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# LET'S WRITE A BOOK

**A DABBLE GUIDE TO STORY CRAFT**

**DOUGLAS LANDSBOROUGH**

# Let's Write a Book

A Dabble Guide to Story Craft

by Douglas Landsborough

# **Let's Write a Book: A Dabble Guide to Story Craft**

**Douglas Landsborough**

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# INTRODUCTION

Rumor has it you want to write a book.

Well, that's freaking awesome, isn't it? First of all, congratulations for taking one of the first steps towards grabbing that story in your head and making it real. There are so many people out there who think about writing a book—or mixing a song, painting a piece of art, creating something out of wood or metal or scraps you salvage from a junkyard—but tragically, few of those people even start their journey. And unfortunately, there are even fewer who see that journey through to the end.

But that's why you picked up this book. You want to get that story out, to finish that book. And damn it, we're going to get you there.

By committing to writing your story, you're joining a group of dedicated authors who want to pursue their passion. In the breakneck pace of the world we live in, chasing your dream can sometimes be cast to the wayside. But more people than ever are taking their creative endeavors and making them a reality. The opportunity is there for the taking.

Despite that, there are so many writers who don't want to admit—even to *themselves*—that they want to write a book. That's a tough pill to swallow. For writers, there are few things as fun or rewarding as writing the story constantly churning itself around in your brain. So, before you read any further, give yourself a pat on the back. Take a few breaths and realize that you're doing something really cool. Congratulate yourself for that.

At the same time, start to understand that writing a book is a **big** undertaking. Writing your first draft is not something that can be done in a day, a week, or even a month for most people. Especially if this is your debut book, just finishing the first draft is going to take a handful of months, if not more. Even then, some people take years to finish their book.

With the tools and knowledge I'm going to provide you in this book, it hopefully won't take you years to write your first draft.

Before we go forward though, you *must* understand that writing a book takes time and is a commitment. Understanding that up front can save you a lot of frustration and burnout through the journey.

Don't worry. We're going to get there together.

## THE #1 SECRET TO FINISHING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

Now brace yourself because you're about to learn the single-most important secret to writing a book. While everything you read in remaining chapters will help you, this one piece of information stands above the rest as the pinnacle of what a writer needs to know.

So what's the #1 tip to writing a book?

You actually have to write.

Before you close this book forever and swear at me, let me explain what that sentence means.

Writing is a skill. It is something that you can be good or bad at but, like all skills, it is something that can improve over time.

Writing is **not** a spark of inspiration or a sacred act that can only be performed when the planets align during a blood moon on the eve of harvest season.

If you want to start and finish writing a book, you have to actually sit your butt down and write. The words only come out if you're the one to make them appear. We'll revisit this top-secret idea throughout the book, but here are some things to keep in mind as you craft your novel.

## Writing creates momentum

The more you write, the more you'll be able to write. You'll get excited and those creative juices will flow as you keep those words coming.

This is true on both a micro and macro level. On a micro level, your writing will improve and you will write more quickly as you progress through your writing sessions. On a macro level, you will become more comfortable and explore more of your story as you bring it to life.

## Make writing a habit

Writing is an expression of creativity, but that doesn't mean that you need to embrace the romanticized idea of a renaissance artist to write a book. Make writing a habit. The more often and regularly you write, the easier it becomes to write. It's as simple as that.

## **Your first draft will be imperfect before it's perfect**

Ask an experienced writer if their first draft looks anything like their published book and you'll probably make that writer laugh. Your first draft is just that: a first draft. Don't get hung up on a single adjective or a sentence that isn't exactly what you want it to be. You are going to go back and revisit your story multiple times before it meets your standards—and, as writers, we tend to set near-impossible standards for ourselves.

This book was created with the sole purpose of helping you write the first draft of your book. It gives you all the information and tools you need to embrace this big secret (which honestly isn't really a secret) and start writing. So let's look at what this book contains.

## HOW THIS BOOK HAS BEEN WRITTEN

This book has been split into two distinct parts to help you in your writing journey.

**Part One** is all about the things you should be doing before you even get started on a draft or an outline. In this first part, I'm going to be covering the foundational knowledge of a book: what a book is, figuring out your genre and subgenre, and more. I'll also be talking about the mindset of a writer, what you need to write your book, and where you'll be writing. Finally, I'll wrap up Part One with the basics of plotting and planning. Just the idea of planning might make some of you groan, so chill out for a second, because I have ways of outlining and structuring for those who love to plan and those who absolutely hate it.

**Part Two** is where we get to the good stuff: writing your first draft. I'll go over the key elements of a kickass book, as well as the more technical stuff like point of view, active and passive voice, and more. Together we'll do a deep dive into what it takes to make the perfect plot, compelling characters, and tantalizing themes. And I'll even help you out with ways to actually get your book written (again, it's a long, sometimes difficult journey) and what to do when you encounter setbacks like the dreaded writer's block. Don't worry, it's not as scary as it sounds.

This second part is, for hopefully obvious reasons, the biggest section of the book. That doesn't mean that it's the only part worth reading. I'm saying it loud for the future bestselling authors in the

back of the room: there is more to writing a book than just having a cool story.

Another thing to know while you're reading through this book is that I'm not claiming one way of writing is better than another. In fact, you'll find options throughout the book for both plotters (people who love outlining and structuring their story before they write) and pantsers (people whose skin burns at the mere mention of planning) and everyone in between.

Don't worry, I've got your back, no matter who you are.

That's what we do at Dabble: we make stuff to help writers write. It's what we're most passionate about and why we go to work every day.

So devour this book in a few hours or over a weekend, then use what you learn to actually get writing. Easier said than done though, right?

Luckily for you, Dabble is here to help. With a novel-writing platform built for writers, by writers, it has never been easier or more fun to write the novel that's been burning a hole in your head. Dabble comes complete with our famous Plot Grid to make plot holes a thing of the past, and makes sure that all your chapters, scenes, and notes are no more than a click away. With built-in goal tracking, an interface that lets you focus on writing (the important part), and more features being voted on and added regularly, Dabble is the tool you deserve to have on your side.

Best of all, you can try it out for fourteen days, absolutely free. You don't even need to put in a credit card. Check us out at

<https://www.dabblewriter.com>.

Now get reading and learn everything you need to know to write your first draft.

# PART ONE: BEFORE YOU WRITE

# CHAPTER 1: BOOK BASICS

What is a book?

Seems kind of like a dumb question, given the sort of people who will be reading this. Bear with me though, because there's some important fundamentals that you might not even be aware of.

In this chapter, I'm going to establish a baseline for what every book—no, every *good* book—needs. But I'll keep it short because you want to get writing, right?

## THE THREE BASIC STORY ELEMENTS

At its core, a book is just a long story, and every story has three basic elements that make it successful: plot, characters, and theme. Scholars (aka me and the other writers at Dabble) might argue which is more important of the three, but the reality is that they are all essential to a quality story.

Throughout this book, especially in Part Two, we are going to revisit these three elements in a lot more detail but, again, this chapter is here to establish a foundation.

## Plot

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines plot as: *the plan or main story.*

Thanks, Merriam-Webster. This section is now done.

For real though, the plot of your book is the story that you're telling. It's Dorothy getting swept away to Oz and finding her way home. It's a handful of orphans going through a wardrobe and getting transported to Narnia to become royalty after hanging out with talking animals. It's the journey a refugee family makes as they are fleeing the dangers of home and hoping for a better life for their kids.

Plot is the story.

So, if your plot doesn't make sense, is convoluted, is weak, or is filled with dreaded plot holes (aka inconsistencies), then your book is going to suffer as a result. No matter how strong the characters and theme are, they can't carry a bad plot to success.

Sprinkled amongst your plot, you also have subplots. These are stories within your story, often focusing on a single character or a handful of them. Subplots contribute to the overall narrative while strengthening the other two elements that we're about to cover.

## Characters

Alright Merriam-Webster, lay it on us: *one of the persons of a drama or novel.*

Nailed it.

Characters are the people, animals, sentient vegetables, etc. in your story. But within a story, not all characters are built the same. You will

have main characters, secondary characters, and tertiary characters.

**Main characters** are central to moving the plot in your book. These could be your protagonist (the hero, the one we're rooting for) or your antagonist (the villain, the one working against your protagonist). You aren't limited to just one protagonist or antagonist, depending on your story.

**Secondary characters** are still pretty dang important to the overall plot but aren't the stars of the show. They might only be involved in a handful of scenes with the main characters, but their impact should still be noticeable. Just like main characters, secondary characters can work for or against the goals of the protagonist or antagonist.

**Tertiary characters** are more like background or occasional characters. Some of them might be named in your story, some might not be. Some might be in a couple scenes, others might just appear for a line or two in a single scene. These types of characters usually add detail to the world or story but often aren't critical to the larger plot.

Where our first element, plot, is just the story, it's your cast of characters that will push your story forward. Without strong characters, even the best plot in the world will flounder.

So then what makes a strong character?

I'm going to give you a bunch of ways to strengthen your characters in Part Two, but just take a moment to think about the last book that made you love the characters. Make a list of what captivated you so much. That list might include things like:

- They had a very detailed back story.

- They displayed traits that you found admirable.
- They displayed traits that shocked or horrified you, thus making them a good villain.
- You could easily picture them in your mind.
- You related to their struggles.
- You liked how they grew over the course of the story.

The list could go on and on. There are a ton of things that can make a character strong, so try thinking of a few before we get to Part Two.

That last detail on our list is an important one, too; your main characters in your story, whether they are the protagonist or antagonist, will likely change as a result of some sort of conflict, either external or internal. These changes are called arcs, and all the best characters have them. We'll cover character arcs in detail later in the book.

For now, just remember that a cast of great characters is what truly draws a reader in and brings the story to life.

## Theme

The last of the three basic story elements, theme is defined as: *a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation.*

That's a little complicated but is at least more interesting than the last two definitions. To put it a little more simply, the theme is the human truth or social message you are trying to get across within your story. It isn't explicitly stated within your plot or by a character, but it is demonstrated by a series of events throughout the plot to paint a larger picture.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the biggest theme is self-sufficiency. Dorothy, despite fields of intoxicating flowers, evil witches, and absolutely terrifying flying monkeys (seriously, they gave me nightmares), makes it to the city of Oz. Her companions—the Lion, Tin Man, and Scarecrow—also find it within themselves to overcome what they thought were their shortcomings.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has a bunch of themes swirling around in it, which is perfectly okay for a book to do. It examines how good triumphs over evil, how humans have the capacity to forgive (but come on, Edmund, she's called the White Witch), and the sacrifices that people sometimes have to make to achieve their goals.

At face value, a theme might not seem like a critical component to a book. Sure, you can write an awesome space opera that focuses on great characters and a really cool story, but do you really *need* a theme?

Again, we have a whole chapter in Part Two dedicated to theme, but for now just know that yes, your book needs a theme. Luckily for you, you don't need to come up with the perfect theme right now. That usually develops as you write.

## OTHER BOOK THINGS

A book isn't just the plot, characters, and themes. There are some less abstract elements that go into the creation of a book, too. Let's rapid-fire our way through this section, since these are all likely concepts you've been introduced to but might not know the specifics of.

### How Long is a Book?

This seems like something that every writer Googles at the beginning of their career. The answer might vary from person to person, but here are some good guidelines to follow.

**Flash Fiction:** Under 500 words

**Children's Picture Book:** 500-600 words

**Children's Chapter Book:** 1,000-10,000 words

**Short Story:** 5,000-10,000 words (though some are less than 5,000)

**Novella:** 10,000-40,000 words

**Novel:** 40,000+ words

It's important to note that some genres and styles vary, even within these guidelines. For example, Young Adult books are best kept between 40,000-70,000 words, while fantasy books tend to range from 90,000-150,000 words.

For those looking to get published through traditional publishers, most first-time authors should aim for less than 100,000 words, as printing costs for larger word counts can cannibalize your chances at getting published.

## Chapters in a Book

Within most books, you will find chapters: a scene or collections of scenes that form the bigger plot. There aren't any hard and fast rules that chapters *must* follow, though.

Some authors have ten or more pages per chapter, while others are happy to have a single page (or less!) be a chapter. Some authors don't have any chapters at all!

Chapters are really good at maintaining the pace of your story. Shorter chapters mean shorter breaks and more interruptions. Longer chapters force your reader to hang around longer, usually indicating a slower pace. No chapters means no interruptions, so the pace is more suited to action-adventure stories.

Honestly, find what works best for your story and just go with it. You will never please everyone.

If you want to become an expert on chapters and impress all your writing friends, check out some of our articles over on DabbleU: <https://www.dabblewriter.com/dabble-u-secondary-category/structure>

## Standalone Book vs. Series of Books

A series of books is just a big story told over multiple normal-sized (which is totally subjective) stories. Because of this, you can use the principles you learn in this book to help craft a bigger series.

Still, writing a series is a massive endeavor. Where some people struggle with maintaining their focus and enthusiasm for a book over weeks and months, you must do the same with a series for *years*. That's a heck of a commitment.

New authors should consider starting their writing career with a standalone book—one that doesn't have sequels and finishes its plot without new stories or loose ends—rather than a series. This isn't to say that you can't start with a series. I'm not your parent, I don't get to tell you what to do.

But remember that writing is a skill and, like all skills, it is one you will develop the more you practice. That means that your second book is going to be better than your first book. Your fifth book will be better than your fourth. So, it's not that your series will be bad if you start your writing career with *Book One of the Coolest Series Ever*, but understand that the series might be weakened because the first book you ever wrote is the one that kicks it all off.

All that being said, you can have an amazing first book in your series if you take what you learn in this book and commit to writing your best story.

## WHAT'S UP WITH GENRES?

Another important part of writing your book is the genre you're writing in. Genre helps us writers understand what we're doing in the first place and who will read it after all our hard work. A book's genre is also crucial for a reader to decide if they want to pick it up in the first place.

By writing within a genre—which, spoiler, we all do whether we admit it or not—you are setting up certain expectations for a reader. From subject matter to pacing to the length of the book itself, genres fill readers with confidence that what they are about to read will at least

fall into their interests, even if it doesn't become their new favorite book.

Think about it this way: a reader picking up a science fiction novel might be expecting to see a spaceship at some point during the story (not all sci-fi novels have spaceships, but that would be your go-to genre to find a spaceship). On the other hand, someone who picks up a historical romance book will be shocked to see a spaceship show up. That's a surefire way to have your book put down for good. If you ignore the fundamentals or expectations of your genre, you will quickly find your readers disappointed in your book.

To make things a little more complicated, genres also have subgenres, which are niches within the broader category. Think epic fantasy or urban fantasy. Historical romance or paranormal romance. Climate sci-fi vs. space travel sci-fi. These subgenres let you get very specific in your story and truly appeal to fans, because not everyone who likes one subgenre likes the other subgenres in that category.

So what are genres all about? I'm going to quickly go over the most popular genres to help you become more familiar with them and, by the end of the chapter, choose which genre is best for you. And before get any angry tweets or emails, let it be known that the subgenres listed are not exhaustive but will hopefully inspire you to look a little further into some of these categories.

## **Action-Adventure**

This genre is all about maintaining a fast pace and a lot of action. It usually involves a hero or heroes racing towards a goal in order to

stop something bad from happening. Characters go on journeys that range from personal to worldwide.

**Key characteristics:** Breakneck pacing, danger, acts of courage and heroism, a sense of time running out or impending doom

**Subgenres:** None, though there is a lot of overlap with other genres.

**Examples:** The Da Vinci Code, The Hobbit, The Maze Runner

## Fantasy

Fantasy stories are usually marked by the presence of magical or other supernatural forces. They can have non-human species that are common in the world (think orcs, elves, etc.) and technology is usually less developed because, well, magic. Fight scenes are detailed on both large and small scales, and the world itself is quite different than what we know.

