Write your story your way

www.**storycompanion**.com

Story creation
GUIDE

Introduction

There is no magic to writing a book. Anyone can do it if they have a starting idea, some structure and some patience. If you never have read a word about the theory behind writing before, this guide will provide you with all you need to know in an easy and natural way. If you are familiar with the theory behind storytelling, you will still find the Story Companion guide an invaluable help in structuring and organizing your future writings.

Here you will find all the most important theory, many examples and aids of how to go from idea to finished story. The guide will make sure that you won't lose overview or feel overwhelmed by the story creation process and it will make sure that you have all the important ingredients for creating an interesting story.

The Story Companion guide is based on the premises that no matter what level of theory you want to use for structuring your story, the guide will help you do it. You do not need the Story Companion software to use this guide (even if the software is streamlined to follow the ideas of this guide). If you chose to use the program you will find that the program itself will not enforce any rules upon your writing, but it will give you tips, hints and guides for support (if you want them).

Please note that, regarding to each and every one of the subjects discussed in the guide, there are much more theory to find, but we have aimed at finding a balance between easy access, usefulness and information feeding.

It is also easy to get overwhelmed by all the pages and all the information of the guide. If that should be the case, please don't despair, jump to and read the final chapter - **Final remarks** - of this guide.

Best regards,
The Story Companion team

Guide outline

The goal of the Story Companion writing guide is to create a flow from your starting idea to a finished story and to start writing as soon as possible. Story Companion uses a unique approach where you will be able to choose just how much theory you want to use and when you "want out". All principles are based on solid ideas from many professional authors and writing teachers.

Why do I need Theory?

Many great stories have been written without any knowledge of the theory behind storytelling at all. You do not need theory to tell a great story, but it will, in almost all cases, make it easier to create a good and interesting story. It will help you to structure your work, to avoid writers' block, to keep a desired pace and it gives you the tools to keep your readers hooked. And, of course, it is always easier to break the rules if you know the rules…

Structure

The theory used as a foundation to Story Companion is divided into four phases (see below). As a writer you will be able to choose how much theory you would like to apply to your story. Some writers like to find out what happens in their story as they write, while others want to have every little detail laid out before them before they start writing.

In this guide you can choose any level of detail. When you feel you have created a good structure in Phase 2 you can jump directly to the writing phase (Phase 3) and if you feel that you have a finished story that is good enough to publish, you can jump to Phase 4 to get tips on how to sell and market your story.

- **Phase 1 - Collecting your thoughts**
  Goal: Getting ready to start your story.
  Main points: Just think about it for a while...

- **Phase 2 - Story Creation**
  Goal: Creating a good story structure as a foundation for your writing.
  Main points: Creating synopsis, acts, chapters and scenes. Make sure you have conflict, desired pace and interesting characters. Here we create the framework.

- **Phase 3 - Writing (to be included)**
  Goal: Writing and editing your story to catch readers and publishers attention.
  Main points: Show, don't tell. Revise! Here we dress our frame with words.

- **Phase 4 - After Work (to be included)**
  Goal: Getting published!
  Main points: How to attract a publisher or an agent.

Note on theory

Theory and rules are a great help for anyone who wants to write a story, but remember to only use the parts that fit your style of writing. You go through this guide because it will make it easier for you to write your story. If you feel that a step doesn't help you or you don't understand it – skip it (or contact us)!

Phase 1 - Collecting your thoughts

Don't worry. This will be really short.
Take ten short minutes and put aside everything around you.
Just relax and collect your thoughts for a moment.
What ideas do you have for your story? How can you use the knowledge and experience you have inside of you? Have you thought about any characters, locations or an overall feeling? Anything else you would like to put into your story? Some stories are born from a feeling, an injustice, a newsflash on TV, a character or a place that caught your eye. Think about your inspirations, hopes and feelings for your story. Think about bringing your ideas and characters to life, to lay out your words and create a fully grown tale.
Now take a moment and visualize you standing with the finished story in your hands.
Imagine seeing your story for sale in all he bookstores across the country.
Feels great, doesn't it!

Ok, that's all.

