take each of your **goals and satisfy them in a way that pits the characters against each other** or underscores the conflict between the POVC's internal and external goals?
19. What does your character stand to lose if they lose this conflict? What is at risk?

20. When the story begins, what **morally significant action** has your protagonist taken **towards that goal**? (Your protagonist should already have made a conscious choice, good or bad, that drives the rest of the story.)
21. What **unexpected consequences** — directly related to the protagonist's goal-oriented actions — **ramp up the emotional energy** of the story? (Will the unexpected consequences force your protagonist to make yet another choice, leading to still more consequences?)
22. What **morally significant choice** does your protagonist make at the climax of the story? (Your reader should care about the protagonist's decision. Ideally, the reader shouldn't see it coming.)

<http://www.ian-irvine.com/on-writing/60-ways-to-create-conflict/> <http://www.ian-irvine.com/on-writing/41-ways-to-create-and-heighten-suspense/>

<http://hollylisle.com/creating-conflict-or-the-joys-of-boiling-oil/>

16. More on Pacing

What is Pacing in Fiction?

Pacing is a tool that controls the speed and rhythm at which a story is told and the readers are pulled through the events. It refers to how fast or slow events in a piece unfold and how much time elapses in a scene or story. Pacing can also be used to show characters aging and the effects of time on story events.

Pacing differs with the specific needs of a story. A far-reaching epic will often be told at a leisurely pace, though it will speed up from time to time during the most intense events. A short story or adventure novel might quickly jump into action and deliver drama.

Pacing is part structural choices and part word choices, and uses a variety of devices to control how fast the story unfolds. When driving a manual transmission car, you choose the most effective gear needed for driving uphill, maneuvering city streets, or cruising down a freeway. Similarly, when pacing your story, you need to choose the devices that move each scene along at the right speed.

Pacing, as it applies to fiction, could be described as the manipulation of time. Though pacing is often overlooked and misunderstood by beginning writers, it is one of the key craft elements a writer must master to produce good fiction.

The elements of time delineated in your story or screenplay include the time of day or period; scene versus summary; flashback; and foreshadowing.

Elements of time raise the following questions:

- 1) When is the story being told as compared to when the events of the story took place?
- 2) Is there a distance in terms of time?
- 3) Does the story begin with the birth of the protagonist and end with the death? or Is the time more limited?
- 4) What narrative strategies should you use to convey the sense of time passing or the distance of the narration?

Scene

Scene is necessary to all fiction. You can't have a story without it. In order to have a crisis moment, for example, it has to be in a moment in time and, therefore, it cannot be summarized. A summary covers a longer period of time in a shorter passage. A scene covers a short period of time in a longer passage. What could take only a few seconds in real time might be covered in paragraphs, even pages, depending upon the writer and the event.

On the whole, one mistake you need to avoid is summarizing events. Instead, realize them in the moment. Sometimes, when you are writing a first draft, you might be tempted to put the moment into summary, but the scene is how you dramatize the action. The question is to try to balance the scenes and use the exposition gracefully. Most short stories have at least three scenes. A 'short' might only have one scene. A chapter could have three or four scenes, although it could just as easily have one.

The scene should probably have movement. Just as in a story you have conflict, crisis and resolution, a scene might have the same sort of shape. You should use scenes in one specific moment in time to show important behavior in your characters. Stretches of time or activities in the story that are secondary to the story's development should be expressed through a 'narrative bridge.' You use summary in the narrative. Now, that doesn't have to mean boring.

For example, 'The Things They Carried,' an excellent short story by the writer Tim O'Brien, goes back and forth between summary and scene.

Here's an example of summary that is hardly dull:

'After the chopper took Lavender away, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross led his men into the village of Than Khe. They burned everything. They shot chickens and dogs, they trashed the village well, they called in artillery and watched the wreckage, then they marched for several hours through the hot afternoon and then, at dusk, while Kiowa explained how Lavender died, Lieutenant Cross found himself trembling.'

Summarize it

Dialogue that is secondary can similarly be summarized by indirect discourse. So, if you find dialogue that expresses information that is fairly routine or not too interesting, you should summarize it. For example:

'Hi, John. How's it going? You feeling better?' 'I'm OK, thanks a lot,' said Mary.'

Instead, just say,

'They exchanged greetings, and Mary confessed she felt OK.'

Arrange your pages on a large table and look at them like an artist would: How many scenes do you have? Are there too few or too many? Do there seem to be any missing scenes? What about if you rearranged the sequence of events? Could you use the beginning of the ending scene to frame the story? Take the sheets of paper, and 'cut and paste' the sections that need moving

If there is a scene that you are having trouble with, especially one that provides a turning point in the story, focus in on that scene. Could it use action, not necessarily physical action, but movement, change? Try to expand the scene into three to five pages to give you a greater opportunity to explore the interpersonal dynamics. Think about dramatizing how the balance of power in the scene changes.

Setting

Setting incorporates place, but you also have to consider the time of the year, the time of day and how you reveal this information without being too obvious. This information is not always essential - - it depends upon the story in question. Basically, it is similar to an 'establishing shot' in a film. Just remember to be consistent and to make the timing logical. It might be boring to mention 'in the evening,' but you could use other words to show the time of day. However, don't skip the time element altogether since it adds veracity to the lives you are portraying. If a family is having breakfast, then we know the time of day. If a character is wearing mittens, this establishes the time of year. Both flashback and foreshadowing are techniques that play with narrative time. It's possible they may be used to enrich the narrative, and you might add them during revision since they provide emphasis and balance.

Flashback

A flashback is a narrative passage that takes us to the past of when the story is set. The flashback reveals something about the character that we didn't know before that explains things by showing not telling. You should use it when the character is going into a situation that varies from the behavior we have come to expect from him or her. However, you need to be sure that the flashback you have selected tells us something relevant to the story. There's nothing worse than slowing down the action with a flashback that doesn't contribute to the story.