**Key characteristics:** Mythological or supernatural elements, magical powers, wondrous worlds

**Subgenres:** Dark fantasy, epic fantasy, high fantasy, magical realism, urban fantasy

**Examples:** Harry Potter, American Gods, City of Bones, The Lord of the Rings, Twilight, The Princess Bride

## Historical Fiction

Not everything in books has to be completely made up. Historical fiction weaves new stories by using known people or places from history. Stories in this genre might take place during a particular social or political event, too. When writing historical fiction, particular

attention must be paid to details in dialogue, clothing, mannerisms, and more. Historical fiction can blend well with sci-fi (via time travel), romance, and fantasy.

**Key characteristics:** Real people, places, and events from history, accuracy and increased presence of details

**Subgenres:** Historical romance, multi-period epics, alternate histories, time travel

**Examples:** A Tale of Two Cities, The Mists of Avalon, The Man in the High Castle, War and Peace, Chesapeake, Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell

## Horror

Meant to scare or shock, horror is a genre filled with the macabre and the terrifying. From ghosts and monsters to psychological thrillers and serial killers, the horror genre is meant to make your reader uncomfortable in the best possible way.

**Key characteristics:** Creates a feeling of fear or dread in both the reader and the characters. Can be realistic or involve supernatural elements.

**Subgenres:** Gothic horror, Lovecraftian horror, hardcore/splatterpunk, psychological horror

**Examples:** The Shining, The Final Girl Support Group, No One Gets Out Alive, Night Chills

## Literary Fiction

This is more of a term for a story that doesn't fall under any other genre. Literary fiction is marked by stories that are more or less realistic. They don't have elements of magic or science fiction, but they also don't focus on scaring someone or people falling in love. Stories in this genre could be based on actual events but are still made up.

**Key characteristics:** The protagonist experiences an important internal transformation, the theme is deeper and more meaningful than other genres

**Subgenres:** None

**Examples:** Holes, The Hate U Give, A Time Outside This Time

## Mystery and Crime

From your classic whodunits to modern day vigilantes solving crimes, the mystery and crime genres both focus on unraveling secrets and figuring out a bigger question. In this type of book, the reader learns new information as the characters do, slowly piecing together the solution as they read along.

**Key characteristics:** A single question that moves the story forward, rising tension, and gradually revealing clues

**Subgenres:** Capers and heists, whodunits, closed-room mysteries, private detectives, noir

**Examples:** Sherlock Holmes, Murder on the Orient Express, The Missing American

## Romance

Love is in the air with this genre, which is consistently the most read and purchased genre in the world. Romance books can take many shapes, but they are all marked by some sort of love story between the main characters, and always have a HEA (happily ever after) or HFN (happy for now) ending.

**Key Characteristics:** Sympathetic protagonist(s), emotional tension, intimacy (physical or emotional), strong emphasis on love

**Subgenres:** Young adult, paranormal, historical, erotic, romcom

**Examples:** The Hating Game, Crazy Rich Asians, Bridget Jones's Diary, Me Before You, It Happened One Summer

## Science Fiction

Marked by scientific advancements ahead of our own (during the time it was written), science fiction or sci-fi is like fantasy of the future. Technology, robots, space or time travel, and inventions most of us can't even fathom are all hallmarks of this genre.

**Key characteristics:** Plot heavily influenced by the setting, advanced scientific concepts, an alternate timeline or dimension

**Subgenres:** Climate fiction, dystopian, space opera, hard sci-fi, military sci-fi, artificial intelligence, steampunk, cyberpunk, time travel

**Examples:** The Hunger Games, The Giver, Hardwired, Neuromancer, Dune

## Suspense and Thriller

Though they can overlap with the horror genre, suspense and thriller stories often forsake the supernatural and grotesque for anticipation,

imminent danger, and atmosphere. Because of this, suspense stories can borrow from other genres—horror, fantasy, sci-fi, action-adventure, and so on—to slow down the pace and make them more tense. This type of story is all about putting your reader on the edge of their seat until everything comes together... or crashing down.

**Key characteristics:** Physical or psychological danger, anticipation, pursuit, a gut-wrenching number of cliffhangers

**Subgenres:** Crime, spy and espionage, historical, legal, psychological, political, disaster

**Examples:** Quake, The Killer Collective, Silence of the Lambs, The Girl on the Train, Gone Girl

## Western

Marked by rugged plains, law at the end of a gun's barrel, horses, and wide-brimmed cowboy hats, the Western genre is a staple of American literature that usually takes place in the 19th century. This genre is marked by law being introduced or enforced in otherwise lawless places, using both historical and fictional characters.

Older works in this genre sometimes portrayed white characters as forces of good against American Indians, which gave rise to many racist stories and characters. If you go with a western story, focus on the romance, action, adventure, and trailblazing.

**Key characteristics:** Set in the American West, romance, adventure, survival

**Subgenres:** Bounty hunters, land or gold rush, outlaws, weird west

**Examples:** The Chuckwagon Trail, The Autumn of the Gun, Three-Ten to Yuma and Other Stories, really anything by Louis L'Amour

## NOT-HOMEWORK: WHAT IS YOUR GENRE AND SUBGENRE?

Here is your first bit of not-homework (isn't it more fun when I say it like that?). It's a pretty easy one, I promise.

Take your notebook or open up a new note in Dabble and list what genre and subgenre your book is going to fall under. Feel free to make some additional notes that you find helpful, like what key characteristics your story will use from your chosen category.

Once you've done that, you're ready for Chapter Two!

## CHAPTER 2: THREE STEPS TO GET READY TO WRITE

So you've got your genre and subgenre down. It must be time to get writing, right?

Not so fast.

Think back to when I mentioned that there is a lot more to being a writer than just your writing. In this chapter, I'm going to introduce the three things you should get in order before you journey into all that fun writing stuff.

No, these aren't necessarily mandatory for you to do first, but I'm all about establishing that strong foundation to set you up for success. The last thing I want to see is a new writer diving into their story, getting discouraged, and giving up before that story can even see the light of day.

Let's get you set up to write in three easy steps.

### STEP ONE: SET UP YOUR WRITING SPACE

Picture this: you're sitting down to write what is sure to be a bestselling novel. Maybe you're in an Italian villa overlooking the Adriatic Sea. Maybe you've just gotten back from visiting a temple in Thailand.

Or maybe you're just at a desk in your spare bedroom.

Even though you *can* write anywhere, it is a great idea to set up a place specifically for you to write. This is *your* space, a place for you to put up motivational quotes and cat posters, keep your favorite books about writing (like this one!), and make as comfortable as you want.

Most importantly though, it is a place where you can distance yourself from distractions.

Some of the biggest enemies your writing career will face are distractions. And while I call them enemies, they come in many forms: social media, your phone, emails, your family, dirty dishes, laundry, video games, books, movies, snacks, shelves that need dusting, floors that need mopping, lawns that need mowing. The list is near-infinite.

All of these are things you could easily use to justify not writing. But when you are in your writing space, those things don't exist. You don't see the dirty dishes or laundry. You don't have a chance to play video games (this might mean disabling your computer's Wi-Fi). Your family knows that most things can wait while you're in your writing space.

This writing space establishes both mental and physical boundaries, allowing your brain to focus on nothing but the story you want it to

write. It also starts to create a routine, so your brain automatically enters writing mode as you return to the same place.

When thinking about your writing space, consider four important pieces: comfort, focus, inspiration, and a spark.

**Comfort:** Obviously one of the most important things to think about when creating a writing space. You don't want a location that will lull you to sleep, but your writing space shouldn't cause aches or pains if you spend more than an hour there on a long writing session.

Comfort means something different to everyone, but make sure your writing space doesn't make you feel too cramped, too rigid, or too anxious (read: keep it clean).

**Focus:** Your writing space is all about helping you focus on the task at hand. This means you might want somewhere that has a door to keep out distractions. Maybe your writing space is on the other side of the house from the chores you need to get to afterwards. Maybe your focus is maintained simply by putting headphones on while sitting at the kitchen table. Wherever it is, make sure you can focus in your writing space. A sweet bonus: if you use Dabble to write, it automatically enters Focus Mode to get rid of the screen clutter once your fingers start flying.

**Inspiration:** Writing is an art form, so a little inspiration can go a long way. Inspiration could be project-specific: you can keep a picture or trinket around that helps you think about the next scene. It could also be motivation-based, like the aforementioned poster of a cat with "Hang in there, baby." up on the wall. So what inspires you?

**Spark:** This is a fun one. No, I don't want you to set your writing space on fire. Pick something sensory that you do every time you sit

down (or stand) in your writing space to tell your mind that it is time to be creative. This is something that shouldn't really happen outside of this space. Perhaps you light a specific candle, listen to a specific song, or make a specific drink. Make it activate one or more of your senses to truly turn it into a creative spark.

One last thing to think about when choosing your writing space is your body's health. Yes, typing in your bed might be comfortable but it will wreak havoc on your neck, back, and wrists. Typing by candlelight can seem cool, but it will do damage to your eyes—and seriously, who is typing by candlelight?

Writing a book takes a long time, so you are going to be in the same position for up to an hour or more at once. Make sure that your writing space isn't negatively impacting your body and, for the majority of people who will be sitting at a desk or table, consider investing in some ergonomic items.

And a little tip: clean up your writing space every time you finish writing. Cleanliness is next to godliness, and godliness is next to writing an awesome book.

## STEP TWO: ASSEMBLE YOUR WRITING TOOLKIT

Even with the best writing space, you still need some tools to write your masterpiece. It's easy to get caught up in wanting the shiniest new thing to add to your toolkit, but we're going to keep it simple.

Simple means less distractions to clutter your writing space and get in the way of your creative process. It also means not spending money on every toy marketed to writers. Heck, you could get going with just a pencil and some paper, but that might be *too* simple.

When you boil it right down, your writing toolkit only needs a few things to get you going. As you grow as a writer, you can add things to your toolkit along the way that you find particularly helpful. But for now, here's what we suggest you add to your repertoire.

## Writing Software

Unless you are one of those purists who refuses to use anything but pencil and paper or a typewriter, you're going to need something to write with. There are a bunch of platforms out there like Google Docs or Microsoft Word; these platforms are free or inexpensive and provide you with a blank digital piece of paper to type on.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are platforms with so many features that most writers won't ever use them all.

Your job is to find the software that works best for you.

Take Dabble, for instance. Our whole thing is making a platform that is built specifically for fiction writers. In Dabble, you can separate parts, chapters, and scenes, make world and character notes that are just a single click away, and use our awesome Plot Grid to map out your story like the pros so you have your notes for each scene right there as you're writing.

All set in a user-friendly, modern platform to limit those pesky distractions.

At the end of the day though, only you know what's best for you. So on your journey to figuring out your writing software, why not give Dabble's Premium features a try for fourteen days, absolutely free (and *actually* free, no credit card required) by visiting

<https://www.dabblewriter.com>.

## A Timer

One of the best ways to encourage your brain to get creative is to put a time limit on it. For writers, this is especially true. Writing fiction isn't really something you can do for eight hours a day, no matter how much you want. That would just be exhausting. My eyes hurt from thinking about staring at pages of text for eight hours in a row.

Luckily, there are two different tried-and-true methods of writing that will stimulate and train your creative muscles. Both of these methods need a timer.

The first is to just set a timer for an hour and don't get up until that hour is done. I hope you didn't drink too much coffee or tea before you started. If you sit down every day for an hour-long writing session—preferably at the same time each day—you will find that creativity comes more easily to you during those sessions. It becomes your writing time, a sacred hour (or two or three if you can afford that many hours in a day) where you are alone with your craft.

Sounds great to me.

The second method is the more fast-paced writing sprint.

Made popular with modern writers by author Chris Fox in his book *5,000 Words Per Hour*, writing sprints are a series of small bursts of writing. For most authors, you'll follow a pattern like fifteen or twenty minutes of writing, followed by a five-minute break. Then another fifteen or twenty minutes of writing, then another break. Repeat for as long as you can.

The idea is that you write as much as you can during the sprints, not taking any time to worry about word choice, spelling, punctuation, or

anything else that can be fixed up later. Get those words out, then use the break to breathe, recover, refill your coffee, answer the call of nature, text your mom back. Then do it again.

True to the name of his book, Fox uses this method to write 5,000 words in an hour. That's a massive number of words. Even though some of those will be cut or changed while revising and editing, this method makes finishing your first draft a lot faster.

Writing sprints can be a great way to be social with other authors, too. Hop on a video call in Discord or Facebook Messenger and crank out those words for fifteen minutes. Then, during the break, share your success and what scene you managed to write with the others, and use their victories to motivate yourself.

If you have a phone, you have a timer, so this item is pretty easy to add to your toolkit.

If you want to embrace the magic of writing sprints, Dabble has made a tool available to every writer everywhere, for absolutely free, over at <https://www.wordsprints.org>.

You can easily set up your own writing sprints or schedule a group one to invite your author friends! Even if you don't use this right now, keep it in mind come November and National Novel Writing Month.

We've also set up an amazing community of writers over at the Story Craft Café ([storycraft.cafe](http://storycraft.cafe)), where we host writing sprints every week. If you haven't checked it out, head on over and introduce yourself. It's like writing Twitter but more fun and with cooler people.

## A Way to Take Notes

Even if you think you will remember every single idea and detail that pops into your head while you're writing, you won't. Not unless you have some kind of superhuman memory that can log every little thought, no matter how small.

While you're writing, ideas and inspiration will peek out from behind your words. You'll mutter, "Wow, that would be great in the last chapter." or, "I want to change this detail about the frames of my villain's glasses." When those moments happen, you should write them down.

If you don't, they could get lost in the void forever.

You might not be a fan of making extremely detailed notes before you start writing but taking notes as you write is a great way to make sure you limit plot holes and capitalize on inspiration when it strikes.

To help out, Dabble not only has a dedicated Story Notes section, but you can create comments and sticky notes as you go. Note taking has never been easier or more fun!

But again, some of you purists might thrive using a pen and paper to take notes. There is nothing wrong with that. You do you, Hemmingway.

## A Few Bonus Tools

There are a few other items you can toss in your toolkit to make your writing a bit easier. Like I mentioned before, an item or trinket that inspires you is always handy to have. It can live in your writing space but, if it's small enough, can also be brought with you if you decide to write on the couch one morning rather than in your normal spot.

Since we never stop learning (or referencing what we've learned), you might want to keep a handful of your favorite writing resources close by, too. Have a question about characterization or story structure after a few writing sprints? Just check your pile of resources.

Not everything has to be physical, either. We're always growing our own online bank of resources we call DabbleU. This is an ever-expanding library of resources made for writers just like you. Check out DabbleU at: <https://www.dabblewriter.com/dabble-u>

Maybe you want your favorite pen in your writing toolkit. Maybe you want a nice bag to hold everything. Maybe you want some kind of fidget to play with while your mind tries to catch up with your typing. Your toolkit is yours, so add what you want. Just remember simpler is often better.

### STEP THREE: FORM YOUR WRITING MINDSET

The last thing you need before we embark on your book is the proper writing mindset. Going into writing without the proper frame of mind will inevitably lead to burnout, a lack of motivation, frustration, and a lot of unfinished books.

It cannot be understated how important getting into the right mindset is. That's why I've put it so early in the book. If you keep these mindset tips at the forefront while reading the remaining chapters and when you go to write your own, it will reinforce everything you're about to learn.

To truly embrace the writing mindset, you must understand the why, the process, and the discipline.

## Understand the Why

Why do you want to write a book?

Seems like a pretty simple question. You probably have a really quick answer for it, too.

