

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO WRITING A NOVEL

STORY PLANNING

THE TITLE

- Create a working title that clearly states the genre
- Check online to see if this title has been used before and in which genre.

STORY LENGTH

- Novella: Usually 20,000 to 40,000 words
- Short Novel: 45,000 to 60,000 words
- Novel: 60,000 to 80,000 words
- Saga: 80,000 to 120,000 words

COLLECT STORY IDEAS

- Take a notebook with you
- Keep a folder of ideas
- Use your phone to take images
- Record ideas on your phone.

PLOT

- Spend time on the premise so that it is as compelling as possible. For commercial fiction there should be a great hook to the central idea. E.g. Would you kill your wife to save your child?
- Write down ONE main story question which will be answered by the end of the novel. Will the heroine find love? Will the detective discover who the real killer is?

HOW TO FIND STORY IDEAS

- Reading in your genre
- Reading other genres and lateral thinking
- Movies
- TV shows
- Conversations
- News and Magazines
- Anecdotes
- Personal experience
- Dreams

DEVELOP AND EXPAND ON THE STORY IDEA

- What central question does the main idea pose?
- How can you expand that to several levels for secondary characters?
- What is at stake for the main character?
- Why should a reader care about that issue?
- Is there a central dilemma that will drive the story?

CHARACTERIZATION

NAMING THE MAIN CHARACTER

The name must match:

- the historical period of the story. E.g. Victorian English vs ancient Egypt.
- the subgenre niche of this story. E.g. Paranormal romance vs Chick Lit.
- the gender of this character
- the social status of the character. E.g. Upper class, middle class, working class
- be regional specific E.g. Scandinavian vs Indian vs Italian
- the ethnic background of this character.
- be memorable
- fit the context of the story
- be catchy and easy to remember

Check online to see if this character name has been used before

APPEARANCE

- What do they look like?
- Tall
- Short
- Slender
- Fat
- Dark tanned skin
- Pale skin
- Use photos of celebrities and actors and actresses as inspiration.

MANNERISMS AND PERSONALITY

- Twitching
- Finger tapping
- Hand rubbing
- Hair flicking
- Fidgeting
- Obsessive cleaning
- Pen organizing
- Totally messy
- Constantly twirling a ring or bracelet
- Obvious health problems/disabled
- Introspective
- Chatty and extrovert

FEATURES

- Hairstyle and color.
- Dark hair.
- Fair.
- African.
- Straight.
- Curled.
- Tattoos
- Body scars
- Body piercing
- Facial hair
- Elaborate make-up
- Manicured fingernails

CHARACTER BACKGROUND

- Are their parents still living?
- What is their relationship?
- Do they live close by?
- Elderly parents who need care or nursing
- Siblings
- Twin brother or sister
- Half-brother or sister
- Stepfamily
- Stepparents
- Adopted parents

GENDER

- Man
- Woman
- Homosexual
- Bisexual

AGE

- Child
- Teen
- Young Adult
- Middle-Aged
- Senior

CLOTHING

- Conservative
- Unconventional
- Provocative
- Colorful
- Drab
- Vintage
- Couture
- Workwear
- Sports

ETHNICITY

- European
- African American
- Asian American
- Indian

HOME TOWN

- Small village
- Busy city
- International traveler
- Nomad
- Foster care.

CHARACTERIZATION

CHILDHOOD HOME

- Apartment
- House
- Rented trailer
- Mansion
- Ranch
- Casino
- Poor childhood
- Privileged background.

CURRENT HOME

- Country
- Region
- Apartment
- Condo
- Hotel
- Rented property
- Owns the property
- Shared accommodation.
- Lives alone

MARITAL STATUS

- Single
- Engaged
- Newly engaged
- Divorced
- Married
- Newly married
- About to be married
- New relationship
- Long distance relationship
- Dating old friend
- Separated
- Widowed

CHILDREN

- Parent of young children.
- Parent with teenage children
- Parent with adult children
- Single parent

MOTIONAL BARRIERS AND LIMITING BELIEFS

- Past traumatic event
- Personal experience
- Loss of a family member
- Rejection
- Betrayal by a lover
- Betrayal by a trusted friend

EDUCATION

- What are their academic accomplishments?
- Are they using those qualifications?
- College education
- Degree level
- Higher degree
- Professional qualification
- Dream profession or lifestyle
- What is stopping them from getting it?