Instead of flashback, you might use dialogue, narration or some detail to give the required information. Also, remember the power of inference. There may be more going on in the background of a character than you reveal in the actual prose. Be economical with your words. Imply what you can about the character or situation without being obvious. Flashback reveals information at the right time, but it may not be part of the central action. Flashback is an effective technique to show the reader more about character and theme.

You might use a flashback if, in the present of the story, the character is unsympathetic and you want to provide another viewpoint. For example, think of Scrooge in 'A Christmas Carol,' where we get the examples demonstrated by the appearance of the Ghost of Christmas Past. We see Scrooge as a boy in flashback and feel sorry for him. The same thing happens with the character Anders in the wonderfully constructed story, 'Bullet in the Brain,' by Tobias Wolff. Anders is portrayed as especially unsympathetic. The story is told entirely in the present tense, except for a long flashback in expository prose that enumerates all the events in Anders' life that flashed through his brain as a bullet went through his head during a bank robbery. The passage begins by noting what Anders did NOT remember during this scene.

'He did not remember his first lover, Sherry, or what he had most madly loved about her, before it came to irritate him—her unembarrassed carnality, and especially the cordial way she had with his unit, which she

called Mr. Mole, as in 'Uh-oh, looks like Mr. Mole wants to play,' and 'Let's hide Mr. Mole!' Anders did not remember his wife, whom he had also loved, before she exhausted him with her predictability, or his daughter, now a sullen professor of economics at Dartmouth.'

And it goes on for paragraphs. This information is expository, rather than in a scene, but it flashes back to Anders' past.

Some writers rely on flashback as a way of avoiding the central conflict of the story. Sometimes, it's easier for the writer to avoid the conflict altogether, since conflict produces anxiety -- fiction is trouble, after all, and we want to produce some tension and anxiety. You, too, may be able to re-order time and use flashback in your story, though you often have to wait until after you have a first draft. Sometimes an entire tale can be told in flashback with a frame (for example, think of the movie 'Sunset Boulevard,' and its dead narrator), or 'Heart of Darkness,' also a frame story (actually a novella). Sometimes the mechanics of the flashback technique can cause you to use cumbersome verb constructions. Keep this simple. If you are writing the story in the past tense, you can begin the flashback in past perfect. You can use 'had' plus the verb a couple of times. Then you can switch to the simple past.

Foreshadowing

What is foreshadowing? It is not conflict, but the promise of conflict. One example would be the opening of Truman Capote's 'Children on Their Birthdays': 'Yesterday afternoon the six o'clock bus ran over Miss Bobbit.'

Or the opening of Richard Yates' novel, 'The Easter Parade': 'Neither of the Grimes sisters would have a happy life, and looking back, it always seemed that the trouble began with their parents' divorce.'

Both of these openings promise that things go from bad to worse. Or how about,

'The boy woke up, got dressed and slung a rifle over his shoulder as he ran out to the school bus.' We know that something's going to happen with the rifle, which raises a story question. If the story questions are strong, then your reader will stay interested in the narrative.

Foreshadowing can be used to get the reader through a dull section of a narrative. For example, you could create suspense by something that WILL happen: 'Susan had no idea when she paid her \$5 for the afternoon matinee that she had just made one of the biggest mistakes of her life. She would've been better off staying home that day.' We don't know what calamity is about to befall Susan, but we get the feeling she made a huge miscalculation, and we look forward to knowing what it was, the worse the better really, in terms of entertainment value.

Of course, you need to use this technique judiciously. You can employ the minor characters to foreshadow the actions of the major characters, for example. If you make a promise by foreshadowing, then make sure to fulfill the promise; otherwise, the reader will feel gypped.

With foreshadowing, it might be better to err on the obvious side because if your attempts are too subtle, there will be no shadows to see.

Broken Dialogue (silence, not paying attention, nonverbal answer, change the subject)

In real life, people don't always respond directly or appropriately to each other in conversation. Good dialogue can work the same way. For example, you could ask a question and the **other person wouldn't be paying attention:**

"Don't you feel anything for me?" Sue moaned.

Cal jumped up from the couch and pointed at the TV screen. "Look at that! Did you see that! That was a foul! You stupid ref!"

Or the other person deliberately **chooses not to respond (aka Silence):**

"Don't you feel anything for me?" Sue moaned.

Cal just stared at the TV.

Or the other person **responds in a nonverbal fashion:**

"Don't you feel anything for me?" Sue moaned.

Cal shrugged. He leaned the rake against the fence and turned toward the house.

Or the other person **changes the subject**:

"Don't you feel anything for me?" Sue moaned.

Cal leaned the rake against the fence and turned toward the house. "What's for supper?"

Each of these responses tells us as much as an entire paragraph of exposition about Cal's thoughts.

Nonverbal communication can often carry an entire scene:

As Jill pushed the vacuum cleaner back and forth across the den floor, she grew redder and redder. She tried glaring at Bill, where he sat on his fat behind, watching the football game, but he didn't even notice her. Not until she got between him and the TV.

Then he gave her a look that would have peeled paint off a door. If their door had any paint left to peel. That was another job he'd been putting off.

Jill put her hands on her hips and glared back.

Bill leaned to one side, then the other, trying to see around her.

Finally, she simply handed him the vacuum cleaner hose and stalked out of the room.

You've got to admit, there was some kind of a dialogue going on there!

Let's add some **nonverbal communication** to our scene with Mrs. Williams and Mr. Green:

Mrs. Williams pushed her way past the screen door and onto her porch. She set down her empty canvas shopping bag, fished her keys from her pocket, and locked the door. Halfway down the path to her gate, she spied her neighbor, Mr. Green, leaning against the fence. She stopped and called out to him, "Good day, Mr. Green."

"Good day."

"Do you think it will rain?"

"Probably not. Though it might tomorrow."

"We could sure use some rain."