If you don't, that's fine! Here are some of the most common reasons:

- You love writing
- You have a story you really want to tell
- You're an avid reader and want to try your hand at writing a book
- Being an author is a lifelong dream of yours
- You want a career change

Whatever your *why* is, write it down and post it in your writing space.

Put it somewhere you will see it every time you sit down to write.

When motivation is lacking—and there will be moments when it's lacking—your *why* will keep you going.

## Understand the Process

Writing a book is one of the longest processes that any creative person or artist will face. Writing the first draft alone takes months, not to mention the planning and outlining before that draft, then the revising, beta reading, more revising, editing, formatting, marketing, and publishing that comes afterwards.

When I say “understand the process,” I don't mean that you need to have a thorough understanding of all those pieces to the writing puzzle. That can only come through experience and time.

But what you need to understand is that writing isn't a quick nor an easy journey. Like I said, it can take months—maybe longer—to write your first draft. That's months of waking up an hour early or spending half an hour during your lunch or after work every day to write.

Every. Day.

And if it doesn't happen every day—because we're human and that's perfectly fine—it's another day more that you need to write.

That's daunting.

That's downright scary.

And to make matters worse, writing is hard! There are going to be setbacks and moments when you just don't want to write. There are going to be times when you are just going to stare at a blank page. At other times you will have *wished* the page was blank because what you wrote can be awful.

The process is long and difficult. But it's totally worth it.

There are few things as fulfilling as finishing the book that has been burning in your mind for years. It makes the entire process bearable.

So just remember when you are working your way through this process, it will be difficult... and it will be amazing.

## Understand the Discipline

This touches on something from the last section, but let's elaborate on it more. Writing a book takes discipline. It takes sitting down for dozens, maybe hundreds of hours in total to start and finish your first

draft. If you don't have the discipline to do that—or aren't willing to grow that discipline—then you risk never finishing your book.

You've heard it before and you will hear it again many times before the end of this book, but the best thing you can do to establish the discipline that writers need is make writing a habit. Set aside some time every day, ideally the same time each day if that works for you. By blocking off this time for writing, you are accomplishing two important things.

First, you are establishing more boundaries that have already been put in place by your writing space. These boundaries will exist for other people in your home—your partner or kids will learn that this is time when you're busy—but they will also reinforce boundaries you've placed on yourself. No checking emails during writing time. No loading the dishwasher. No scrolling through social media for hours on end.

Just write.

The second thing that blocking off time accomplishes is the all-important process of habit building. It takes, on average, over two months of daily repetition to make a habit automatic. For some habits, it can take closer to 250 days. For others, more like three weeks. Writing is a little more complex than, say, making your bed as soon as you wake up in the morning, so don't go hoping for that shorter timeframe.

But why is building a writing habit important?

When something is a habit, it happens automatically. You won't need to psych yourself up for writing. You won't worry about whether or not

you'll be blessed with creativity today. You will just write. And you'll write a lot.

By forming a writing habit, it's easy to master the discipline you need to work through your first book—and your next, and your next, and so on. We'll revisit this again when we talk about writer's block and losing motivation.

## What *Doesn't* Get Your Book Written

So we've established the three things you need to understand before you start writing your book. Unless you're an experienced author, it's going to take some time to perfect your writing mindset. That's okay. Writing is a journey, and you might just be starting yours.

Before we move on to the next chapter though, I wanted to help clarify the things that *don't* get your book written. In the writing world, it's easy to justify procrastination. Especially for first-time authors, you aren't working with the pressure of an external deadline or fans leaving a comment on every single social media post asking when the next book is coming out.

So here are some common sources of procrastination that authors use to justify not writing. Spoiler: none of these are actually valid excuses.

**Checking email** is one of the most time-consuming and momentum-disrupting activities that human beings perform throughout the day. On average, people receive 121 business emails *per day*. Even if you spent one minute reading each one, that's two hours of your life. That doesn't take into account the spam email we receive, the

replies we have to write, and the way some emails can affect our mood and desire to write.

When you're in your writing space, don't check emails. When you're writing, disable email notifications. Just ignore them. They'll be there when you return.

**Reading (even books about writing)** is such an easy excuse for writers who don't feel like they're in the mood to write. "At least it's making me a better writer, right?" is a line that has been muttered by too many authors.

The *best* way to become a better writer is to—shockingly—write. Yes, it's important to learn about the craft, which is why I wrote this book and included resources in your writing toolkit, but there is a time for reading about writing and there is a time for writing. Those are two separate times, not one time shared between the two.

**Posting on social media about writing** is not a substitute for writing. Authors who are looking to make a living or a partial living out of their work will have to capitalize on social media, but your author platforms need you to be an author. That means writing a book.

Social media is the same thing as reading about writing: both are important, but neither of them should take the place of writing. Carve out some time, even as little as thirty minutes per week, to create and schedule some social media posts, but don't use your sacred writing time to do it.

**Waiting for the clouds to part and have creativity drift down from the heavens to bless your keyboard** is a very specific thing that way too many writers are guilty of. Your story is living inside your

mind. Your creativity, your imagination, and your writing skills are all in there, too.

You don't need an external force to push you every single time you need to write. You'll be waiting for a very, very long time for that to happen.

You are a writer. Embrace that sentiment, think about your *why*, and feel empowered. Write an amazing story. You can do it, and no one or nothing else can do it for you.

Now, with all of that in mind, let's start planning your book.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: SET UP YOUR WRITING SPACE AND TOOLKIT

Another piece of not-homework—and I'm not sorry about it.

Take a little bit of time to set up your writing space and toolkit.

Remember the key pieces you need for each.

For your writing space, look for:

- Focus
- Comfort
- Inspiration
- Your writing spark

For your writing toolkit, include:

- A word processor (and don't forget about Dabble's fourteen-day free trial at <https://www.dabblewriter.com>)
- A timer
- A way to take notes
- Your favorite writing resources

Set this book down and go set up your writing space and toolkit, then you will be ready to start working on your book!

## CHAPTER 3: PLOT FOUNDATIONS

Okay, practitioners of the literary arts, it's time to get started on your book. Together we've laid the foundation for being a writer in the first two chapters, but now it's time to really get down to business (cue *Let's Get Down to Business* from Mulan).

In this chapter, we're going to cover the exciting—or dreaded—tasks of plotting and planning. My hope is that, by the time you've read this chapter, you have a half-decent understanding of your book and its plot.

First things first though, we need to figure out what kind of writer you are: a plotter, a pantsler, or somewhere in between. This information will help guide you through the rest of this book, because not all writers are built the same!

### PLOTTERS VS. PANTSERS VS. PLANTSERS

So, as I just mentioned, there are two polar opposites when it comes to writers: plotters and pantsers. Understand that there is no right or wrong role to adopt. As you're about to find out, being more of a plotter has its pros and cons, as does being more of a pantsler. And,

like most things in life, plotters and pantsers can learn from one another.

So, who are plotters and pantsers, and what does having one of those titles mean for your writing? Let's find out.

## Plotters

Does the idea of crafting a perfect outline excite you? Do you create a lot of to-do lists and maybe even color-code them? Do you have nightmares about writing your first draft without knowing what every single scene is going to be?

Then you might be a plotter.

Plotters are the type of writers who will spend hours outlining and making notes about their story before they even write the first sentence of their book. These writers love adding meticulous details to their character sheets and the history of the world they've built.

Being a plotter often means that you're closing plot holes before they get a chance to show up in your story. It means that you spend a lot of time in the pre-writing stages but are able to quickly write your first draft, often with fewer revisions needed than your pantsers counterparts.

On the flip-side, plotters often obsess about their outlines and planning documents to the point where they never start writing. If the outline isn't perfect, how can the book be? That's what some hardcore—albeit anxious—plotters think. Plotters often use this as an excuse for procrastination.

## Pantsers

On the other end of the writing spectrum are pantsers, so named because they tend to “write by the seat of their pants.” Pantsers follow their impulses while writing, often coming up with subplots that work well without even thinking about them beforehand.

It doesn't matter if what you're writing is a novel or a short story, because pantsers treat both with the same level of planning: minimal.

Just like plotting, there are some pros and cons of living this rebel lifestyle. Pantsers get their first draft done a lot faster than plotters. They are not restricted by a perfect outline before they write, they just write. This is an excellent way to meet writer's block head-on (and we'll cover that dreaded enemy later in the book).

Pantsers are also, with practice, more adept at identifying plot holes and errors along the way. They are more willing to change what they've written than plotters who are working from the in-depth notes they've created.

All that being said, being a pantser has its drawbacks. If you can't just brute force your way through writer's block or an obstacle in your story, you don't really have notes to turn to. While experienced pantsers are able to identify most plot holes on the fly, newer pantsers are not and can end up with a story riddled with potential problems. It's also difficult for a lot of pantsers to properly arrive at the end of their story. Sure, you know what you want the end of your book to be, but actually getting there can be difficult for pantsers.

Finally, pantsers will likely do a lot more revising to their first draft than plotters. The first draft itself is more like an outline, something that you write and then revise until it's perfect.

## Planters: The Grey Area

You would be hard-pressed to find writers who are plotting or pantsing purists; both are such extremes that they become rigid and unadaptable to most writing. That's why these styles are more like two separate ends of a writing spectrum with planters—a mix of plotters and pantsers—falling in between them.

Almost all writers fall somewhere in the planter grey area, even if they lean more heavily towards one end of the spectrum or the other. This allows a good amount of flexibility when approaching your writing.

Perhaps you create a decent outline but leave room for new ideas as you go. Maybe you do a very basic outline—just a start and an end—but make up the rest as you write.

Other writers might spend a lot of time creating their characters but let their world build itself or vice versa. Some authors create a detailed outline but change that outline as characters evolve, new scenes emerge, or if something isn't quite working. There are even some writers who will completely scrap their outline if they need to change something big.

There are so many different ways to write within the plotter-pantser spectrum. If this is your first (or second or third) time writing a book, odds are you haven't even found the perfect method that works for you. The only way you can find it is by trying out all the different options available to you.

I kept that in mind while writing this book. While some of the tips and exercises are a little skewed towards planning (which I think is

beneficial for newer writers), I've provided alternatives for those who are more pantsers-inclined. My goal is to help you find the writing style that works best for you so you can crush that first draft.

So, assuming you really want to be the best writer you can be, keep an open mind and approach the rest of the book as a journey of discovery to find out what your best writing style is.

With that, let's start your book.

## WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

I know your story is buzzing around in your head, so it's time to get it on paper (whether digital or physical paper is up to you). We're going to take a mental vacuum and suck that idea right out of your brain.

Sounds so pleasant.

So what is the story that you want to tell?

A pretty straightforward question. It's probably one you've thought about multiple times. But now you're going to bring it to life. This is a very simple yet powerful exercise for both pantsers and plotters.

Take that Story Note in Dabble, that piece of paper, or blank document and **write down one or two sentences that describe your book.**

Don't worry about spoilers or fine details, those can come later. We just want a basic summary of the story you want to tell.

Alright, now you're going to **take those one or two sentences and expand them into one or two paragraphs.** Again, we're not looking for explicit detail or even character names if you don't have them yet. Just elaborate more on what's happening throughout your story.

And that's it! Step one in writing your book is done! That wasn't so painful, was it? This is the little seed from which the rest of your story will grow.

But we're not done with it yet.

Next, you're going to take that summary and share it with people, specifically people who read your genre. These folks can be friends, family, or a group you're part of on social media. Regardless of who they are—though again, they should be readers of the genre you want to write in—ask them what they think of the book idea.

By sharing your book summary in text form, you're accomplishing a couple things.

First, you don't need to be as anxious about sharing your idea (though I know it can be scary sharing it), and that anxiety won't get in the way of you articulating your summary. Second, you're meeting readers where they're at. Rather than forcing them to interpret your ideas through their ears, they are able to read, reread, and analyze what you have.

Remind them that you aren't looking for Sherlock Holmes-level criticism or suggestions. You just want to know if it sounds like it could make a good story. Make note of what they say and keep some of those suggestions in mind as you go forward. You might even revisit your summary to change it a little, but try not to take any negative or constructive criticism to heart.

I'm being this cruel and forcing you to share this summary for two reasons: it not only lets you get feedback but can also weed out early ideas that might lead to bad stories.

Remember when I made you come up with *why* you write? If you're writing for commercial reasons—to be a published author or to make supplemental or full-time income from your writing—then you need to write books that people are interested in. If your initial summary doesn't spark that interest or just seems like a dozen other books they've already read, then it's best to make changes early on before you've written 60,000+ words.

If you're writing for other reasons—as a hobby, to get your feet wet, to help with your mental health, etc.—then you don't necessarily need to worry about the marketability of your idea. Still, a little bit of early feedback will never hurt in the long run.

Once you've received some feedback on your big idea, it's time to figure out how you can turn it into a full-fledged story.

## STORYTELLING BASICS: THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

One of the fundamental pieces of storytelling, whether it be in books, theater, video games, songwriting, or any other medium where a tale can be told is the three-act structure.

Now before all you creatives go running off at the word *structure*, let me explain what this important idea is and why it's critical to modern storytelling.

As the name suggests, the three-act structure breaks a story up into three pieces: the beginning, middle, and end. There's stuff going on in those three acts, but that's the barebones summary of the structure. You start somewhere. You move away from that starting point. You end up somewhere.

This structure is centuries old but has withstood the test of time because it's based on the most important part of storytelling: every story is about a journey. This can be an external journey, like an explorer finding a lost island and the secrets that it holds, or an internal journey, like a family navigating the grief of losing a parent or child.

No matter what your story is, it's a journey. The three-act structure shows this in such a way that you would struggle to find a good story you *can't* apply it to in some way, whether the author intended to or not.

Within each act are three plot points or "beats" that help move the story along. This is a total of nine beats throughout the story, each of which represents a major incident or event.

Because the three-act structure is the basis for almost all storytelling, I'm going to go over the three acts and the beats within them to finish up this chapter, making sure you have a thorough understanding of what your story will likely contain.

**Pantser:** Even if you've already decided you're a hardcore pantser, read this section to better understand how your story is going to unfold. What you ultimately do with the tools I give you in this book is up to you, but I encourage you to at least understand what's available to you.

## Act One: The Beginning

Shockingly, this is where your book starts. Also known as the Setup, Act One will take up somewhere around one quarter of your book and includes the exposition, the inciting incident, and the first plot

point of your story. This act lays the groundwork for the rest of the story that follows.

So let's look at these three story beats.

**The exposition** is the introduction to the “normal” world that your character lives in. This might be an everyday setting like the one you experience in your own life. Oppositely, the protagonist’s “normal” can be scavenging for food in a post-apocalyptic world while avoiding evil drones flying overhead. Normal is subjective, but the exposition helps us understand who the protagonist is, what they do, what values they hold, what challenges they face every day, and what they really want.

**The inciting incident** then comes along and shatters that normal. It initiates the journey that the characters of your story will go on throughout the book, because no one wants to read a book that is just a normal day, every day, until you say “The End.” The inciting incident helps prompt your main character(s) into action, even if they resist that prompt initially.

**The first plot point** is the protagonist’s initial steps into their new world, away from the normal they are used to. It can come immediately after the inciting incident or after some deliberation, but it is a clear indicator that the protagonist is in new, uncharted territory.

Once you have finished with Act One, your protagonist has already started their journey. They have been moved (either willingly or unwillingly) to somewhere that is unfamiliar, and that now starts to push the story forward into the strange territory of Act Two.

## Act Two: The Middle

Also known as the Confrontation, Act Two raises the stakes for the protagonist. The largest of all the acts—usually around half the entire book—Act Two is where all the exciting build-up happens. Within the second act, we have another three beats: rising action, the midpoint, and the second plot point.