PROFESSION

- Current work profile
- Professional or manual?
- Income level and expenses.
- Type of work - solo or in a team?

HOBBIES

- Do they collect things?
- Still have stuffed toys in the bedroom
- Visit art galleries and museums
- Creative art and crafts
- Loves vintage cars
- Stamp expert
- Likes to go to live music concerts
- Sings jazz every weekend
- Visits casinos once a month
- Do they have pets at home?

SKILLS AND ABILITIES

- Sporty
- Athletic
- Technical
- Computer geek
- Observational
- Crafts
- Creative
- Cooking
- Business and money
- Weapons
- Patience
- Caring personality
- Sharp and cruel

TASTES IN FOOD AND DRINK

- Favorite food and restaurants
- Chinese
- Indian
- Mexican
- Italian
- French
- American Diner
- Pub food
- Gourmet fine dining
- Coffee
- Tea
- Green tea
- Wine
- Fizzy drinks/Cola

HOW TO DEVELOP UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS

CHARACTER GOALS AND STAKES

- What does each of your main characters want when the story opens?
- The main character must have a powerful and all-consuming short-term goal when the story opens which is easy to understand and for the reader to relate to.
- The stakes for reaching that goal must be set high to make the reader care.
- It should be clear why this goal is important to them.
- The external conflict built into the story idea is going to challenge the character's ability to achieve this goal.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

- No character lives in isolation
- Use secondary characters as sidekicks to reveal the true nature of the main character.
- A network of at least three close friends provides scope for subplots.
- Take time to create real relationships, both good and bad for this character.

THE CHARACTER'S WOUND

- This is the character's past that are still haunting them today.
- How has that event or events informed their current controlling and limiting belief systems which set the rules about how they live their life?
- What other weaknesses and flaws does the character have?
- What is their greatest weakness and their greatest fear?
- But also, what is their greatest strength?
- This is crucial to developing the internal emotional conflicts which will determine how that character reacts to challenges and obstacles during the novel.
- When the story opens the character will come on stage with those rules and limiting belief systems all in place.
- During the story, these beliefs will be challenged and the damaging and limiting elements overcome with the help of the other characters - who in turn has their own set of controlling beliefs.
- In the opening chapters the reader will only know how the character reacts to the challenges they are hit with, but it is crucial that you know the deep-seated root cause of these beliefs which the foundation for the character's internal conflicts are.
- Readers expect that there could be several layers to these beliefs, which will be revealed at the crisis key decision points in the story.

THE SETTING

WHERE. Geographical location

- Entire novel can be staged in one room, but that room is set somewhere in the world.
- European settings
- Nordic Countries
- Northern Europe
- Mediterranean
- Africa
- Asia
- Americas
- India
- Russia
- China
- Australia & New Zealand
- Pacific Rim & Islands

WHERE. Time of year and season

- What is the Climate like? How does that impact the story?
- Winter. Christmas holidays and New Year Celebrations.
- Spring. New beginnings and growth.
- Summer. Sunshine and long days.
- Autumn. Rich colors and reflections.

WHERE. How to Describe that setting

- Specific unique details
- Landmarks
- Landscape
- Creating a sense of place
- Should instantly take a reader inside that story world.
- A fantasy gothic mansion used as a school for magic.
- Specific relevant detail. E.g. Blood on snow. Cherry blossom in the wind.
- A small village. Curtains twitching in the cottages.
- Landscapes and scenery. Open vistas. Dark claustrophobic streets.
- Use Interior description to give an insight into the personality of the person who lives in that room.
- Neat and organized clean space. Cluttered hoarding of rotting bags and old food.
- A mansion full of gilt furniture and fine antiques. A homeless shelter.
- Include details that readers will recognize and associate with.
- Use meticulous research to add telling details if you do not know the location or visit the area in person.
- Language
- Regional Dialects

WRITING THE NOVEL

STORY STRUCTURE

ACT ONE

- The first 25% of your novel.
- Stage One. Set-up the story in the normal world. Establish a base line.
- Present the reader with an opening image/hook.
- Create a bond between the reader and the character by making them feel sympathy or empathy towards this likeable character and their situation.
- Reveal the character's desire to the reader. What do they want?
- Some dramatic Inciting Incident disrupts the normal world of the main character.
- This causes them to leave that normal world in response to this new situation.
- At the end of Act One is a Turning Point with a major plot twist, revelation or clue that makes them change their plans and initiates the next phase of the story.