"Yes. It's been pretty dry."

"My bean plants are all wilting."

"You should water them."

"I know, but I keep forgetting."

"Write yourself a note and fasten it to your door. That's what I do. Then, every time I go out, it reminds me."

"That's a good idea. I'll try that."

Mr. Green nodded, as if agreeing with himself. He seemed to have something more on his mind, so she waited.

"Are you still going to town?"

"Yes, right now. Do you need a ride?"

"Yes, please."

Mr. Green's nod is all it takes to tell Mrs. Williams that he has something more to say.

Interior Monologue

A great way to help your readers get close to your characters is to let them know what they're thinking. This doesn't mean that you have to use the omniscient viewpoint. Instead, you can use a form of dialogue known as *interior monologue*. This is where a character has a conversation inside her head. And as you'll recall from our lesson on scene and sequel, most of the thinking takes place in the sequels.

When writing in first person, there's often a fine line between the character reflecting on or describing what she thought at the time and the character thinking the actual thoughts. It's really quite easy to make the transition from description to thoughts themselves, as in this passage where Huck Finn struggles with his decision to do the "right" thing and turn the slave Jim over to the authorities:

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking—thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind . . . and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

"All right, then, I'll go to hell"—and tore it up.

The final line also occurs inside Huck's head, but author Mark Twain put it in quotes to draw attention to it. In fact, it represents the turning point in the story.

Now let's add some interior monologue to our earlier example with Mrs. Williams and Mr. Green:

Mrs. Williams pushed her way past the screen door and onto her porch. She set down her empty canvas shopping bag, fished her keys from her pocket, and locked the door. Halfway down the path to her gate, she spied her neighbor, Mr. Green, leaning against the fence.

What's that fool doing out here on such a hot day? she wondered.

She stopped and called out to him, "Good day, Mr. Green."

"Good day."

"Do you think it will rain?"

"Probably not. Though it might tomorrow."

He was never very talkative, this Mr. Green. In fact, she couldn't remember him ever completing a sentence. With proper grammar, anyway.

"We could sure use some rain."

"Yes. It's been pretty dry."

"My bean plants are all wilting."

"You should water them."

"I know, but I keep forgetting."

"Write yourself a note and fasten it to your door. That's what I do. Then, every time I go out, it reminds me"

"That's a good idea. I'll try that." And it was a pretty good idea, she had to admit.

Mr. Green nodded, as if agreeing with himself. He seemed to have something more on his mind, so she waited.

"Are you still going to town?"

"Yes, right now. Do you need a ride?"

"Yes, please."

The interior monologue we've added clearly establishes Mrs. Williams as the viewpoint character. We feel we know her better as a character.

Another way to reveal character and distinguish the actors in your story from each other is through *how* you have them speak. Let's look at that next.

17. Beats (I think of them as non-verbal body language)

Beats

A *beat* is a small piece of stage action—*puffing on a cigarette, sniffing, shifting one's gaze*—**that transfers the focus from one person to another**. It's important to use beats before the character's dialogue and to place the dialogue in the same paragraph as the beat.

Here are Mrs. Williams and Mr. Green, *with beats added to their exchange*:

Mrs. Williams pushed her way past the screen door and onto her porch. She set down her empty canvas shopping bag, fished her keys from her pocket, and locked the door. Halfway down the path to her gate, she spied her neighbor, Mr. Green, leaning against the fence.

What's that fool doing out here on such a hot day? She wondered.

She stopped and *called out to him*, "Good day, Mr. Green."

"G'day."

Mrs. Williams looked at the cloudless sky and then down at her parched grass. "Do you think it will rain?"

"Nope. Might tomorrow, though."

He was never very talkative, this Mr. Green. In fact, she couldn't remember him ever completing a sentence. With proper grammar, anyway.

"We could sure use some rain," she said.

He raised his elbows from where they rested on the fence rail, examined his sleeves, and brushed them off as he seemed to consider this. "Yep," he said at last. "Been pretty dry."

Mrs. Williams *sighed*. "My bean plants are all wilting."

He *shrugged*. "You should water 'em."

"I know, but I keep forgetting."

"Write yourself a note," he said, "and put it on the door. That's what I do."

"That's a good idea. I'll try that." And it was a pretty good idea, she had to admit.

Mr. Green **nodded**, as if agreeing with himself. He seemed to have something more on his mind, so she waited.

At last he said, "You still goin' to town?"

Mrs. Williams **smiled**. "Yes, right now. Do you need a ride?"

"Yep."

Two's Company, Three's Confusing

The best policy for scenes with dialogue is to keep the number of characters present **to just a few**. You'll need hardly any attributions at all when you have only two characters; just an occasional beat is enough to remind us who's speaking. But the more characters you add, the more confusing it gets, even with attributions.

Even masters struggle to keep things straight, as in this excerpt from *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (although I suspect she wanted this scene of a mixed-up séance to be confusing):

"We must join hands," the Count said to Tossie, taking her hand in his. "Like this . . ."

"Yes, yes, we must all join hands," Mrs. Mering said. "Why, Madame Iritosky!"

Madame Iritosky was standing in the doorway, draped in a flowing purple robe with wide sleeves. "I have been summoned by the spirits to serve as your guide this evening in the parting of the veil." She touched the back of her hand to her forehead. "It is my duty, no matter what the cost to me."

"How wonderful!" Mrs. Mering said. "Do come sit down. Baine, pull up a chair for Madame Iritosky."

"No, no," Madame Iritosky said, indicating Professor Peddick's chair. "It is here that the teleplasmic vibrations converge." Professor Peddick obligingly changed chairs.

Well that's confusing! But maybe that was Connie Willis' intent. In general, though, it's best to limit the number of characters in dialogue scenes wherever possible.