**Rising action** is more of an umbrella term for events and crises the main characters face. During the rising action, the protagonist is mostly reactionary (meaning they are just trying to cope with what's happening) as they learn more about their new world, make friends, are introduced to the antagonist, and face obstacles. This beat is all about facing new things and absorbing new information.

**The midpoint** then comes along and makes everything bad again. Somewhere near the middle of your book (which can't be shocking, considering its name), the midpoint represents a huge setback for your character and forces them to go in a new direction to solve the problem.

**The second plot point** prepares the protagonist for the third and final act. This often makes the protagonist go through a mindset shift from reactionary to proactive. They have reflected, trained, had an epiphany, or just experienced a great pep talk that prepared them to go forward and face their challenges.

The second act shoves your main character into obstacles they are forced to overcome so they can grow. This shouldn't be smooth sailing: orcs, high school bullies, and grief are all vastly different, but they are all very difficult to overcome. Things will go your protagonist's way and they won't. That's what makes a compelling

story. The changes in your main character prepare them for the next act.

## Act Three: The End

Making up another twenty-five percent of your story is Act Three, also known as the Resolution. Everything has been leading up to this, the big payoff. Within this act, we have the pre-climax, the climax, and the denouement.

**The pre-climax** is a very low point for your protagonist. Also known as the “dark night of the soul” (which is almost as edgy as I was in high school), this is where your protagonist seems to be losing, despite the changes they’ve gone through. We see the full might of the antagonist—physically, mentally, or emotionally—and struggle to see how the main characters will prevail.

**The climax** comes next, usually as a single scene. In the climax, our hero prevails by using everything they’ve learned up until now. Alternatively, you could pull an *Infinity War* and make the heroes lose, but that takes some more delicate navigating.

**The denouement or falling action** comes after the climax. This is where things relax a little and you can tie up any loose ends that remain. You can show bits of what the new normal looks like, how your characters have adapted to it, and put a bow on your subplots.

## BUT WAIT, THERE CAN BE MORE

I didn’t want to bog you down with an extreme number of details about the three-act structure, since we’re going to dive deeper into

plot later in this book. For now, I hope this served as a great introduction.

If you want to learn more about this plot structure, you can check out a blog by one of our awesome Dabblers, Abi, including some examples of the different beats over at:

<https://www.dabblewriter.com/three-act-structure-examples-dabble/>

There are other structures out there, too. The three-act structure, as I mentioned, is the foundation of storytelling, but there are countless ways that authors have expanded on this classic and you might find some of them more relatable than others. If you want to know more, go ahead and check out some of the most popular ones at:

<https://www.dabblewriter.com/story-structures-fundamentals/>

## NOT-HOMEWORK: OUTLINE YOUR STORY WITH THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

No matter where you stand on the plotter-pantser spectrum, this is a worthwhile exercise that can give you a very thorough understanding of your story. You can also customize it however you'd like.

All I'm asking you to do is outline the nine story beats of your book using what you just learned about the three-act structure. So, using whatever you've been using to take notes and do these exercises, jot down the following beats, leaving some space in between:

- The Exposition
- The Inciting Incident
- The First Plot Point
- The Rising Action
- The Midpoint

- The Second Plot Point
- The Pre-Climax
- The Climax
- The Denouement

If you're using Dabble, you can jot these down in one of your Notes so it is only a click away while you're writing your book. With one of our latest features, you can even add ribbons on to Plot Points to keep track of which scenes belong to which beat! Honestly, color coding rocks.

Like I said, you can customize this as much as you want. Even if you're a pantsier or a pantsier-leaning plantsier, I want everyone reading this to jot down at least a sentence describing each story beat. This will help you create a high-level outline before moving on, and we're going to use this outline later in the book. And I promise I won't tell your pantsier friends.

If you read more about other structures and found one you liked better, then use that one instead!

Whatever it is you choose to do, just don't leave this chapter without having some sort of high-level outline done.

# PART TWO: WRITING YOUR FIRST DRAFT

## CHAPTER 4: ELEMENTS OF A STORY

Stories are sort of like houses; they require quality materials and a strong foundation to make them great. Sure, you can use subpar materials, but the house (in this metaphor, your story) will be hollow, weak, and filled with holes.

Throughout Part Two, I'll be giving you a tour through the key elements that come together to make the story you've been dreaming of. Along the way, I'll be suggesting different ways to improve these elements and make them as great as they can possibly be. You should understand upfront, though, that an awesome story doesn't just appear out of nowhere on your blank page.

Sorry, that's just the truth.

Remember that the *only* way to write a killer book is to actually write.

So these next chapters are going to equip you with the tools you need to make sure your key elements are strong enough to share your dream with the world. Over the following three chapters, we'll

cover the fundamental elements of every story: characters, plot, and theme.

**Characters** are what bring stories to life. You can have an amazing story to tell, but it will fall flat if your characters aren't well developed. If you think about your favorite stories—whether they are books, movies, etc.—what are the most memorable parts? Odds are you remember the characters or, if not them directly, the choices and actions of those characters. In Chapter Five, we're going to drill down on what makes characters great and how you can craft the characters your story deserves.

**Plot** is the actual story you're telling. Just like a good plot relies on good characters, you can have amazing characters but your story simply won't work if you have a weak plot. We've already covered the very basics of the beginning, middle, and end of the story in your head, but Chapter Six will expand on those further to give you a strong grasp of the major plot points of your book.

**Theme** is an element of storytelling that is often overlooked by most first-time writers. A theme is a universal truth that your story is trying to tell. It is the message behind the action, intrigue, characters, and every other piece of writing prowess you've put into your story. Without a theme, your story will feel meaningless and shallow. Sure, you can have great characters and an engaging plot, but a theme ties the whole thing together with a nice bow that makes your book more than just another story. In Chapter Seven, I'll give you the tools to craft the perfect theme.

If you're a pantsier and reading this, you might be shaking your head in disgust or trembling in fear at the idea of planning. Keep in mind

that I've written this book for all sorts of writers and have included options for plotters and pantsers throughout. Follow along with all the exercises I've included; they are there to make you a stronger writer. Remember that very few people are *just* plotters or pantsers and you will only really find where you land if you try out all the different options available to you.

Before moving on to the excitement of characters, plot, and theme, there are a few other elements to quickly go over that aren't necessarily as complex as those three.

## POINT OF VIEW

Who is telling your story? That's the question that our point of view or POV answers.

Choosing your POV for your story is a decision that's more important than you might think. The way in which a story is told can drastically change how well it's received by an audience, how much emotional weight you can inject into it, how many subplots you can manage, and more. But for many first-time or inexperienced authors, choosing the correct POV and using it properly can be difficult.

There are a lot of intricacies involved in proper POV use, but I'm going to break down the four different viewpoints you can use in your book so you can see (get it?) things more clearly.

### First-Person Point of View

The most intimate point of view, first-person gives us a look directly into the mind of the narrator. In this POV, the narrator is telling the story from their perspective, using pronouns like *I* and *we*.

First-person is such a powerful way of telling a story because it's how humans naturally share experiences. Telling your partner about your day at work or reliving past glory days with your oldest friends all involve first-person retellings of tales. This perspective is natural and comfortable for us.

In addition to that, no other point of view immerses a reader as much as first-person storytelling does. You become connected to the narrator much more than any other perspective, which directly translates to you caring for—or, in the case of an antagonist, reviling or even sympathizing with—them.

For mysteries, thrillers, horror, and other suspenseful genres, first-person also limits the amount of information we can gather from the narrator. We only know what they know. So, if there is something terrifying hiding under the bed that they can't see, we can't see it either. Likewise, we won't know who murdered the butler until our narrator leads us through the detective work they're doing.

Most importantly, first-person narration is influenced by the narrator themselves. It has more of their voice, quirks, and flaws than any other narration style. Other popular POVs, specifically third-person, will never be able to achieve this level of characterization in the voice that tells your story.

## Second-Person Point of View

Up next is the strange uncle in the family. This point of view is the one that's there and sometimes makes sense, but most of the time you're just confused or overwhelmed by what they're saying.

Second-person narration is the least-used style in writing. In this style, you're using *you* and *your* pronouns to draw the reader into the story. You are essentially telling the reader that they are a character in the story.

It's a tough one to balance properly, mostly because you're asking your readers to imagine *a lot*. When it's done perfectly, it's very engrossing. But it is very difficult to ask a reader to become an actual part of your story.

This perspective is best saved for shorter pieces of works, like short stories or poetry, or for those awesome choose-your-own-adventure books that we all loved when we were younger (how come no one writes those for adults?). It has also been put to great effect in small amounts within a larger work, like in a scene or chapter. For most books though, especially if it's your first, it's best to choose another POV.

## Third-Person Limited Point of View

Third-person perspective is broken up into two different types: limited and omniscient. Let's tackle the most common POV, third-person limited, first.

Stories are told in third-person when they use pronouns like *he*, *she*, and *they*. Everybody who has read a few books in their life has read a third-person narrated book. This point of view becomes limited when the perspective of the narrator is confined to one character at a time.

This means that we only have access to the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of one character, no matter how many are in the scene.

That's how the perspective becomes limited.

Both forms of third-person narration—limited and omniscient—allow a reader to become more familiar with the story more quickly. While first-person adds a layer of characterization to your storytelling, third-person means that your reader doesn't have to adapt to an unfamiliar voice.

The restricted nature of third-person limited POV is a strength, too. Like first-person, it makes the story more intimate; you get a look into the head of one particular character, get to know them better, empathize with them, and root for them. The story is not diluted with a flood of different thoughts.

To this end, third-person limited also makes suspense and surprises easier to write. If you're limited to one character's perspective in a scene, you can't possibly know what's behind the door they're about to open.

Third-person limited also allows you to change the narrator, depending on the scene. With this style of narration, you can write one scene from your protagonist's POV, another told through a secondary character, and a third from your antagonist's perspective.

Be *very* careful with head-hopping, though. It should never be done within a scene (i.e., if you start a scene limited to one character's perspective, you cannot switch to another perspective in the same scene) and it should be done with a purpose. Why are you telling the story from this character's perspective? What is it adding to your reader's experience?

Being able to tell the story from the perspective of multiple characters, when done right, is a powerful way to add depth to those characters

and your work.

## Third-Person Omniscient Point of View

Less common than its limited counterpart, third-person omniscient storytelling isn't restricted to the thoughts and feelings of one character at a time. In these stories, the narrator is all-seeing and detached from the story. They can share what each character is thinking, giving us a clearer picture of what's going on.

This storytelling style can also add suspense known as dramatic irony: the reader, thanks to the all-seeing narrator, can know things that the characters don't. In books with dramatic irony, you might find yourself clenching your teeth and begging the characters to turn around and spot the killer lurking in the shadows.

An omniscient narrator sort of becomes a character of their own. They might have their own quirks, interjections, and remarks that add to the story without actually influencing it. This characterization grants you a unique addition to your story that third-person limited can't offer.

The downside is that third-person omniscient perspective removes the intimacy with characters that all other POVs offer. You might understand more characters but connecting with them is a lot more difficult when you're experiencing the story through a detached narrator.

This POV can also lead to passive writing and telling the reader rather than showing them, which is what we're going to chat about after these quick tips on choosing a point of view for your story.

## POV Tips

Remember, choosing a POV is an important part of creating the perfect story. You might already have an idea of which one you want to use or maybe you're on the fence. Either way, here are some questions to keep in mind when deciding on your narrator's point of view.

- Which genre are you writing for and what POV do most books use?
- Are you looking for intimacy between the characters and the reader?
- Are thoughts and insights from characters important to your story?
- What tone do you use in your writing?
- Do you need to tell the story from the perspective of multiple characters?

## ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE WRITING

It's very difficult to tell someone how to objectively write better. As a creative art, there will never be a consensus on what makes one style of writing better than another. Some people will always prefer one style over another, and it's that uniqueness that makes you stand out as an author.

*But* (and I want you to really draw out that pronunciation for me) there is a consensus among writers and editors that active writing is generally—though not always—better than passive writing.

If you've never heard of active and passive writing or just need a reminder, here are some definitions.

*Active writing* is when the subject of a sentence is performing the action.

*Passive writing* is when the subject of a sentence is acted upon.

But to understand those, we need three more definitions, but they're simple ones—and who doesn't love a good definition or five?

*Subject:* The person, place, or thing that is doing something.

*Verb:* An action.

*Object:* The person, place, or thing being acted upon.

A complete sentence has a subject and a verb, otherwise it's a sentence fragment. Here's an example of a complete sentence:

**Julia kicked.**

Julia is the subject, kicked is the verb. We can also add an object to provide more details.

**Julia kicked the ball.**

In this sentence, the object is the ball. That sentence just so happens to be an example of active writing, too. The subject does something to the object. But here's another way of writing that same sentence:

**The ball was kicked by Julia.**

In this sentence, the subject is now the ball, the action is being kicked, and the object is Julia. But now the object, Julia, is acting on the subject.

To be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with that sentence. The issue with passive writing is that it is murkier, more convoluted, and slower-paced than active writing. We don't gain anything from the

rewritten sentence other than more words and some strange phrasing.

Active writing, on the other hand, pushes the flow of your story forward and is easier to understand. It's straightforward and doesn't bog the reader down. In most cases, active writing is preferred.

That's because too much passive writing slows your book's pace to a crawl, and most readers don't like that. In certain genres, passive writing can be helpful by adding details, controlling the tone of your writing, intentionally slowing your pace, and adding ambiguity to things.

Passive writing is also okay when the subject is unknown or irrelevant. Sometimes it doesn't matter who baked a pie, only that the pie was baked. Sweet, sweet pie.

You will have passive writing in your book. This book has passive writing in it. Remember, passive writing is okay *in moderation*. But using it too often will make your book harder to read and less engaging, so keep a lookout for these sentences in your writing and make sure that you're benefitting from them being there.

An easy way to identify most passive sentences is to look for "will be," "to be," "by," or "has been" in your writing. These are often indicators of passive writing.

Your writing will grow stronger over time, too. Don't be discouraged if you find a lot of passive writing in your first draft; it's just an opportunity to grow!

That's something to keep in mind throughout the entire writing process. This is just your *first* draft. For some folks reading this, it will

be the first time you've ever written an entire book. There will be amazing parts. There will be absolutely awful parts.

Celebrate the former and don't stress about the latter.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: WHAT POV WILL YOU USE?

Before we hop into characters, it's time to start thinking about what POV you're going to use in your book. I just bombarded you with a lot of information about your narrator's potential perspective. Did any of them resonate with you? Did any of them make you want to learn more?

If you already had an idea of the POV you want to use, did any of the other perspectives seem interesting or did they just reinforce your ideas?

Think back to the questions that came up in this chapter:

- Which genre are you writing for and what POV do most books use?
- Are you looking for intimacy between the characters and the reader?
- Which POV feels most natural for you to write in?
- Are thoughts and insights from characters important to your story?
- What tone do you use in your writing?
- Do you need to tell the story from the perspective of multiple characters?

Before you go on, jot down which POV you will be using. This isn't set in stone and might be something you change as you write your

first draft, but it is good to have an idea of what POV you want to use before you write.

## CHAPTER 5: CRAFT COMPLEX CHARACTERS

A story is nothing without amazing characters.

Some might argue that is a subjective statement, but I don't hang out with those sorts of people. Last chapter I asked you to think about your favorite books and how awesome and memorable the characters were. If that didn't convince you, try this:

Name three of your favorite books where the characters were bad. Not bad like the Joker or the club members in *Sons of Anarchy*. No, bad meaning poorly written, unrelatable, shallow, or just plain boring.

If you can name three books with those sorts of characters that you love, you get an imaginary gold star. But I'm confident I won't be handing out many of those.