ACT TWO

- 25% to the Midpoint.
- The characters leave the ordinary world behind and start work on the new goal.
- Complications arise, stakes grow higher and challenges increase.
- Allies and enemies are introduced.
- Act ends at the Critical Midpoint of No Return with a Major Plot twist.
- The character cannot go back - they have to proceed.

ACT THREE

- 50% to 75% of your novel
- More complications, challenges and barriers.
- A time factor may be introduced.
- The challenges and enemies seem unbeatable.
- Apparent failure, dejection and reversal.
- Leading to a Crisis Decision.

ACT FOUR

- The final showdown.
- The main character must come back from this reversal and come up with a new plan of action.
- Story builds to a final dramatic climax where the main character resolves their issues, faces the past and triumphs against adversity.
- The final confrontation is even harder than they had imagined.
- The final scenes show the character return to his normal life, transformed.

WHEN DOES THE STORY OPEN?

- Big public event
- New job
- Family party
- Friend's party
- Engagement party
- Baby shower
- Wedding
- Birthday event
- Business meeting
- Some traumatic event [crime]

WRITING DRAMATIC OPENING SCENES

- Where. Must establish the setting in the opening paragraphs to ground the reader in the story world.
- When. Period in history. Time of day.
- Characters in the Scene. Who is speaking/thinking.
- What happens when the scene opens?
- What happens next?
- An Action or Reveal followed by an Emotional and Physical Reaction
- Then the character makes a decision and takes action
- Question at the end of the scene that makes the reader want more
- Does every scene move the story forwards or reveal something?
- Is there conflict of some sort in every scene?
- Does the story make sense?
- Or do you need to add another scene and/or rewrite a flat one?
- Can I cut and streamline to increase the pace without losing content? Do I really need that long introspection?

WRITING THE NOVEL

DECIDE ON THE POINT OF VIEW

- The point of view is the position from which the story is told.
- **First Person POV**
- The entire story is told from the viewpoint of one person in their own words.
- **Third Person POV**
- The writer acts as a narrator and reports on the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.

DIALOGUE

- Reveals quirks and interesting aspects of the character.
- Indicate their background and education through their choice of vocabulary.
- Reveal information about what they want and need.
- As ammunition. When a character reacts angrily or with passion they can blurt out something that was meant to stay a secret or something hurtful to the other person.
- As tender and sweet expressions of love.
- As a way of demonstrating the change in that person during the novel.

CHARACTER ARC

- At the end of the story, does the reader see how the main characters have changed from the characters they were at the start the book because of the romance relationship?
- Character change = interest and engagement.
- Use symbolism to demonstrate the change from the first pages to the last
- What is their short-term goal when the story starts – a simple external goal with a clear endpoint and pref linked to a chance to achieve their longing or need –they must do this to make a big change in their life?
- What are the stakes? What happens if they do not achieve this goal?
- Why now?
- What is their long-term goal or longing- that deeply held desire which they have not found the courage to go after yet?
- What is their need? The thing that is missing in their life which will make it complete?
- What is their wound – the unhealing source of continuing pain? This has led to the identity mask that they show to the world – which will be chipped away during the story journey.
- What is the one overpowering dilemma in this story? And who does it belong to? The dilemma is the choice between staying in the past or moving forward and taking the risk – and it belongs to the person who changes most.

WRITING ROMANCE FICTION

UNDERSTAND THE MAIN SUBCATEGORIES OF ROMANCE FICTION

- African American
- Clean & Wholesome
- Contemporary
- Fantasy
- Gothic
- Historical Romance. There are five sub-sub categories; Ancient World, Medieval, Regency, Scottish, and Victorian.
- Holidays
- Inspirational. There are two sub-categories; Amish and Christian
- LGBT. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.
- Military
- Multicultural & Interracial
- Mystery & Suspense.
- New Adult & College.
- Paranormal.
- Romantic Comedy
- Science Fiction
- Sports
- Time Travel
- Westerns