18. When to use New Paragraph

Often writer's craft a new paragraph for any of the following:

- 1 When a different character speaks
- 2 Shift in time
- 3 Shift in place
- 4 Change of action
- 5 New scene
- 6 Writing a summary

19. Dialogue

Dialogue as Action

Things should never come to a dead stop when your characters start talking. Remember, **dialogue must either move the plot forward, help your readers know your characters better, or both**. In our lesson on scene and sequel, we learned that the scenes advance the plot. This is often done using exposition, but it can be even more effective—and interesting—to use dialogue. Let's see how our characters can keep the action moving through the words they speak.

"What are you doing?" she said. "You're driving like a crazy person!"

"You said you didn't want to be late. I'm hurrying."

"I didn't want to be dead, either!"

We could have written several paragraphs describing his driving, but this exchange sums it up nicely. It's as if we're in the car with them and can feel its speed, even though neither the car nor the speed are mentioned.

Notice how tempting it is to substitute *screamed* for *said* in that first line. But it's unnecessary. We can tell she's screaming. (We'll explore this in depth a little later in this lesson.)

Dialogue as Setting

You **can also use dialogue in place of description**:

When they pulled up in front of the house, Jane studied it for a moment and then shuddered. "What a creepy place," she said. "I don't like the looks of those vines, crawling all over the walls."

There's no need to describe the house now. Jane did the work for us. **Look how much more effective it was to describe the setting in the dialogue than in conventional exposition:**

They pulled up in front of the house. There were vines crawling all over the walls. Jane didn't like the creepy way it looked.

How **bland that setting seems** compared to the previous passage!

Dialogue and Pacing

Dialogue is also interesting to read. It breaks up long passages of exposition. So don't avoid it just because it's harder to write. In particular, **don't summarize dialogue**. That's a sure way to suck the drama out of it:

When she told John the car had been wrecked, his first reaction was to ask her if she had been hurt.

This all happens in one uninteresting sentence. There's no sense of it even being a scene—it's just a recitation of facts.

Compare that uninspired passage with this:

"I'm sorry, John," June said. "I totaled your beautiful new car."

"Oh my gosh!" John said. He reached out to touch her shoulder. "Are you all right?"

Now we're in the room with them as the exchange occurs, and we have time to absorb the facts and begin to get to know the characters.

20. Semi-Colon versus Comma

Semicolon (;)

1) Use a semicolon to separate 2 independent clauses in a sentence, closely related, with no coordinating conjunction.

Example: The students reviewed for the exam; the teacher corrected the papers.

Example: The candidates spoke to the crowds during Election Day; each candidate spoke passionately about the fate of the country.

2) Use a semicolon to separate items in a series where the series themselves contain commas.

Example: We visited our relatives in Albany, NY; Philadelphia, PA; and Washington, D.C.

Comma (,)

1) Use a comma to separate 2 independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction such as 'and', 'but' and 'or'. The key here is to have 2 **subject verb** pairs.

Example: The **students reviewed** for the exam, and the **teacher corrected** the term papers.

In this example we have 2 subject verb pairs: "students reviewed" and "teacher corrected."

Example: The **teacher corrected** the papers and **entered** the grades in the grade book.

In this example we use the coordinating conjunction "and" but have 1 subject and 2 verbs: "teacher corrected, entered"; therefore, no comma is used.

2) Use a comma to separate items in a series to avoid ambiguous meaning.

Example: Uncle **willed** me his **property, houses, and warehouses**.

In this example, we mean that uncle willed me 3 items--his houses, warehouses, and property.

Example: Uncle **willed** me his **property**, **houses** and **warehouses**.

In this example, we mean that uncle willed me 2 items--all his property, which consisted of houses and warehouses.

3) Use a comma with introductory elements such as subordinating clauses that come at the beginning of the sentence.

Example: Because the **river** had **flooded**, the **school** **closed** for the week.

The introductory element, or subordinating clause is "because the river had flooded." It is introduced with the subordinating conjunction "because."

Example: The **school** **closed** for the week because the **river** had **flooded**.

In this example the subordinating clause is at the end of the sentence so we do not use a comma.

21. Things to do now that you 'think' you're done 😊 (ha ha)

Before anyone sees your manuscript, you must not overlook a very important step, and that's **self-editing**. If you want to catch the interest of a publisher, your work should be as polished as you can make it.

Whole courses have been written on editing. If you're uncertain of your grammar or punctuation skills, I encourage you to take one. But even if you're an experienced writer, it doesn't hurt to review a few commonly made errors as noted below.

15.1. Condense-Clean up Dialogue

Edit your transcript.

- For your first few attempts, try to edit by only removing words, not by changing any of them — you'll quickly see that most real speech can be condensed by half without deleting any of the meaning.
- Finally, test your fictional dialog by reading it aloud (Hint: smart phones have recorders). If it doesn't sound natural, it probably isn't. Keep revising until it comes trippingly off your tongue (yes, that's a cliché — but remember, although you want to avoid clichés in your narrative, people use them all the time in speech).

Dialogue Must Have a Purpose

Even if a passage of dialogue in your story is full of juicy conflict, you still may need to delete it if it's not serving any storytelling purpose.

What kind of purpose? At least one of the following...

- The dialogue moves the plot forward.
- It deepens the reader's understanding of what makes the character tick.
- It provides important information.

If a conversation in a novel has no reason for being there other than adding to the word count, you either need to *give it* a reason for existing or cut it out, no matter how pretty you think the writing is.

Get your speech-attribution/dialogue tags in as early as possible.

A "dialogue tag" is the bit you put before or after the dialogue, like:

- he said
- she asked
- I replied
- Throw in an occasional "whispered" or "shouted" if you need to, but don't get fancier than that.

There's nothing more frustrating than not knowing whose dialog you're reading. Slip the tag in after the first completed clause in the sentence:

Example: "You know," **said Juan**, "when the sky is that shade of blue it reminds me of my childhood back in Mexico."

Example:

"Joe, please come here," **Sarah said**. "We need to talk."