That's because characters are just as important to a story as the plot is. Over this chapter and the two that follow, we'll be covering characters, plot, and theme. That's because a good story boils down to the following formula:

## **Complex Characters + Perfect Plot + Tantalizing Themes = A Good Story**

Yes, I obviously went for alliterations there because that's fun. And yes, there are more things that go into writing a book like POV and your writing skills.

But as long as you've got a decent grip on writing in your language (and a good editor), are open to feedback, and are willing to put in the work, then strong characters, plot, and theme will result in a story that people will enjoy reading.

If you don't put in the effort into all three of those components, however, then you won't end up with a memorable story. Characters can be especially difficult for writers to get right; it's easy to have bland, two-dimensional characters and think you can get away with it. In this chapter, I'm going to make sure that you develop complex, interesting characters to live in your book and bring your story to life.

### **CHARACTER BASICS**

You can't understand the top-secret, arcane knowledge of characters without first understanding the basics. So let's start there.

The main or primary characters of your book are the ones who drive the story forward, even if they aren't necessarily working together.

There are two types of main characters: protagonists and antagonists.

**Protagonists** are the heroes in your story. These are the main characters who have their world changed and decide to work towards a goal, growing along the way and usually accomplishing that goal (or at least a goal) by the end of the book. You can have

multiple protagonists as long as doing so serves a purpose and you invest in all of them to make them worth reading about.

**Antagonists** are the opposite. In some cases they are villains, while some antagonists are simply getting in the way of the protagonist's goals rather than actively working against them. This means that some books have antagonists that are characters (i.e., the White Witch in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*) while some antagonists are more existential or metaphorical (i.e., any apocalyptic movie where a natural disaster is working against the characters).

After main characters, you have **secondary characters**. These types of characters can fall on either side of the good vs. evil spectrum or anywhere in between. Secondary characters still play an important, notable role in your story but aren't where you will shine most of the spotlight. They might show up in just one or two scenes or they might help out in half the scenes in the book. The best secondary characters have their own subplots to add more depth to your story.

Secondary characters might not feel that important at first, but most books would feel empty without them. No matter what genre you're writing, you are creating a world for readers to get lost in. And a world with only two or three main characters is pretty bleak.

When writing secondary characters, it's crucial to remember that they are still characters and, as such, deserve as much character development as main characters, even if there are some details that never make it into the book. They deserve to have goals, flaws, quirks, and personalities. Authors who don't provide them with the

love and attention they need will quickly find that their readers aren't connecting with those characters or the story as a whole.

Moving farther away from the spotlight brings us to **minor—or tertiary—characters**. Unlike secondary characters, minor characters usually don't play a significant role in the story. They are background characters that add substance to your world without bogging the story down. Some will be named, some won't. Some will be nothing more than a smiling face in a coffee shop, while others might be poverty-stricken children in your dystopian cyberpunk city. Tertiary characters add substance to the world more than the story. Occasionally one of them might say or do something that will help the protagonist or antagonist, but minor characters rarely show up in more than one scene. They also don't require much depth or attention—if you force your reader to focus on tertiary characters too much, they will expect them to play a bigger role in the story.

## STORIES ARE ABOUT CONFLICT. CONFLICT COMES FROM CHARACTERS.

Every story is about some kind of conflict. Somebody wants something. Other things get in their way. That's an incredibly simple way of describing stories, but it's true.

In order to have conflict, you need characters to experience it. Therefore, conflict is contingent on characters. These conflicts can be **external** or **internal**.

**External** conflict occurs between a character and someone or something else. Your protagonist and antagonist clashing. A character braving a hurricane to rescue their child. A princess

slaying a dragon. These conflicts happen outside of a character, thus they're considered external.

**Internal** conflict is the opposite. This type of conflict occurs inside someone's thoughts or heart. Do I really need to choose between the vampire and the werewolf? Will I ever live up to my father's expectations? Do I want a seventh slice of pizza?

Your story can have either external or internal conflict—it can even have both, and multiple kinds of each. But there should be one major conflict that you choose to be the focus of your book, while other conflicts are saved for subplots.

If you want to become an expert on the different types of conflict within external and internal, I've got your back over here:

<https://www.dabblewriter.com/articles/four-types-of-conflict>

Take a moment to think about the story you want to write. What is the bigger conflict you are writing about? What characters (that you know of right now, anyway) are critical to that conflict?

## EVERY CHARACTER HAS AN ARC

So we've established that conflicts are central to stories and that characters are what drive conflict. But what effect does conflict have on characters?

As a character changes throughout a story, we call that a *character arc*. These arcs represent the journey that our characters go through from the moment they are first introduced to their last scene in the book. It's this change that is driven by conflict, because people—or non-human entities, if that's your genre—don't like changing if we don't have to.

In every story, main and secondary characters should each experience their own character arc. It is not mandatory for some secondary characters, but the entire purpose of an arc is to make a character stand out and make them meaningful to us. We want to be able to cheer for them, be shocked by them, cry because of them, and more. It's the change our characters go through that makes them memorable.

When planning or writing your characters, there are four different arcs that you can have them experience: moral ascending, moral descending, transformational, and flat.

## Moral Ascending Character Arcs

This is probably the most common and most heartwarming of the character arcs. A moral ascending arc is marked by a character pushing past their flaws and obstacles—fear, perceived weakness, a fight with a friend, the Dark Side of the Force—to accomplish their goals.

It's a hobbit faced with a dragon. It's realizing the key was friendship all along. It's showing your high school classmates that you're really the hot one after all these years by being your true self.

Moral ascending characters inspire us and make us root for them because they are trying to overcome something. That sort of arc—whether facing a monster, a Draconian boss, or a schoolyard bully—is something almost everyone can relate to. It can apply to villains, too! Who doesn't love a good redemption story?

## Moral Descending Character Arcs

Not every story has a happy ending, though. Moral descending arcs are the exact opposite of an ascending one. They are the descent into madness, the embracing of power and greed. In a moral descending character arc, the character ends in a morally worse place than they began.

Moral descending arcs can be a lot of fun to read and write, if done properly. Casting off societal expectations or making blood pacts with extra-dimensional entities are both examples of descending arcs—negative actions that benefit the character personally.

Again, both protagonists and antagonists can have their own descending arcs. There is no sure ending for this type of arc, either. Selfishly acquiring power can lead to madness, but it can also lead to complete satisfaction for a character. Maybe they just want to rule the world!

## Transformational Character Arcs

Sometimes characters change but their morals stay the same. Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* didn't necessarily have her morals changed throughout the books, but she did become a much more accomplished leader, revolutionary, and archer. Luke Skywalker started as a kind farmer on Tatooine and ended *Star Wars* as a nice Jedi (we're talking original trilogy here, please).

A transformational arc sees the character changing in some way while more or less retaining the morals they had at the start of the story. The lawful-good paladin becomes stronger to slay a dragon. A grassroots organization works really hard to grow bigger. Come the

end of the story, the character should be a different version of themselves.

## Flat Character Arcs

What a contradictory name, right? Flat arcs don't have any change from beginning to end, instead opting to stay exactly where they were when it comes to their power or morals. This type of arc isn't exciting or relatable, so you have to use it wisely.

It can be helpful in episodic storytelling, like a television show or a serial of short stories. In these episodes, the characters might not change between the beginning and end of each short segment. Odds are, though, you will see them change throughout the entire season or set of stories.

Flat arcs can also be applied to secondary characters who aren't as important or influential as some others in the book. Your wise wizarding headmaster might just be that for the entirety of their story.

If you choose to use a flat character arc, make sure that the characters you're applying it to don't take up too much "screen time" in your book or you might end up boring your readers.

## BRING YOUR CHARACTERS TO LIFE

Remember when I said that there would be some options along the way for plotters and pantsers? Here's one of those options. I present to you three gifts: a character trait list, a character interview, and a character profile.

These three resources can be used as little or as much as you want to bring your character to life.

People who lean more towards the plotting side will want to know *everything* about their characters. Even if those details are never used in the story, you still want to know things like what your protagonist had for breakfast on the third Wednesday of January 1985.

That might be a little extreme, but the more details, the better. To that end, the character trait list contains more than 100 possible details you might think of for your character. You definitely don't need to fill out each one, and some of them might not be applicable to your genre, but you can choose which ones you want to include and which you don't.

The character interview gives you the opportunity to plunge into the depths of your characters' histories, personalities, and more. Honestly, you'll end up knowing them better than your best friend.

Finally, the character profile will wrap up everything neatly and organize all the essential elements of your character. It's a great resource to have just a click away.

Pantsers might think that the list of details a plotter creates is way overboard. Like we just hit an iceberg and there's no room on this floating door overboard (there was totally room on that door). For the pantsers out there, feel free to fill out whatever details you think you want from the resources included.

Again, you might only use two or three questions (or you might use all of them!) from the interview but they are there to encourage some deeper thinking about your characters to give you a better understanding of them without spending time listing dozens of individual details.

No matter where you fall on the plotter-pantser spectrum, take a look at the three character resources at the end of this chapter. Figure out what you like about each one, because I'm going to get you to use them soon.

## CHARACTER SYNOPSES

Before we get to your next not-homework, there's one other tool I want to share that can help you understand your characters even more: character synopses.

An idea that originated from Randy Ingermanson's Snowflake Method of planning a novel, a character synopsis is pretty straightforward. The idea is to take each of your main and secondary characters and write a summary of your story from their perspective. Main characters should get about a page for their summaries, while secondary characters only need about half a page.

This might sound tedious, especially to pantsers, but it helps on so many levels. First, it gives you a better understanding of each storyline and subplot you're trying to include. That, in turn, lets you look for any plot holes you might have missed. Most importantly, it gives you a thorough understanding of each of your important characters, how they contribute to your book, and the arcs that each of them go on.

Without understanding your plot, which we will cover in the next chapter, it isn't worth writing a character synopsis for any character yet. But keep this powerful tool in mind once you have a better grasp of your story if you want to get new insights into your creation.

For now, check out your not-homework and the three resources for building amazing characters.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: CREATE YOUR PROTAGONIST(S) AND ANTAGONIST(S)

It's time to bring everything you've learned in this chapter together to make your protagonist and antagonist, the two most important characters in your story. Now, your story might not have a character as the antagonist or it might have multiple. Your protagonist might actually be a villain or an anti-hero. You do you, this is your story.

Whatever the case is, I want you to have as good an understanding of your main characters as possible before moving on to the next chapter. If you're using Dabble to write your book, we make that very easy by providing you with a place to house all your character notes. Whether you just want one page to completely describe your character or a folder to include the traits list, interview, profile, synopsis (eventually), inspiration, etc., you can do that in Dabble.

So get to know them! Here are some ways to do that:

- Write down as many of the character traits for your main characters as you want.
- Complete a character interview for each main character.
- Fill out a character profile for your protagonist and antagonist.
- Summarize each character's arc in two or three sentences (or more if you're feeling ambitious).
- Include some photos or images that inspire this character. These could include their physical traits, goals, skills, etc.

Pro tip: you can add images to your story notes in Dabble!

- Include a spot for a character synopsis for each main character. Don't fill it out quite yet but consider returning to your outline once you've finished up your plot.

Pantsers, you definitely don't have to do all of those. In fact, I'd be shocked if most plotters even hit all of those points. I suggest that *everyone*, especially if this is your first book, fills out the character profiles. That will give you a great start to your story.

Read over the character traits list, interview, and profile below!

# DABBLE CHARACTER TRAIT LIST

## Demographics

- Name:
- Age:
- Sex/Gender:
- Ethnicity:
- Occupation:
- Socioeconomic status:
- Education:
- Other notes:

## History

- Birth date:
- Place of birth:
- Key family members:
- Notable events/milestones:
- Criminal record:
- Affiliations:
- Skeletons in the closet:
- Other notes:

## Physical Appearance

- Eye color:
- Skin color:
- Hair color:
- Height:
- Weight:
- Body type:
- Fitness level:
- Tattoos:
- Scars/Birthmarks:
- Other distinguishing features:

- Disabilities:
- Accessories:
- Style:
- Cleanliness/Grooming:
- Posture/Gait:
- Tics:
- Coordination (or lack thereof):
- Weaknesses:
- Other notes:

## Psychological Traits

- Personality type:
- Personality traits:
- Temperament:
- Introvert/extrovert:
- Mannerisms:
- Educational background:
- Intelligence:
- Self-esteem:
- Hobbies:
- Skills/talents:
- Loves:
- Morals/virtues:
- Phobias/fears:
- Angered by:
- Pet peeves:
- Obsessed with:
- Routines:
- Bad habits:
- Desires:
- Flaws:
- Quirks:
- Favorite sayings:
- Disabilities:
- Secrets:
- Regrets:

- Accomplishments:
- Memories:
- Other notes:

## Relationships

- Partner(s)/significant other(s):
- Lover(s):
- Parents/guardians:
- Children:
- Grandparents:
- Grandchildren:
- Family:
- Pets:
- Best friends:
- Friends:
- Rivals:
- Enemies:
- Colleagues:
- Mentors/teachers:
- Idols/role models:
- Followers:
- Strangers:
- Non-living things:
- Clubs/memberships:
- Social media presence:
- Public perception of them:
- Other notes

## Character Growth

- Character archetype:
- Character arc:
- Core values:
- Internal conflicts:
- External conflicts:
- Goals:

- Motivations:
- Epiphanies:
- Significant events/plot points:
- Other notes:

## Communication

- Languages known:
- Preferred communication methods:
- Accent:
- Style and pacing of speech:
- Pitch:
- Laughter:
- Smile:
- Use of gestures:
- Facial expressions:
- Verbal expressions:
- Other notes:

## Strengths, Weaknesses, and Abilities

- Physical strengths:
- Physical weaknesses:
- Intellectual strengths:
- Intellectual weaknesses:
- Interpersonal strengths:
- Interpersonal weaknesses:
- Physical abilities:
- Magical abilities:
- Physical illnesses/conditions:
- Mental illnesses/conditions:
- Other notes:

# DABBLE CHARACTER INTERVIEW

## Phase One: Character Conception

1. Tell me about your community.
2. Who are the most important people in your life?
3. What's your favorite song and why?
4. How do you spend your days?
5. What activity brings you joy?
6. What responsibility do you hate?
7. Where do you live?
8. What would you say is your best physical feature?
9. What would you say is your worst physical feature?
10. Are you responsible for anyone other than yourself?
11. Is anyone else responsible for you?
12. Have you ever been in love? Are you in love now?
13. What do you find funny?
14. What are your pet peeves?
15. What is your greatest fear? Why is it so scary for you?
16. Tell me about your deepest longing.
17. What is your biggest regret?

## Phase Two: Character Development

1. Describe your perfect day.
2. What is the worst thing that ever happened to you in your life before this story?
3. What is the best thing that ever happened to you?
4. If the world were going to explode and you could only bring one person with you on the escape pod, who would it be and why?
5. Tell me about a time when you truly felt safe.
6. What would it mean to live as your true, authentic self?
7. From your perspective, what is your biggest flaw?
8. What do other people say is your biggest flaw? How do you feel about that characterization?

9. How do you want others to perceive you?
10. Do others find you approachable?
11. Do you believe everyone has a purpose? Do you believe you have a purpose? If so, what is it?
12. A hurricane is coming and you have time to grab exactly one object from your home before you evacuate. What object do you choose and why is it so important to you?
13. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
14. If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?
15. If you could change one event in your life, what would it be?
16. What do you do better than anyone else?
17. What does everyone else seem to do better than you?
18. Tell me about a time when you surprised yourself.
19. What was your dream job as a child?
20. Who were your role models growing up?
21. What has been your proudest moment? How did you see yourself at the time?
22. What values or beliefs were you taught when you were young? Do you still carry those same values and beliefs today?
23. From your perspective, what's really standing between you and your goal? Do other people see it that way?
24. Who loves you with all their heart and soul? How does their love make you feel?
25. Do you feel you have the life you deserve? If not, what do you deserve?
26. Tell me about an enraging experience you had that everyone else thought was no big deal. Why was it so infuriating for you?
27. What's one habit you can't seem to kick?
28. What does it mean to belong?
29. What role did/do you play in your family? In your friend group? In your larger community?