PLANNING A ROMANCE NOVEL

- Who is the central character you want the reader to empathize with? This is usually the heroine or the hero in a romance story.
- Why are they at the end of their tether at the start of the story? How are they in deep emotional trouble at this point in the story?
- What do they want at that precise moment in the story? Their short-term IMMEDIATE goal or desire?
- What are the stakes if they do not achieve this goal?
- Who or what is stopping them from achieving this goal?
- Where do we first meet this person? Describe the location.
- Create empathy and sympathy for the central character to help the reader emotionally connect with them. Make them likeable and relatable.
- What are their internal emotional issues or conflicts? What is their true internal desire and longing?
- The dominant conflict – the real battle – is not between physical forces but between the powerful and deep-seated internal belief systems that the hero and the heroine hold.
- The dominant conflict – the real battle – is not between physical forces but between the powerful and deep-seated internal belief systems that the hero and the heroine hold.
- Everyone has limiting beliefs that guide our daily lives. In romance fiction these are going to act as barriers to the romance relationship.
- The EMOTIONAL choices the characters make under the pressure of the crucible you have put them into as the author, reflect the controlling belief systems of the hero and heroine.
- Your job is to create a series of challenges which will force these belief systems to change as the characters are transformed because of the romantic relationship.
- Layer your conflict with highs and lows, advancements and retreats, passion and withdrawal. Happy light-hearted moments and deep emotional revelations.
- Manipulate the sequence of revelations and action and reaction steps in the story so that the reader must keep turning the pages to find out what happens next. The emotional structure sets the pace for the story.

THE FOUR KEY ELEMENTS OF ROMANCE FICTION

- Two main characters that readers can relate to and want to get together. The heroine, who is usually the female main character, and a hero.
- A central romantic storyline where our two characters fall in love and develop a relationship.
- A series of barriers and struggles that the heroine and hero have to overcome to make the relationship work. These conflicts are both physical and emotional.
- An emotionally satisfying ending which usually results in emotional commitment.

GENERAL ROMANCE STORY STRUCTURE

There are four overarching components of any piece of romance fiction, irrespective of the length.

- The Main A Romance Story. How the romance relationship builds.
- B Plot. The Character Arc of the Heroine over the course of the story.
- C Plot. The Character Arc of the Hero over the course of the story.
- D Plot. The external story situation which will bring the hero and heroine together, even if they are battling against one another for the same prize. In most cases this acts as the spine for the story.

UNDERSTAND POPULAR ROMANCE TROPES

- Amnesia
- Beaches
- International
- Love Triangle
- Medical
- Second Chances
- Secret Baby
- Vacation
- Wedding
- Workplace.

WRITING CRIME FICTION

UNDERSTAND THE MAIN SUBCATEGORIES OF CRIME FICTION

- Cozy Mystery
- Police Procedural
- Private Investigator
- Historical
- Legal
- Psychological Suspense
- Romantic Suspense
- Political Thrillers
- Technothrillers
- Spy Thrillers
- Western Mysteries

PLOTTING THE CRIME

- Location for the crime
- When is the crime discovered? Shortly after the crime or in the past?
- Who discovers the crime?
- What is the true sequence for this crime?
- What is the real motivation for the crime?
- What clues are left behind for the investigator to discover?
- Can you introduce “red herrings” and false clues to mislead the investigator and distract them from the real sequence of events?

THE VICTIM

- Create a detailed character analysis for your victim
- Share their backstory as each clue is revealed
- Make each reveal about the victim move the investigation forwards
- What secrets were they hiding? Some will not lead anywhere but there will be one secret which leads the investigator to the truth.

THE VILLAIN

- Understand the psychology of the criminal
- Make them a rounded character with personality, friends and family
- Reveal them to the reader as one of several possible suspects
- The villain should be the equal of the investigator and a worthy opponent
- What motivated the villain to carry out this crime?
- Is it morally or personally justified?

THE INVESTIGATOR

- The type of Investigator must match the subgenre.
- Amateur detective
- Private detective
- Professional police officer
- FBI, CIA, Drug Enforcement officer.
- Do they work alone or part of a team?
- Each must have their own special skills and talents
- How can you make this crime matter to the protagonist?
- Why are they the best person to solve this crime?
- Why should the reader care that the victim has justice?
- The stakes should be high for the investigator and as personal as possible so that their deep involvement in this investigation feels true to the reader