He folded his arms. "What about?"

"You know what." She bit her lip and looked away.

Identify speakers every 5-6 exchanges

- You don't have to use dialogue tags every time someone talks.
- When alternating lines of dialogue, make sure you identify speakers at least every five or six exchanges; it's very easy for the reader to get lost otherwise.

Em-Dash

- Finally, much real dialog goes unfinished. When someone is interrupted or cut off abruptly, end the dialog with an em-dash (which you type in manuscript as two hyphens); when he or she trails off without completing the thought, end the dialog with ellipsis points (three periods). Real dialog also tends to be peppered with asides: "We went to Toronto — boy, I hate that city — and found . . ."

Snappy Dialogue / Short speeches

- **The fewer words, the snappier the dialogue – so keep your character's speeches as short as possible.**
- Real-life conversations are wordy and often dull. People often talk faster than they think, so they use filler words like 'really' and 'quite'. They say the same thing several times until it sinks in, and they let sentences ramble on and on and on and on. **Fictional dialogue needs to be much tighter.**
- Repetition is weak; tight speech creates stronger emphasis. When people converse in tight phrases, the dialogue sizzles.
- Characters that use few words come across as intelligent and confident. Let your characters ask precise questions, give laconic answers and deliver pithy comments.
- Short sentences make dialogue feel realistic. Dialogue sentences don't have to complete; sometimes partial sentences work well.

Here are some examples of trimmed down dialogue:

Fat

"You know, I reckon you may be missing a chance that won't come again in this lifetime. Are you absolutely sure you want to do that?"

Trimmed

"Do you want to miss this chance?"

Fat

He turned to look at her, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Actually, this is up to you. I think it's you who has to make a decision here, one way or another. It's your choice, really."

Trimmed

He shrugged. "Your choice."

Fat

"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, Augustus. Let me get this right. Are you saying that you're leaving me?"

Trimmed

"You're leaving me?"

Fat

He grabbed her by the arm and said, "At least tell me where you're going."

She turned to look at him. "It's really obvious where I'm going, after what has just happened. I'm going home, of course. You shouldn't need to ask."

Trimmed

He grabbed her arm. "Where are you going?"

"Home."

Fat

"What he told you just now isn't true. It was really a lie."

Trimmed

"He lied."

Before being cleaned up...

"Hi, John. How are you?"

"I'm fine, thanks, Mary. And yourself?"

Oh, I can't complain," she said. "Actually, I'm glad I bumped into you. Are you coming to the party tonight?"

"I hope to, Mary. It really depends if I can get off work early."

"Have you asked your boss?"

"Not yet," John admitted. "McNulty's having a bad day, to tell you the truth. His ex-wife called. She wants money again. I'm waiting to pick the right moment."

"Is there ever a *good* moment with that man?"

"Sure," John said. "Catching him somewhere between his third and fourth scotch usually works."

After being cleaned up...

"Hi, John. Coming to the party tonight?"

"If I can get off work."

"Have you asked?"

"The boss is having a bad day," he said. "Ex-wife troubles. I'll pick my moment."

"Is there ever a *good* moment with McNulty?"

"Sure. Somewhere between his third and fourth scotch."

Break up dialogue with little snippets of prose

Because having one line of speech, followed by another, then another can sound like ping pong again – even if you *do* vary the length of each line.

To overcome this problem, simply freeze a conversation for a few sentences while you...

- Describe the sound of the rain hitting the window or a dog barking in the distance.
- Show what one of the characters is thinking (this is called interior monologue).
- Write *anything at all* except another line of dialogue.

This before/after example demonstrates all of the key points to remember when writing dialogue that flows...

Before... Note: Below the words: *enquired, admitted, cautiously* are NOT necessary. Stick to *said, replied, and maybe asked*.

"What do you fancy for dinner, Sarah?"

"What have you got?" she *enquired*.

"Not much," Frank *admitted*. "I think I could stretch to pasta, though. And there's cheesecake for dessert."

"Cheesecake's my favorite," Sarah replied.

"Then later I thought we could catch a movie," Frank *said cautiously*.

"We could," Sarah said. "But I've got a better idea."

After... Note: The characters show nonverbal body language below.

"What do you fancy for dinner, Sarah?"

"What have you got?"

Frank *opened the fridge, stood on his tiptoes* to search the top shelf. "I could stretch to pasta," he said. "And there's cheesecake for dessert." Note: This is the prose that broke up the dialogue.

"Cheesecake's my favorite."

"Then later I thought we could catch a movie."

"We could," Sarah said as *she poured the Chardonnay*. "But I've got a better idea."

Quicken the pace with fragments, spare sentences, and short paragraphs.

- Crisp, punchy verbs, especially those with onomatopoeia (*crash, lunge, sweep, scatter, ram, scavenge*) also add to a quick pace. Invest in suggestive verbs to enliven descriptions, build action scenes and milk suspense.
- Harsh consonant sounds such as those in words like *claws, crash, kill, quake*, and *nag* can push the reader ahead. Words with unpleasant associations can also ratchet up the speed: *hiss, grunt, slither, smarmy, venomous, slaver*, and *wince*. Energetic, active language is especially appropriate for building action scenes and suspense, and for setting up drama and conflict.
- A fast pace means trimming every sentence of unnecessary words. Eliminate prepositional phrases where you don't need them: For example, "*the walls of the cathedral*" can be written as "*the cathedral's walls*."
- Finally, search your story for passive linking verbs and trade them in for active ones.

Write Stronger

Use definite, specific, concrete language.

Prefer the specific to the general, the definite to the vague, the concrete to the abstract.

- A. He showed satisfaction as he took possession of his well- earned reward.
- B. He grinned as he pocketed the coin.

Write positive statements.

From *The Elements of Style*, "Put statements in positive form. Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, noncommittal language. Use the word not as a means of denial or in antithesis, never as a means of evasion." Example:

- A. She did not want to be near her former lover.
- B. She despised standing next to her former lover.