## Phase Three: Character Clarification

1. What is the absolute worst thing that could happen to you at this point in the story?
2. What is the best thing that could happen at this point in the story?
3. Everybody's hiding something—a fear, a weakness, a strength, an unpopular opinion. What are you hiding right now?
4. How is this moment challenging your beliefs about yourself, the world, or the other people in the scene? If your beliefs are not being challenged, what would make you question everything?
5. What's one thing you would change about the person you love most in the world?
6. What's one thing you admire about your worst enemy?
7. Of the many actions you could take at this moment, which would be the most difficult? The most effective? The most terrifying? The least forgivable?
8. What do you know now that you didn't know at the beginning of your arc?
9. Who is your ally right now? How do you feel about having this person on your side?
10. Who is your enemy right now? How do you feel about being up against this person?
11. What is the outcome you're hoping for? How much would you sacrifice to make it happen?
12. What are you still resisting? Is there a specific belief or past experience that makes that sense of resistance so strong?
13. What is the best memory you share with the person in this scene?
14. What is the worst memory you share with the person in this scene?
15. In what ways do you see yourself in the person in this scene?

16. Do you believe victory is possible at this point? Why or why not?
17. Gut check: do you expect people to act in their own self-interest or in the interest of others?
18. If someone really wanted to hurt you right now, what should they do?
19. Who knows you better than anyone? Do you trust them with that knowledge?
20. Who do you wish was here with you now? How would they make things better?
21. What power do you hold in this situation?
22. What did you dream about last night?
23. Tell me the story of this scene like you were recounting it over a beer with your best friend.
24. Who has it easier than you in this situation? Are you open to considering the possibility that they actually have it worse?
25. Has this journey already changed you? Do you like the change, or do you miss the person you used to be?

# DABBLE CHARACTER PROFILE

## First Impressions

Let's nail down your initial ideas about who this person (or creature) is.

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Location:**

**Time:**

**Archetype or Personality Type:** For inspiration, check out Dabble's comprehensive [guide to character archetypes](#).

**General Personality Notes:** Record any ideas you already have about who this character is.

## Build Your Character's Backstory

How did your character come to be who they are by the time your reader meets them?

**Upbringing:** Include details of their upbringing such as setting, income, family dynamics, culture, values, etc.

**Family Relationships:** Which family relationships had a significant influence on your character?

**Friendships:** Describe your character's most significant friendships.

**Adversaries:** Who looms in your character's memory as a nemesis or villain?

**The Ghost:** What single disastrous event changed your character forever?

**The Lie:** What flawed philosophy does your character now live by because of the Ghost?

## Get Psychological

Dig into your character's heart and mind to understand the role they play in your story's conflict.

**Motivation:** What powerful, primitive fear or desire drives your character?

**The Want:** What does your character wish to achieve in life? It should be something that would be motivated by the Motivation. (Go figure.)

**The Need:** What does your character actually need?

**Fear:** If you haven't already covered this in Motivation, what is your character's greatest fear?

**Flaw:** What is your character's greatest flaw?

**Value System:** This could be religious doctrine, personal philosophy, cultural norms, etc.

## Bring the Creature to Life

Turn this mess of emotions into a flesh and blood being.

**Physical Description:**

**Phobias:**

**Pet Peeves:**

**Insecurities:**

**Key Relationships:**

**Quirks:**

**Contradictions:**

**Habits:**

**Job:**

**Hobbies:**

**Voice:**

**Handling Emotions:**

## CHAPTER 6: PEN THE PERFECT PLOT

We've set the foundation for some amazing characters, but now it's time to make sure you have an equally strong plot to go along with them. Remember:

**Complex Characters + Perfect Plot + Tantalizing Themes = A Good Story**

So let's build the perfect plot.

Way back in Chapter Three, I introduced you to the three-act structure and the nine story beats that go along with it. Just to recap, those beats are:

- The exposition (act one)
- The inciting incident (act one)
- The first plot point (act one)
- The rising action (act two)
- The midpoint (act two)
- The second plot point (act two)
- The pre-climax (act three)
- The climax (act three)
- The denouement (act three)

If you were following along with your not-homework up until now, you should have a one-sentence summary of each of these story beats already. Now, equipped with the tools we have from the last few chapters, let's dive into each of these beats in more detail.

I'm going to explain what they are but, more importantly, also help you understand how to use these storytelling fundamentals to map out your story and make it the best it can be.

You might have gone and read about some of the other story structures over on our blog. Some of these structures are just variations of the three-act structure, while others—like the Hero's Journey and Story Circle—have a lot more steps to them. If there was a story structure that you resonated with, go ahead and use that to help plot your tale.

Reading this chapter is still a good idea though, even if you go with another structure or if you hate outlining as much as some people hate cilantro (loudly and viciously). The three-act structure is the foundation of most modern storytelling, and having an understanding of why these beats have stood the test of time will do nothing but make you a better writer.

## THE EXPOSITION (ACT ONE)

Every story needs some sort of setup for the readers. Even if your book starts in the middle of a war, natural disaster, or in the aftermath of a bad breakup, you *must* establish certain things for the reader to get a feel for your story.

The exposition is the first beat in the three-act structure and it does just that. In the exposition, your job is to establish what the current

normal is, also known as the ordinary world.

Who is your protagonist? What do they do every day? How does the world treat them and how do they see the world? Are there monsters (supernatural or human)? What's the political system like?

Use the exposition to not only establish a baseline for whatever the heck normal life is but also make sure you let the reader know what hurdles or difficulties characters face in this normal life.

Most importantly, we should understand what your protagonist longs for. Maybe they want to see what life is like beyond the city walls or just have a partner they can watch Netflix with on weeknights. This is why it was important for us to figure out our characters first: your characters have goals, fears, and ideals that a reader will want to know about as the story unfolds.

## Dos and Don'ts of the Exposition

Here are some tips on what to include in the exposition and what to avoid.

**Do:** Spend some extra time on your first line, paragraph, and page. These could be the make-or-break moment for some readers.

**Don't:** Fill the exposition with so much information that reading it all is a slog. Establish the ordinary world, the details we need about the protagonist, and slow-drip the rest of the information throughout the story.

**Do:** Make sure you understand your protagonist as best you can. If you can't share the important details about them, how will your readers understand them at all?

**Don't:** Include a prologue just so you can dump even more info before the proper start of your book. Prologues should be included for a reason and, for most books, aren't usually needed.

**Do:** Introduce the larger conflict early. It doesn't have to include the protagonist's role, since they might not even know that yet, but help the reader understand what's wrong in your story.

## THE INCITING INCIDENT (ACT ONE)

Now that you've established the ordinary world, it's time to shatter it. The inciting incident is one of the most important beats in the three-act structure. Without it, your hero wouldn't have a reason to leave the life they already have. Nothing would drive them to reach their goals (like every New Year's resolution we make).

While the exposition and other beats can take place over multiple scenes or chapters, the inciting incident is usually a single scene. It ups the ante, adds drama and tension, and is something that your protagonist shouldn't be able to avoid.

In some structures, this beat is also named the *call to adventure*. Whether they want it or not, your protagonist is called to a task as a result of the larger conflict in your book. Perhaps they are conscripted to the war. Maybe they learn a tsunami is going to swallow their town whole. Or maybe their friends want to take them out for a night on the town to forget the jerk who dumped them. All of these can disrupt the ordinary world your protagonist lives in.

To make an effective inciting incident, consider what it is your character wants, how they are dissatisfied, and what it would realistically take to change their world. The inciting incident *does not*

have to immediately force them into action—in fact, the scenes and chapters that follow are usually filled with worry, reluctance, or hesitancy—but it can. Whatever works best for your story.

## Dos and Don'ts of the Inciting Incident

**Do:** Include the inciting incident earlier in your book. The entirety of Act One (exposition, inciting incident, first plot point) should only be about 25% of your book, and if you spend too long on exposition, you're going to lose readers.

**Don't:** Force the protagonist into action if it doesn't make sense. If your inciting incident is unrealistic or isn't reflective of the hero's values, you may want to get to know your protagonist a little better.

**Do:** Check out other books in your genre. The inciting incident comes much earlier in thrillers than it does in fantasy or horror. Depending on your genre, some inciting incidents might not even involve the protagonist but pull them in after the fact. In those situations, a secondary inciting incident might be needed (i.e., someone showing up at their door and asking them to save the president).

**Don't:** Force the protagonist to make an immediate decision. There is a lot of depth in providing internal conflict for a character who doesn't want to leave their ordinary world.

**Do:** Make the call to action make sense for the protagonist's personality, strengths, and weaknesses. If a wizard showed up at a high school to tell a fourteen-year-old that they have to fight a dragon, make sure the teenager loves fantasy, is interested in the knightly heritage of their great-great-great-great grandparents, has

accidentally done magic before, or any number of things that can tie them to that cause. Your average teenager would say no to that wizard or die if they said yes. Make sure the connection is there.

## THE FIRST PLOT POINT (ACT ONE)

The first plot point shows the reader how your protagonist reacts to the inciting incident. This can include scenes where they're just trying to figure their lives out and are hesitant about responding to the inciting incident.

Few people are prepared to just rush off to war, so someone conscripted might consider running away or think about how they're going to spend their last few days before shipping out. For our folks facing a tsunami though, there might be some disbelief that everything they know is going to be destroyed. But they have to choose pretty quickly whether or not they're going to try to evacuate in time to save themselves. Our heartbroken protagonist who is invited out for a night of fun must decide whether they are going to continue wallowing in their apartment with Ben & Jerry's or if they're going to put themselves out there again.

There is not a mandatory number of scenes or chapters that you must spend cultivating your protagonist's response to the inciting incident; it's the variation within the beats of a story that make it uniquely yours.

Ultimately, your protagonist must respond in a way that progresses the story and pushes them away from their ordinary world. Without that, you wouldn't have anything else to write about.

## Dos and Don'ts of the First Plot Point

**Do:** Make your protagonist's reaction believable. Unless it fits your character's personality, don't force them into a reaction.

**Don't:** Take too long resolving this story beat. Yes, tension and uneasiness can help develop your main character, but don't spend too long on the first plot point. Sometimes this story beat happens within a paragraph after the inciting incident. Sometimes it takes a chapter or two. Either way, remember that this is the gatekeeper to the rising action and all the great stuff that makes your story even more awesome. Don't drag it out.

## RISING ACTION (ACT TWO)

As you enter the second act, you encounter the rising action. This is where all the build-up and fun stuff starts to happen in your story—or, if it's a sadder genre, the not-so-fun stuff that still enralls your reader and builds character.

The rising action takes place over numerous scenes and multiple chapters. There is a lot of room for development during this beat for both your character and world. In this rising action, you can write about:

- Your protagonist exploring their new, unfamiliar world.
- Your antagonist's efforts to stop your protagonist.
- New friends and acquaintances your characters meet along the way.
- New obstacles and enemies.
- New information or backstories about your characters.
- The larger conflict developing in your book.

There is plenty of opportunity for you to explore and develop different aspects of your story during the rising action. Your protagonist(s), however, isn't very confident or powerful at this point (powerful could refer to magic powers, martial arts, political power, social power, etc.). They aren't necessarily seeking out the bad things that are happening; instead, they are reacting to most things that life throws at them.

And by life I mean you, the sadistic author who is putting them through all of this in the first place.

That doesn't mean your characters are passive and just let things happen. Rather, they are doing their best to keep up, all while learning and growing along the way.

## Dos and Don'ts of Rising Action

**Do:** Continue to increase the stakes for your characters. It's called rising action for a reason—things are getting more and more tense. This means that your pacing will increase and obstacles will become more difficult to overcome.

**Don't:** Go long periods of time without introducing conflict or expanding on the larger conflict. Remember, stories are driven by two opposing forces. If you take a long break away from this, some readers might get turned off. In the same vein, don't make every scene a fight or conflict. Find your happy medium for your style of writing.

**Do:** Ensure there are opportunities for your characters' weaknesses and flaws to be tested. This is where the most growth will come from.

**Don't:** Make your protagonist invincible, which could be physical, emotional, or mental depending on your genre. They shouldn't be barreling through the obstacles in the rising action without growth or consequences.

**Do:** Create obstacles that make sense. Don't throw a monster or a love triangle in just because you can't think of anything else. Everything should contribute to the larger narrative, whether that be pushing the conflict forward or developing a character.

## THE MIDPOINT (ACT TWO)

The midpoint takes place somewhere near the middle of your story. For creative folks, sometimes we come up with really boring names.

But it isn't *just* a scene in the middle of the book. Rather, the midpoint should be a turning point for your protagonist. Some big event happens here that is bad news—like, *really bad news*—for the protagonist.

This might mean that our conscripted soldier's unit is betrayed and left for dead. Maybe we learn that the tsunami is going to hit hours before originally thought. Or our heartbroken hero finally gets the courage to ask their ex to get back together, only to see them kissing someone else.

After this devastating event, the characters must refocus their efforts on their goal. There is a renewed sense of urgency driving them forward.

## Dos and Don'ts of the Midpoint

**Do:** Make the midpoint event life changing. This should be the most significant moment so far but should not be a win for the protagonist.

**Don't:** Get to the midpoint too early. You need time in the rising action for characters to develop and readers to get to know your world and those living within it.

**Do:** Create a midpoint that is particularly devastating to your characters. Why is it so impactful to them specifically?

## THE SECOND PLOT POINT (ACT TWO)

Being the ruthless author that you are, you've now put your characters through the worst scenario yet with the midpoint. They're sad, defeated, maybe even depressed. Everything they've worked through seems to have been for naught.

The second plot point is usually a series of events that show how the protagonists cope with what happened in the midpoint. Everything is changed now, and it's time for the characters to transform as a result.

Most often, this will be a handful of scenes leading to their renewed resolve. These scenes could include:

- Reflection
- Denial
- Improvement (like a classic training montage set to *Eye of the Tiger*)
- Help from others (like a good ol' pep talk)

So our conscripted soldier who was left for dead could crawl to a nearby house, heal up, and craft weapons to use against those who betrayed him. Our family in the path of a tsunami could panic but

come together to make a plan that saves themselves and their neighbors. After seeing their ex smooching someone else, our heartbroken protagonist could decide to focus on self care and their creative side hustle to find meaning (probably after reading this book, let's be real).

The midpoint figuratively or literally laid your protagonists flat on their back. The second plot point is how they stand back up and move forward.

## **Dos and Don't of the Second Plot Point**

**Do:** Shift your protagonist's mindset from reactive to proactive. They are no longer just responding to what life (or you) throw at them. Because of the midpoint, they are actively pushing themselves.

**Don't:** Drag on the protagonist's recovery or response for too long. Yes, we have to empathize and understand how devastating the midpoint was. No, things shouldn't be fixed in a scene or two. But if your characters are wallowing in self-pity for too long then your reader will start to be annoyed.

## **THE PRE-CLIMAX (ACT THREE)**

If you want to be as angsty as some of us were in early-2000s high school, you can also refer to this beat as the "Dark Night of the Soul." In the pre-climax, you need to be mean to your protagonist (again).

See, as your protagonist was leveling up, learning more about the world, or trying to escape their awful situation, the antagonist should

have been growing and getting stronger as well. Your main characters don't know this until the pre-climax, though.

Armed with their motivation from the pep talk that is the second plot point, your protagonist goes head-first towards their ultimate goal. Your abandoned soldier attacks those who betrayed them. Your family braves the final stretch to safety. Your now-successful entrepreneur heads to a convention to sell their artisanal crafts.

But the pre-climax stops them dead in their tracks. The soldier encounters overwhelming odds. The tsunami crashes down. The ex is also at the convention with their new lover.

In the pre-climax, we see the antagonist's full strength and highlight the deepest fears and weaknesses of our protagonist. We have to keep rooting for our protagonist, even if all hope seems lost.

## Dos and Don'ts of the Pre-Climax

**Do:** Make your protagonist the most confident they've been since the story began. It sounds cruel, but this makes the resistance they encounter seem even more hopeless.

**Don't:** Make it obvious that the hero will be victorious in the end. While all readers know that almost every story ends with the protagonist succeeding, the pre-climax should make the readers think that maybe, just maybe, the antagonist will succeed.

**Do:** Make the stakes high. If the antagonist *does* succeed, it should be absolutely devastating for the main character. The consequences of failure should be the worst that could happen in your story (death, financial ruin, heartbreak, disappointing your parents even more than usual).

## THE CLIMAX (ACT THREE)

This is it, the moment we've all been waiting for. The climax is one of the beats that usually takes place over a single thrilling scene. It is the ultimate moment when your protagonist stands up once more, rising from the ashes of the hit they took in the pre-climax, and prevails over the antagonist (usually).

This is the scene where our betrayed soldier gets his revenge. Our family clings to a raft for dear life as they are washed away by the tail end of the tsunami. Our successful entrepreneur closes the biggest deal of their life, showing their ex what they're really capable of.

Your entire story has been leading up to this beat, so give your readers what you've been promising this whole time.

### Dos and Don'ts of the Climax

**Do:** Make sure that your protagonists prevail because of the growth and development they've experienced throughout the story. Make them conquer their fears and prove that they've overcome their flaws.

**Don't:** Draw out your climax for too long. The pre-climax can take place over multiple scenes so your protagonist can experience the gut-punch you're delivering to them, but the climax should be an explosive, tense turnaround.

**Do:** Consider what prevailing means for your protagonist. Has their view of their ultimate goal changed at all throughout the story? The person who left the ordinary world in Act One might have been

searching for something much different than the person in Act Three.

## THE DENOUEMENT (ACT THREE)

Take a deep breath because the worst of it is likely over. The denouement, also known as the falling action, is a chance for you to tie up all your loose ends and plot holes. It's also an opportunity to give your reader a look at what the new ordinary world looks like now that the protagonist has accomplished their goal.

This doesn't necessarily have to be a happy ending but absolutely can be if you want it to. For our soldier who just got revenge, the denouement could show them running from the consequences of their actions or establishing a new life overseas. For our family who escaped the tsunami, it could mean rebuilding the community that was destroyed. For our entrepreneur, it could mean waking up and going to a job that they enjoy while finding fulfillment that isn't dependent on someone else.

The denouement is also where you can wrap up character arcs, resolve subplots, reinforce the transformation of characters, fulfill promises you made earlier in the book, and restate or clarify the theme (which we'll talk about in the next chapter).

Finally, if you're writing a series, the denouement is where you can set up a soft lead into your next book. That said, the denouement should be a break from the tension of the rest of the book, so don't do anything too intense.

## Dos and Don'ts of the Denouement

**Do:** Wrap up any subplots or unresolved character arcs. There are few things more unsatisfying than being teased with an answer and never getting it.

**Don't:** Fill the denouement with action. Your reader needs a break after the intensity of the climax. Your denouement can be happy or sad, but don't make it another tense action sequence.

**Do:** Focus on your characters, their journeys, and what their new ordinary world means to them. Remember, characters are what make a story important and memorable.

**Don't:** Spend too long on the denouement. It's called the falling action for a reason: nothing overly exciting is supposed to happen. If you drag on scene after scene with no conflict or development, you will bore your reader. Any cliffhangers should be brief and, well... leave the reader hanging.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: EXPAND YOUR THREE-ACT OUTLINE

Revisit wherever you wrote down the one-sentence summaries of the nine story beats in Chapter Three (ideally you used Story Notes or the Plot Grid in Dabble to make it easy to expand and edit your plotting!).

Using what you've learned in this chapter and from developing your characters in the last chapter, expand your summary of each of the nine beats. Don't rush this or you'll be rushing the foundation of your story—and would you buy a house if you learned someone rushed its foundation?

For plotters, go crazy. Write a paragraph for each summary. Heck, if you know the beat takes place over multiple scenes, try writing a paragraph for each scene.

Pantsers, at least expand your one-sentence summary into two or three sentences. It won't hurt to have a little bit more information going into your first draft, and I promise that a few sentences per beat won't restrict your creativity.

Wherever you fall on the pantsers spectrum, expand your outlines as much or as little as you want. Once you're done that, it's time to move on to the third key story element: theme.

## CHAPTER 7: TELL A TANTALIZING THEME

Complex characters? Check.

Perfect plot? Check.

Now it's time for the last crucial story element: theme.

Figuring out the theme of your story is a little bit more complicated than characters and plot. For those other two elements, it's easy to see how important they are to your story, right? Characters are the folks doing things and your plot is, well, the story itself. Theme is quite a bit more abstract than either of those.

But your theme is going to be what takes your story from, "That was fun." to, "Wow, that book was amazing!" Theme is the secret spice that will make your book linger on the tongues of your readers for days and weeks after they finish it.

That analogy is kind of weird, but I'm not taking it out.

So, to wrap up our last of the three story elements, I'm going to use this chapter to help you figure out what a theme is, understand why it's important, and at least lay the groundwork for creating one.

Before we get too deep into theme, there's something unique about this story element that you should keep in mind. Unlike character and plot where it can be helpful to have thoroughly outlined ideas, you don't want to have your theme fully planned out before you start writing.

Even though, as you'll soon read, themes can elevate a story, your book can be heavy-handed, dry, or lacking in other areas if you focus *too much* on driving your theme home. Instead of obsessing over it, I advocate for coming up with an idea for your theme and then letting it grow organically with your story.

If you don't think about theme at all though, your book will seem hollow and unfulfilling, even if you're lucky enough to stumble your way onto a theme by the end of it.

## WHAT IS A THEME?

Time to make the abstract a little more understandable. Let's revisit our friend Merriam-Webster once more to define theme for us: *a subject or topic of discourse or of artistic representation.*

Once again the definition seems more confusing than the word itself. I'm more a fan of defining theme like this: a subject or issue repeatedly discussed in a story. An idea that the author wants you to find.

The theme is the message your story is about. While your plot is the story itself, your plot and characters come together to share the message you want the reader to take away. It is the central idea behind your story.

Theme is **not** the plot. Theme is **not** the characters. Theme is the message that both of those send. Because of that, your theme is going to rely heavily on both of those other elements.

For characters specifically, your theme is going to be closely tied to your protagonist's story arc. It is through their journey—whether that be to fight a dragon or ask their crush to prom—that you will make the theme known.

When thinking about your theme, bear in mind that themes are not profound pieces of philosophy. These aren't five-sentence long statements that you'd raise your hand and share at a meeting to make yourself seem intelligent (or boring). Rather, themes are simple and easy to understand.

That's because themes are supposed to resonate with your reader. While they don't have to be identical to an experience your reader has had, themes should be recognizable and relatable to your audience. If they aren't, then your theme will be harder to find than a particular needle in a needlestack.

## Theme Topics

A list of every possible theme would take too long to read and, frankly, would be impossible to make. Still, here are a handful of some popular theme topics in literature. You can take these topics and expand them to focus on your theme, and I've given some examples of questions that can lead to themes in brackets for the first three examples.

Remember that themes are supposed to be simple—it's how you incorporate them into your story that will make them unique and

memorable.

- Good vs. evil (Are people innately good or evil? How far will good people go to stop evil?)
- Happiness (Is happiness objective? Can money buy happiness?)
- Grief (Is grief all-consuming? Can there be joy in grief?)
- Mental health
- Belonging
- Racism
- Family/friends
- Art
- Love

I think you get the point by now. Can you see how these topics can lead to a multitude of themes that your story could use? Next, we'll talk about why themes should even be included in your book.

## WHY ARE THEMES IMPORTANT?

I'm not going to lie, it seems like it would be easy for authors—especially new authors—to shrug off themes. “I don't really need a theme,” you might be saying.

Or maybe you're one of the enlightened ones now and know that themes make a story so much better.

Whichever camp you fall into, the best authors in the world understand that themes are important. For the sake of writing your first draft, I'm just going to highlight two of those reasons.

First and foremost, a theme helps elicit a strong emotional reaction from the reader. Themes, by their nature, tie emotion to the message

they are trying to impart to your audience. Not only that, but they are directly linked to the arcs of your main characters. By putting those two things together, you have a reader who is invested in both the character and the larger theme.

We cry when our protagonist copes with their grief. We cheer when good finally triumphs over evil. We're shocked or horrified when we see a protagonist with strong morals do something terrible for what they think is the greater good.

This is because of the second reason themes are important: they make the plot worthwhile.

A story without a theme is just a two-dimensional retelling of events. Sure, your characters might be neat and the world you build unique, but what's the point? By adding a theme to your story, you are making it bigger than what you are simply telling the reader.

This is what gets the reader invested. This is what clicks with your audience. This is what will make your book stand above the rest.

## HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR THEME

There is a certain eloquence to crafting a great theme. It isn't as blunt as a fight scene, nor is it as easy to identify, like that mysterious man standing at the back of the crime scene crowd.

First and foremost, **a theme is subtle**. You don't state your theme anywhere in your book. Imagine the eye rolls that would happen if you had your hero claim, "Good has prevailed over evil!" I'm groaning at the thought of it. Rather, your theme should be integrated throughout your story. Show us the cost of good prevailing over evil. Have your character suffer in order to maintain their vision

of good. And of course, this goes for any theme, not just good vs. evil.

**Character arcs are the best place to integrate your theme.** You can get your message across by having a well-crafted character experience the message for themselves. Again, don't make what they're experiencing explicit, but show it through their journey.

Before you even think about designing a character arc to illustrate your theme, you need to figure out what the heck you're trying to say in the first place. Start by **deciding on your theme topic**, like some of the ones listed earlier.

Then think about what theme you want to share related to that topic. My advice here is to **choose something that can be broadly understood**. Themes don't work if nobody relates to them or gets what they're trying to say. Once you've chosen that broader theme, you can get a little more specific with it—if that will work better with your audience. Odds are, unless you're paying someone to do some market research, first-time authors won't know exactly who their audience is or why some themes resonate better than others.

**You aren't limited to one theme**, either! You can have multiple themes in your story, though it's best to keep one theme per plot or subplot. **Consider using objects or symbols to represent your themes**, too. Have them pop up more than once to really drive the point home.

But again, be subtle about it. A symbol can appear two or three times but placing it in every scene would be obnoxious. In the same vein, **don't beat your reader over the head with your theme**. It should almost take some detective work to piece your theme

together. Multiple scenes and characters should contribute to your theme, but you don't need *every* scene or character to do so.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: START THINKING ABOUT YOUR THEME

Remember, we don't want to be heavy-handed with our themes, which usually means we don't want to go into a story with the sole intention of sharing a theme. Like a lot of what you've read so far, your theme will develop and grow as you write.

It's still helpful to have at least an idea of a theme you'd like to include and some possible ways to integrate it into your story. So, for your not-homework for this chapter, create a new note in your Dabble project or jot down and complete the following:

1. Identify two to five possible theme topics you might want to explore in your story. If you're feeling adventurous, expand those topics into full-fledged themes (just remember that these aren't set in stone).
2. How will your theme topics or themes work with the arcs of your main characters? How will those characters change because of the theme? Jot your answers down.
3. What recurring symbols will you include that relate to your themes? Make a list of potential items.

Make sure those are completed before moving on to the next (and most important!) chapter.

## CHAPTER 8: TIME TO WRITE!

Well, young Padawan, it's almost time for me to set you free into the scary, exciting world of writing. Just thinking about what you're going to write is bringing a tear to my eye—a tear of happiness, I swear.

But there's a little bit of parting wisdom that I want to share with you. So far throughout this book, I've tried to take theory and make it practical: what makes a great character and then making one; story structure and actually structuring a story; understanding theme and figuring out what the heck yours could be.

This chapter is dedicated to taking everything you've learned so far and putting it into action. I'll leave no stone unturned, no excuse for you to not start writing, by the time you've put this book down.

So what's the next step? Start writing.

I mean, I've been upfront about that big secret since the very beginning.

Throughout this book, I've given you the tools to make sure your first draft is something you can be proud of, something that is a comprehensive, connected book. With everything you've taken from here, you should be able to create amazing characters who

participate in an awesome plot, all while driving home a great theme. Your workspace should be set up, your toolbox in place, and now the only thing that can stop you from writing a great story is you.

There is no mystical secret to writing a book. There is no long-lost relic that you need to empower you. Seriously, all you need to do to write your book now is start writing.

Something so simple can seem so daunting. But that resistance you feel only exists in your head.

Let's use a metaphor. We're all writers here, right?

You're standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking an azure blue lake. Your characters have already jumped in. They're treading water down below, shouting up about how fun it is and how great you'll feel when you take the plunge. Your story is down there, waiting for you. All you have to do is take a single step and you're on your way to something you know you really want.

But that first step is scary. Like, really freakin' scary.

I hope that giving you the tools throughout this book has made that book a little less scary. Still, here's one more piece of advice to drive home before I let you go.

## CREATIVITY IS A MUSCLE

One of the biggest myths in writing is that creativity is the product of inspiration. I argue that it's the other way around. Sure, if you get inspired by a dozen different things in a day, you're going to be feeling pretty creative. What about those days when you don't have any inspiration, though?

To be a writer—whether a commercially successful one or someone who just wants to finish a book for themselves—you have to treat creativity like a muscle.

If you want to write a story, you are a creative person. Maybe you already knew that or maybe you have always looked at successful creatives with envy and thought, “I wish I could do that.” Whichever camp you’re in, understand that creativity is something you already have and it’s just waiting for you to use it.

Finding that creativity and maintaining it through an entire book can be tough, especially when you’re just starting out. It can be discouraging to hit those roadblocks along the way that make it feel as if you don’t have a creative bone in your body.

When you treat creativity like a muscle though, you’re building up resiliency to those roadblocks *and* making it that much easier to turn on your creative genius when you want it. The cool part is that building your creative muscles will also inspire you more than you already are. When creativity becomes second nature to you, inspiration is everywhere. It’s literally waiting for you to find it.

Then all that inspiration can be used to be even more creative. Creativer, one might say (your editor won’t, though).

Inspiration on its own is a form of procrastination. It is an excuse that anxious or fearful writers use to put off typing a single word. If you wait for inspiration to strike, you will never finish your book. Heck, you might not even start your book.

So, if we want to treat creativity like a muscle, how do we work out? How do you get that creative exercise that you’re going to need to write your story?

## MAKE WRITING A HABIT

Just like working out, you need to make writing a habit. Really just like any skill, the only way to get better at it is to do it regularly. Why would you expect writing to be any different?

We touched on this back in Chapter Two but now I'm back to hammer this point home before you finish this book. The *best* way to make writing easier, to get your book done, and to become more creative is to write consistently.

Unlike other habits though, writing doesn't suck. Healthy eating? Boring. Hitting the gym? No fun. Making your bed? Ugh.

Writing a book? Tons of fun! But writers are some of the only people who will bellyache about needing to do the thing they love doing most. We truly are a unique group of people.