Tighten Tension

Techniques to tighten tension, according to Gloria are:

- Silence
- Anxiety
- Strategic tagging – inserting your tag in the middle of the dialogue sentence
- Pacing
- Suspense

Another writing nugget: Scene endings – to compel your reader to turn the page leave them hanging at a scene ending with a statement of dialogue that is suspenseful or something that will affect the character.

EMPLOY CONFRONTATION.

Many writers struggle with exposition in their novels. Often they heap it on in large chunks of straight narrative. Backstory— what happens before the novel opens—is especially troublesome. How can we give the essentials and avoid a mere information drop?

Use dialogue. First, create a tension-filled scene, usually between two characters. Get them arguing, confronting each other. Then have the information appear in the natural course of things. Here is the clunky way to do it:

Example: John Davenport was a doctor fleeing from a terrible past. He had been drummed out of the profession for bungling an operation while he was drunk.

Instead, place this backstory in a scene in which John is confronted by a patient who is aware of the doctor's past:

"I know who you are," Charles said.

"You know nothing," John said.

"You're that doctor."

"If you don't mind I—"

"From Hopkins. You killed a woman because you were soused. Yeah, that's it."

And so forth. This is a much underused method, but it not only gives weight to your dialogue, it increases the pace of your story.

Ramp up the excitement

Give the two characters **conflicting goals** – one of them wants one thing, the other something else. Even if it doesn't end in a shouting match here and now, the underlying tension will be all you need to keep the readers turning those pages.

To illustrate that, take a look at this example...

"What are we having for dinner?" asked Jane.

Bill opened the fridge, shifted the milk to see to the back. "How does steak sound?"

"Sounds great."

"There's chicken if you prefer," he said.

"No, steak is fine. With mashed potatoes."

A perfectly nice conversation, the kind we all have everyday – but hopeless for the purposes of novel writing. Add some conflict into the mix, though, and it might look something like this...

"What are we having for dinner?" asked Jane.

Bill opened the fridge, shifted the milk to see to the back. "How does steak sound?"

"What, again?"

"We haven't had steak since last Saturday," he said.

"I know. And the Saturday before that and the one before that! Don't you ever fancy something different, Bill?"

Much more interesting, I'm sure you'll agree. Why? Because the dialogue is in conflict. Jane wants one thing and Bill wants something else...

- Bill wants to stick to the same old routine.
- Jane wants some adventure in their relationship.

And when characters have conflicting goals, consequences are sure to follow later in the novel.

SIDESTEP THE OBVIOUS.

One of the most common mistakes aspiring writers make with dialogue is creating a simple back-and-forth exchange. Each line responds directly to the previous line, often repeating a word or phrase (an “echo”). It looks something like this:

“Hello, Mary.”

“Hi, Sylvia.”

“My, that’s a wonderful outfit you’re wearing.”

“Outfit? You mean this old thing?”

“Old thing! It looks practically new.”

“It’s not new, but thank you for saying so.”

This sort of dialogue is “on the nose.” There are no surprises, and the reader drifts along with little interest. While some direct response is fine, your dialogue will be stronger if you sidestep the obvious:

“Hello, Mary.”

“Sylvia. I didn’t see you.”

“My, that’s a wonderful outfit you’re wearing.”

“I need a drink.”

I don’t really know what is going on in this scene (incidentally, I’ve written only these four lines of dialogue). But I think you’ll agree this exchange is immediately more interesting and suggestive of currents beneath the surface than the first example. I might even find the seeds of an entire story here.

You can also sidestep with a question:

“Hello, Mary.”

“Sylvia. I didn’t see you.”

“My, that’s a wonderful outfit you’re wearing.”

“Where is he, Sylvia?”

Hmm. Who is “he”? And why should Sylvia know?

CULTIVATE SILENCE.

A powerful variation on the sidestep is silence. It is often the best choice, no matter what words you might come up with. Hemingway was a master at this. Consider this excerpt from his short story “Hills Like White Elephants.” A man and a woman are having a drink at a train station in Spain. The man speaks:

“Should we have another drink?”

“All right.”

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

“The beer’s nice and cool,” the man said.

“It’s lovely,” the girl said.

“It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” the man said. “It’s not really an operation at all.”

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

“I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig. It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.”

The girl did not say anything.

In this story, the man is trying to convince the girl to have an abortion (a word that does not appear anywhere in the text). Her silence is reaction enough.

By using a combination of sidestep, silence and action, Hemingway gets the point across through a brief, compelling exchange. He uses the same technique in this well-known scene between mother and son in the story “Soldier’s Home”:

“God has some work for every one to do,” his mother said. “There can’t be no idle hands in His Kingdom.”

“I’m not in His Kingdom,” Krebs said.

“We are all of us in His Kingdom.”

Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always.

“I’ve worried about you so much, Harold,” his mother went on. “I know the temptations you must have been exposed to. I know how weak men are. I know what your own dear grandfather, my own father,

told us about the Civil War and I have prayed for you. I pray for you all day long, Harold.”

Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening on the plate.

Silence and bacon fat hardening. We don’t need anything else to catch the mood of the scene. What are your characters feeling while exchanging dialogue? Try expressing it with the sound of silence.

DROP Unnecessary WORDS.

By excising a single word here and there, he creates a feeling of verisimilitude in his dialogue. It sounds like real speech, though it is really nothing of the sort.

Here is a standard exchange:

“Your dog was killed?”

“Yes, run over by a car.”

“What did you call it?”

“It was a she. I called her Tuffy.”

This is the way Leonard did it in *Out of Sight*:

“Your dog was killed?”

“Got run over by a car.”

“What did you call it?”

“Was a she, name Tuffy.”

It sounds so natural, yet is lean and meaningful. Notice it’s all a matter of a few words dropped, leaving the feeling of real speech.

For each character, you could think about:

- **Any habitual phrases they use.** You won’t want to overdo these, but they can be a useful way to cue the reader in that a particular character is speaking.
- **What words they *don’t* use.** Perhaps they never swear, preferring “Oh sugar!” or “Fiddlesticks!” Maybe they tend to avoid long or complicated words.
- **How eloquent they are – or how taciturn they are.** Some characters have a way with words; others don’t say much, or say it awkwardly when they do.
- **How polite they are – or not!** Do they make requests pleasantly, or do they order other characters around?

This means making a character's voice fit their background and occupation...

- An educated character will have more words (and fancier words) at his or her disposal than a not-so-educated one.
- A dockworker will probably swear more than a school teacher – and won't care as much (or know as much) about grammar.
- A physics professor will likely throw the odd scientific term into his or her speech.
- An artist will have plenty of words to describe colors.

15.2. You could choose to polish Your Draft With Grammarly

<http://www.grammarly.com/>

Grammarly is an online tool that corrects and explains pesky grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. Their algorithm catches about ten times more errors than leading word processing software.

15.3. First, Delete All the misused Adverbs (-ly) and maybe (-ing) words

Search your long form for words ending in -ly. Delete them if they aren’t used properly—you can use stronger verbs to eliminate the need for adverbs. You’re a writer, get creative.

She walked quickly to the stove and unceremoniously lifted the lid from the boiling pot.

It's laden with adverbs. **Instead, write:**

She hurried to the stove and snatched the lid from the boiling pot.

The trick to eliminating adverbs is to think about why you’re tempted to use one and then find an alternative. The usual reason is to enhance your verb. But it’s better to simply select a more vivid verb.

For example, in the passage above, the original verbs were *walked* and *lifted*. I added the adverbs *quickly* and *unceremoniously* to try to bring life to these listless verbs. But substituting the vivid verbs *hurried* and *snatched* solved the problem without all the clutter.

English has a wealth of verbs, with a nearly infinite variety of subtle shadings of meaning. So choose your verbs carefully, and you'll never need an adverb.

Adverbs and participles give writers excuses not to write well. Slipping in an adverb or misusing a participle weakens prose.

Examples:

A. The lovely lady angrily slapped the badly dressed police officer.

B. The woman slapped the disheveled police officer.

A. She agreed to the divorce, wanting to end her rotten marriage.

B. She wanted to end her rotten marriage, so she agreed to the divorce.

15.4. Check 'It's' vs 'Its'

The possessive form of *it* has no apostrophe. Only the contraction of *it is* uses an apostrophe. **This is the number one grammatical error in most writing.** The following are both correct:

The sun directed its heat on the field.

It's hot out.

15.5. Weak Verbs

Make sure your adjectives aren't just covering for weak verbs:

She was discouraged as she walked to work.

Discouraged is a perfectly fine adjective, but it's only there because the verb *walked* is so vague. How much better to say:

She trudged to work.

15.6. Be Active, Not Passive (delete 'am', 'is', 'are', 'was', 'were', and MAYBE 'has/have/had', 'began to/started', 'do/did', 'make/made' AND 'walked' since it's overused)

Get rid of weak verbs like *am/is/was/are/were*, *has/have/had*, *go/went*, *do/did*, *make/made*, *walked*, etc. (the exception is *said*, in dialogue). These are all telling words. *Was* is probably the biggest culprit to avoid, since most stories are told in the past tense. "She was scared. He was angry. They were happy." Another example: the verb 'walked' is one of the most overused words I encounter in editing fiction. Dozens of stronger, more evocative verbs can be substituted for *walk*: *amble*, *saunter*, *stride*, *hobble*, *mosey*, *shuffle*, *stagger*, *plod*, *stalk* . . . the list is long. While a sentence like "Peter hobbled along" is technically still telling, it shows how Peter is moving, and it's far more visual and specific than *walked*.

Am, *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were* are all passive verbs. Also, *had* is particularly weak. Search for them and look for opportunities to change them to active ones. Active verbs can clarify and strengthen your writing.

Before:

The trapdoor was opened by the detective, revealing another room below.

After:

The detective opened the trapdoor, revealing another room below.

Before:

There were dead leaves on the tree. They were trembling in the breeze.

After:

Dead leaves still clung to the tree, trembling in the breeze.

Before:

She was late, and there was an angry look in her eyes.

After:

She arrived late, her eyes flashing anger.

Before:

It had been a bad day at the office.

After:

His day at the office sucked.

Writing that relies less on adverbs and adjectives and more on strong verbs and effective description draws the reader into the story. Example:

She was not going to go into the dark bathroom. She always heard scary scratching noises that her brother said were

monster fingers scraping the insides of the walls. Sliding her hand into the room, she searched for the plastic plated light switch and screamed when her fingers touched something furry.

She hated going to the bathroom at night. Her brother said monsters lived in the walls, and she believed him. She often heard them scratching the thin plaster walls with their thick monster nails. She closed her eyes and slid her hand along the wall, searching for the light switch. Her fingers skittered against furry bumps. Her heart stopped beating; then the furry bumps moved and she screamed.

Issues occur when the writer introduces an action to the reader by saying “began to”, as in “My nerves began to calm.” The writer can cut “began to”, however, and tighten the wording by saying, “My nerves calmed”. Notice how it’s not only a shorter sentence but a stronger one because “calmed” is the main verb rather than “began”.

Active: When a verb is in active voice its subject acts or does something. In the following examples, the subjects are underlined and the verbs are in bold. Notice that the subjects are acting out the verbs.

- We are building a house for a family of four.
- I did not make that call.
- The dog bit our mail carrier.
- He has fixed our computer twice already.

Passive: When a verb is in passive voice its subject receives the action or is acted upon. The passive form is often indicated by helping verbs (is, am, are, were, was, been) used with another verb. The word "by" is another clue to identifying the passive form. In the following examples, the subjects are underlined and the verbs are in bold.