The best way to make writing a habit is to use something like a calendar or an alarm on your phone. Use these tools to make writing part of your everyday routines. You already have your writing space set up from Chapter Two. You've already established physical and mental boundaries in your home with yourself and your family. Put those to great effect by setting aside a chunk of time each day to write your story.

To be clear, you don't need to spend an hour or more each day to get started. Heck, try out fifteen minutes every day for a week. If that goes well, bump it up to thirty minutes per day, making use of a couple sprints to help boost your creativity and get those words down (remember, <https://www.writingsprints.org> is there for everyone

to use!). After a month, see if you can graduate to that hour per day mark.

Most importantly, go at your own pace. Unless you are writing commercially and trying to produce multiple books per year, there is no rush to finish your book. The worst case scenario would be going too hard, too fast and burning yourself out. If you thought it was difficult motivating yourself to write before, imagine how hard it can be if you're completely burnt out on it.

If you're using Dabble (and with a 14-day free trial, why aren't you?), our goal tracking makes habit building even easier. By inputting the number of words you want your story to be, when you want to be done, and any days you know you won't be writing, we'll automatically calculate how many words you should be aiming for per day. It's really satisfying to get a spray of celebratory confetti when you hit your daily word goal.

Beyond the motivation that a daily goal can provide, it also helps bring you back down to reality sometimes. It isn't until you see that you're averaging 500 or 1,000 words per day that a goal of 2,500 words per day needs some adjusting. On the other hand, it isn't until you're hitting 1,000 words per day that maybe 1,500 seems plausible. Then 2,000. Then 2,500. Habit building works in small steps.

Again, we want to avoid burnout. We want to avoid frustration and disappointment. This is your story! You should love the process of bringing it to life.

Now let's Frankenstein it up. I have two final actions for you before I say goodbye.

## NOT-HOMEWORK: BOOK TIME TO WRITE

This is an easy one. With whatever system you use to plan your day—a desk calendar, agenda, Google or Outlook calendars, or anything else that has the dates and time slots—book time to write tomorrow.

And the next day.

And the next day.

And... the next day.

Do you see the pattern? Remember that you don't need to be blocking off an hour or two at a time, at least to start. If you get there eventually, that's great! But start with manageable pieces.

So book fifteen minutes or whatever you think works for you and repeat it every day. Then...

## *ACTUAL* HOMEWORK: WRITE!

If you thought the last one was easy, get a load of this one. All I want you to do is exactly what you want to do: start writing. You've read about it. You have all your notes from throughout this book. You're ready.

Open up your Dabble project or whatever platform you're using.

Set a timer for fifteen minutes.

And just have fun writing. I can't wait to see what you come up with.

## BONUS CHAPTER: WRITING ROADBLOCKS

Picture this: you're writing your amazing first draft. Everything is coming together. The birds are singing, the sun is shining, and you realize, "Hey, this book is awesome!"

Then one day you sit down to write the next word and...

Nothing. Nada. Zilch.

The words aren't coming. There is *something* blocking them, you're sure of it. Well, dear writer, you are experiencing writer's block. This term spreads such terror amongst new writers that I needed to add a bonus chapter about it.

Whether you call it writer's block or something else—some authors claim "writer's block" isn't even real—there will come a time when you are struggling to put more words down on paper. It's impossible to know exactly what will cause this struggle because every writer is different, and there will be times when you can't write if your life depends on it.

On the other hand, there will be many times when you *think* you have a valid reason for contracting writer's block, but you're really just making excuses.

Some valid reasons for not writing: you or your child is sick, you've experienced a tragedy or loss, a storm has knocked out your entire city's power, the four horsemen of the apocalypse have risen, or you're recovering from something mentally or physically exhausting.

Some invalid reasons for not writing: you don't feel inspired, you want to browse social media, you're a little sleepy, you haven't had your coffee yet, you just aren't feeling it today.

That might sound a little harsh, but I wanted to clearly differentiate between genuine reasons that are stopping you from writing and common excuses. Because most of the time, writer's block is really just one of those excuses rearing its ugly head. There are very few things that can actually block your creative process, so the ability to identify the real blockage is a great tool to add to your kit.

If you find yourself staring at a blank screen, answer (aloud, in your head, or on paper) reflection questions like:

- Am I stressed about something?
- Am I worried about something?
- Am I scared of something?
- Have I acknowledged the impact that a recent event has had on me?

If those don't yield any results, odds are you're dealing with a motivation issue more than anything else.

## FIND YOUR MOTIVATION

Like I've said maybe 1,000 times now: writing a book is a lot of work. It takes a long time. Beyond relationships, family, pet ownership, or mortgages, there aren't many journeys you'll embark on that can take as long as writing a book. You are bound to at least have your motivation fluctuate if not get lost altogether every now and then.

First things first, being unmotivated is not the same as writer's block. It is not some mystical force that stops you from typing. It's more that you just don't feel like it.

Just like you don't feel like going to the gym, eating a salad, cleaning the bathroom this weekend, raking up leaves, or any number of tasks that are easy to put off because you aren't *motivated* to do them.

Finding the motivation to do any of those things isn't easy, don't get me wrong. There's a reason that losing your motivation is so detrimental to goals, because getting that motivation back is one of the hardest things you can do. So here are some more tools to help you stay motivated or find your motivation if you've lost it.

## **Motivation Tool #1: Patience**

Right off the bat I'm going with something intangible. Sorry about that. But having patience with yourself is one of the best things you can do when you lose motivation.

Understand that you're a human being first and a writer second. Human beings make mistakes. We lose motivation. We eat too many chips in one sitting. If you haven't experienced these (specifically the latter), then you're probably some sort of alien robot masquerading as a person.

The first time you find that you're unmotivated, simply take a step back and realize that it happens and you will get your motivation back. Be patient.

## Motivation Tool #2: Your *Why*

Way back in Chapter Two I asked you to determine your *why*. Why are you writing your story? If you followed along, you also posted that *why* somewhere in your writing space.

You might think it's lame, but that *why* is a powerful tool to keep you motivated. If you haven't looked at it lately, take another gander at your *why*. Remind yourself what is pushing you to bring this story to life.

If your *why* isn't instantly resonating, take a break for the day and think about how much your book will mean to you when you're done. Read a short story or a couple chapters from your favorite author. Promise yourself that you will embrace your *why* and write for at least fifteen minutes tomorrow.

## Motivation Tool #3: Routine

Okay, not to beat a dead horse with this one, but the easiest way to counter a lack of motivation is to work writing into your daily routine (which is a nicer way of saying you need to make it a habit). This is how you stop "writer's block" before it even happens.

Once your writing is a daily routine, you don't *need* motivation. It's always there in the background. Your creativity is on tap. You simply sit down and write.

You don't need motivation to wash your hands or brush your teeth. You don't need motivation to sip on your hot beverage of choice in the morning. You don't need motivation to lock your door on the way out. These things all just happen because you've done them so often.

Working writing into your routine is the best way to counter waning motivation. It's also the one tool that will take the longest to put in place. So get started ASAP.

## **Motivation Tool #4: Support**

Writing is often a solitary venture. Unless you're co-authoring a book with someone (which, in case you didn't know, you can totally do with Dabble), most of the process of writing a book is done by yourself. Sure, you'll have an editor or editors, beta readers, and maybe you'll get in touch with some book bloggers to help with your release. Otherwise, it's just you and the people you make up.

That's why it's important for you to set up a support system to keep you motivated, bounce ideas off, or just rant at when you come up with something amazing to add into your story.

With your support system, size doesn't matter. In fact, it can be as big or as small as you want it to be. As in most things, quality is more important than quantity. This support system will be there to help you with your lows and celebrate your highs.

Some folks you might want to include in your support system: your partner, parents, best friends, book-loving friends, and writers you've met through writing groups or social media.

Some folks you **don't** want in your support system: people who don't read your genre, people who don't believe in your creative endeavor, people who always steer conversations back to themselves.

At the same time, remember that any solid support system works both ways; you can't just take, take, take without reciprocating the same help you're getting.

Need a place to start? Head on over to the Story Craft Café ([storycraft.cafe](http://storycraft.cafe)) to connect with an awesome community of fun, supportive writers.

## Motivation Tool #5: Fun

If you thought #1 was lame, I wish I could have seen your eyes roll when you read this final motivation tool.

At the end of the day, if you aren't having fun bringing your story to life then something isn't right. You're a creative person. This story might be a dream of yours. So, if you aren't enjoying the process, why are you doing it?

This tool calls for some more reflection, too. If you aren't having fun, ask yourself why. If there has been something in your life that has changed recently, address it. In some cases though, you might find yourself unmotivated because of how your story has gone.

It happens to all writers at some point in their career, usually more than once. Even the most rigorous planning can still end up with a story that veers in a direction you weren't expecting, one that maybe you aren't happy with.

If you find that you aren't having fun with your story, perhaps it is time for a...

## COURSE CORRECTION

Stories are funny. They are these things that we, as writers, breathe life into. They are dependant on their authors but also seem to grow and shape like some kind of living organism.

Unless you are the most stringent of plotters, you will find yourself riding a wave with your story, going with the flow, seeing where the words take you. And sometimes that wave can take you places you don't want to go.

Which sucks.

If this errant wave comes along and you aren't a huge fan of where the story is going, you need to realize it's time for a course correction. Here are some ways to eloquently navigate the choppy seas of an off-course story.

### **Avoid Perfectionism**

Your first draft is just a first draft. There will be things you want to change, either now or later. There will be scenes that you write that will never see anyone's eyes but your own.

It's important to accept that course correcting is a natural part of writing. You will not be a perfect author the first time you write a story. If you can accept this fact, at least a little, then a course correction won't be the end of the world. It will just be another thing you have to do to make your story awesome!

## Don't Hate Your First Draft

Okay, I've taken some jabs at first drafts throughout this book, but I don't want you to think the first novel you write is going to be one you're ashamed of. Some first drafts only need a little polishing. Some need a lot.

Whichever way your first draft goes, remember that it is your first pass at the story—maybe your first pass at *any* story. For minor corrections, don't worry about scrapping everything. These are corrections you can make when you are reading and revising your first draft or ones that will get noticed by beta readers.

For larger corrections—like entire subplots, story arcs, or the larger plot—it is worth understanding when your story either isn't what you wanted it to be or has become something that isn't panning out the way you thought it would.

If you think you need to make a larger correction like that, don't just jump the gun and scrap everything. Take a day or two away from your story. Ask someone you trust for their thoughts about the issue. Try and pinpoint exactly what it is you're unhappy with.

The whole time though, don't end up hating your book because you need to fix some things. That's just how writing works.

## It's Okay to Deviate From Your Outline

Listen up plotters. You need to understand that your outline, as detailed and intricate as it might be, can be altered or abandoned. The purpose of an outline is to guide you in your writing, but it isn't holy scripture passed down by a higher power.

If you find that your story has deviated from your outline, don't immediately think that you need a course correction. As I said, stories have a habit of growing organically. Accept that your creativity and skills as a writer can create something that you didn't originally dream up.

When your story has strayed from the path set up by your outline, take some time to read through what you've created. Be objective about it; accepting this new path shouldn't be a blow to your pride or an insult to your outlining skills.

## BUMPS IN THE ROAD ARE LIKE THANOS... INEVITABLE

Sorry for any folks out there who don't like Marvel movies. The reference might be lost on you. I'm only kind of sorry, though.

On a more serious note, this bonus chapter wasn't meant to scare you about what's coming or make you feel like your first draft will disappoint you. It was to let you know that writing a book isn't just smooth sailing, but the waves you will encounter are not as bad as you think.

Writer's block, losing motivation, and writing something you aren't happy with are all normal experiences for all writers. Don't let them discourage you from writing the story that's begging to get out of your head.

# CONCLUSION

And, dear friend, we've reached the end of our time together. No, don't cry. Hold it together. I'm not crying, I swear.

Whether you're writing your first book or your fifth, I genuinely hope that you have learned a thing or two (or dozen) that will help you out. Just to make sure you're best equipped for your next story, let's quickly recap what you read.

In Chapter One, we established the fundamentals of a book: plot, characters, theme, length, genre, and more. Without a good understanding of the fundamentals, you're playing with one hand tied behind your back.

Then we got set up for writing—both internally and externally—in Chapter Two. This is really important, especially for new authors. By setting up your writing space, growing your toolkit, and determining the *why* behind your writing, you are already ahead of many writers who started but never finished their story.

In Chapter Three, I introduced you to pantsers and plotters, then helped you figure out where you fell in between those two points.

Chapter Three is where you started to a very basic outline of your story using the tried-and-true three-act structure.

Then we got into the good stuff... if you consider determining your point of view the good stuff—and I do. Chapter Four went over the different options you have to tell your story from. We also looked at the difference between active and passive writing, and the impact these two voices can have on your storytelling.

But then we got into the *real* good stuff: characters. Characters are the lifeblood of a story. In Chapter Five, you read all about what makes character great, including the different arcs you can apply to your own characters. You also got three resources that some writers would kill for. No murder here, though, they're yours to keep.

On to Chapter Six, where we dove deep into plot. So deep we couldn't even see the sun by the time we were finished. By working with the three-act structure introduced back in Chapter Three, we went beat-by-beat and covered the major points in storytelling. It's important to remember that, while stories tend to follow these beats, the three-act structure and all other structures don't make your story cookie-cutter or boring, which you hopefully saw when you further outlined your own story using these elements.

Things got a bit more abstract as we learned about themes in Chapter Seven. A theme might not seem that important at first, but it will be the thing that takes your book to the next level for your readers. By drawing on larger experiences and sharing a message, you add an extra layer of life to your story and make it worth reading.

With the different lessons and tools you've read about in this book, Chapter Eight brought them all together to reinforce your creativity.

You learned that creativity is like a muscle and the best way to write is to actually write. Just acknowledging that fact puts you well ahead of many first-time authors.

And just when you thought it was over, I threw in a bonus chapter to address three of the biggest challenges writers face: writer's block, losing motivation, and course correcting.

This recap wasn't just to throw more words at you but to help in two ways. First, it should have helped you identify areas where you feel like you're still lacking. If you feel like you need to revisit a chapter and take some more notes, read a section over again, or if you just need a refresher before your next writing session, go for it!

Second, and most importantly, this recap was to show you how far you've come. Pursuing your dream or goal of writing a book isn't easy, but you have taken so many steps down the road to making that book a reality.

The thing is, the perfect book will never write itself. You're the one that has to bring it to life. You're the one that has to make amazingly flawed characters, beautiful plots, and themes that resonate with your readers. You're the one who has to weave subplots together while showing us a world of love, science, magic, or mystery.

It's on you now, and I know you can do it.

If you want to make your writing journey easier, more fun, and dare I say even a little magical, have I mentioned Dabble recently? I definitely have but, just to be safe, Dabble is a novel writing platform that is built with writers in mind. You get all the features you want—character and story notes, chapters, and scenes only one click away in the same document, and more—and some you had no idea you

wanted but won't be able to live without—like our Plot Grid and goal tracker. And new features are being added all the time—features requested and voted for by the community.

If you're reading this and are already a Dabblers, I know I don't have to convince you how amazing the platform is. If you haven't given Dabble a shot though, you can try it for free, no credit card required, for fourteen days by checking out: <https://www.dabblewriter.com/>

Be sure to check out our vibrant, growing community of writers just like you over at <https://www.storycraft.cafe/>. You can meet other writers, especially those in your genre. You can ask questions about writing and learn more about the topics you read about in this book. Join a writing group, participate in writing sprints, find or become a beta reader, and so much more.

And if you're feeling up to one more piece of not-homework, why don't you hop on over to the community and let everyone know about your new story? We'd love to hear all about it.

Once you've done that, put this book down and write some more. I love that you've joined me throughout this book, but now you're ready to go.

Happy writing!