- The house is being built for a family of four.
- That call was not made by me.
- Our mail carrier was bit by the dog.
- My computer has been fixed twice already.

EXAMPLE:

passive: The novel Frankenstein **was written by** Mary Shelley.

active: Mary Shelley **wrote** the novel Frankenstein.

EXAMPLE:

passive: Baby elephants **are taught to** avoid humans. (By whom are baby elephants taught?)

active: Adult elephants **teach** baby elephants to avoid humans.

EXAMPLE:

passive: The Oxford English Dictionary **was compiled by** Sir James Murray.

active: Sir James Murray **compiled** The Oxford English Dictionary.

1. **When the active verb is in the simple present tense**

Active verb: **write/writes**

- He **writes** a letter.

Passive verb: **is/am/are written**

- A letter **is written** by him.

2. **When the active verb is in the present continuous tense**

Active verb: **is/am/are writing**

- He **is writing** a letter. (Active)

Passive verb: **is/am/are being written**

- A letter **is being written** by him. (Passive)

3. **When the active verb is in the present perfect tense**

Active verb: **has/have written**

- He **has written** a letter. (Active)

Passive verb: **has/have been written**

- A letter **has been written** by him. (Passive)

4. **When the active verb is in the simple past tense**

Active verb: **wrote**

- He **wrote** a letter. (Active)

Passive verb: **was/were written**

- A letter **was written** by him. (Passive)

5. **When the active verb is in the past continuous tense**

Active: **was/were writing**

- He **was writing** a letter. (Active)

Passive: **was/were being written**

- A letter **was being written** by him. (Passive)

6. **When the active verb is in the past perfect tense**

Active verb: **had written**

- He **had written** a letter.

Passive verb: **had been written**

- A letter **had been written** by him.

7. **When the active verb is in the simple future tense**

Active verb: **will/shall write**

- He **will write** a letter. (Active)

Passive verb: **will/shall be written**

- A letter **will be written** by him. (Passive)

8. **When the active verb is in the future perfect tense**

Active verb: **will/shall have written**

- He **will have written** a letter.

Passive verb: **will/shall have been written**

- A letter **will have been written** by him.

15.7. Idle 'That' (remove any 'that' that isn't needed)

Search for the word *that* throughout your manuscript. If you're like me, you'll find lots of sentences like this:

She knew that he was coming.

What purpose does 'that' serve in this sentence? None. Remove it.

15.8. Check for Impossible Simultaneity

Impossible simultaneity is a fancy way of saying a character is doing two or more things at the same time that simply aren't physically possible. Here's an example:

Picking up the wine glass, he took a sip while checking it for lipstick marks.

He can't pick it up, take a sip, and check it all at the same time. First he needs to pick it up, then he needs to check it, and then he can sip. Like this:

He picked up the wine glass, checked it for lipstick marks, and then took a sip.

15.9. Fuzzy -ness (delete any non-intelligent ones similar to slipperiness)

Search your work for *-ness* endings. Are they attached to fuzzy-sounding words like *slippery* or *dark*, as in the following:

The slipperiness of the sidewalk caught him by surprise in the darkness under the elm tree.

How much better to be specific:

Hidden by the shadow of the elm tree, the ice on the sidewalk caught him by surprise.

15.10. Lazy Which, Who, and What (Delete any that are not needed)

Who, *which*, and *what* are useful words, but a large percentage of them do nothing but clutter your sentences. So examine each one carefully, and see whether it's really necessary.

The man who came in sat in a chair, which was near the door, and took out what appeared to be a gold pocket watch.

The words *who*, *which*, and *what* are doing nothing in this sentence. Cut them:

The man came in and sat in a chair near the door. He took out a gold pocket watch.

15.11. Remove excessive/unneeded dialogue tags and names.

Most dialogue tags are unnecessary, particularly when two characters are speaking. "Said" is the best word to use in a tag (avoid adding an adverb to it!) because it's considered an "invisible" word--the reader's eyes go right over it. Avoid using words like barked, growled, hissed, and so forth. Characters should not sigh or laugh their words nor should they speak through "gritted teeth." Insert actions/internal thoughts to break up dialogue. Example:

"Get out, Nick!" she shouted angrily.

"No, Karen" he said quietly.

"Leave me alone," she hissed.

"Not until you tell me the truth, Karen" he said through gritted teeth. "Do you love me?"

"I never loved you," she sighed.

"I don't believe you," he growled.

"Then believe this, Nick" she laughed, "I'm engaged to someone else."

"Get out!" Karen shouted.

He crossed his arms. "No."

"Leave me alone, Nick."

"Not until you tell me the truth." He grasped her chin and forced her to look at him. "Do you love me?"

Tears trembled on her lashes. "I never loved you."

Then why was she crying? "I don't believe you."

"Then believe this." She raised her left hand. A diamond ring glittered in the sunlight. "I'm engaged to someone else."

15.12. Delete qualifiers: rather, very, little, pretty.

Consider deleting these words from your work: rather, very, little, pretty. These are thought as leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words.

15.13. Sentence Fragments Are Okay

You can use fragments to punch up your style. Forget what your high school English teacher told you about them. Right now.

Sentence fragments are great. They add impact. Create rhythm. Build excitement.

Of course, like anything else, they can be overused. Become tedious. Annoying even.

Still, they lend a certain punch, and we can make most writing more interesting with the occasional fragment. So don't hesitate to use them when you want to underscore a point or catch your readers' attention.

15.14. Avoid Mirrors and Other Clichés

Don't have your character look in a mirror so she can think about what she looks like. If you can't figure out another way to work in her hair color, it probably isn't important anyway. Leave it to your readers' imagination. Similarly, her eyes shouldn't be limpid pools, and her bosom shouldn't swell (sounds like medical attention is needed). **Simply put, use phrases you'd use in everyday speech, not ones you've encountered in overwrought poetry.**