Let's start writing!

Short Story Companion dictionary

This is just to show how we use the terms in this document (please don't bother to memorize it).

- **Antagonist** – This is the character or force that is normally trying to stop the Protagonist. It can be the other love interest in a love story, cancer in a tragedy, the corrupt landowner in a social drama or the really scary alien trying to eat our heroine.

- **Character driven story** – The main focus in the story is on the characters and how they develop and not on the actions and the events taking place (the plot).

- **Consequence** – There should be clear consequences drawn up for what will happen if a character fails to reach the main goal of story.

- **Conflict** – Conflict is what driving a story. And normally there is a main conflict in the heart of every story.

- **Genre** – Genre is the general mood and "rules" you commit your story to. E.g. drama or horror.

- **Goal** – Every story normally has a central goal over which the character fights (and thus creating the conflict). It can be Saving the world, Curing cancer, Marrying that girl etc. Every character in your story should also have a goal.

- **MacGuffin/maguffin** – This is a word for a motivational component in a story that is used to move the plot forward. It can be the secret documents/the treasure/the lost person/ the lost ark that everyone is trying to find. Its only purpose is to give an excuse for the plot moving.

- **Narrative point of view** – the narrative point of view is the perspective from which the story is told. Normally you choose between first person or third person point of view.

- **Plot** – Plot is all the actions and events that together creates a story.

- **Plot driven story** – The main focus in the story is on the actions and the events taking place (the plot) rather than on the characters.

- **Plot hole** – A contradiction, inconsistence or breach in the logic of a story.

- **Protagonist** – This is the person driving the story forward. It can be several people, but normally one character is more in the center than the others. This is the person in the center of your story.

- **Reason** – What reasons do the characters have? Why do they act as they do?

- **Setting** – Setting is the places, the time and the senses of the characters. In Story Companion you normally use the Places tab for creating and saving your settings.

- **Structural role** – These are roles that are needed for the structure of any story (Protagonist, Antagonist, Viewpoint character and Narrative point of view).

- **Synopsis** – your general story layout with all the ingredients for describing the core of your story (normally it should at least include main conflict, main characters, their goals and their reasons).

- **Theme** – Normally you have an underlying subject or issue you want to explore or use as an influence in your story – this is your theme. It can be seen as the message of your story.

- **Viewpoint character** – This is the character from whose point of view the reader sees the story unfold and learn about the world where the story takes place. It is often the same character as the Protagonist, but it can be any other character that is involved in the story.

Phase 2 - Story creation

In this phase we will create the structure of your story that we, in the next phase, will use as the writing foundation. We will make sure that the structure has all necessary ingredients for a creating a great reading experience – making a solid structure will make writing so much easier! First we will make a basic overview of your story (the Synopsis), then we will break down the Synopsis into crude Acts. Then we will break down the Acts to more exhaustive Chapters and, finally, we will break down the Chapters into fully detailed Scenes (see below).

Exit points - When you don't want to go into more details in your structure, chose the next *exit point* in the Story creating process and end the story creation phase and go to the writing phase.

Story creating process

Synopsis

The goal is to create a general story frame with all necessary ingredients for the next step (Acts).
- Create a basic story outline (synopsis)
- *Exit point*

Part 1

- Create important characters and decide roles
- Theme
- Genre
- Settings
- Backstory
- Review
- *Exit point*

Part 2

Acts

The goal in this part is to break down your synopsis into manageable pieces, but without losing the overview.
- Divide your story into a desired number of acts (normally three or more)
- Check the acts to see that we have all the important ingredients (theme, genre etc.)
- Normal Character and plot development through acts
- *Exit point*

Chapters

We will start to look at the finer details of your story.
- Character and plot development
- Check pace, theme and other important ingredients
- *Exit point*

Scenes

We will start to fine tune your story and create a detailed plan for what you are going to write.
- A complete plot progression
- Finalizing the character and plot development
- A final look at your structure

Synopsis

Let us start creating your basic story layout!

A synopsis can have different purposes at heart: to outline the general story structure *or* to sell the greatness of a story to a publisher or potential reader. In this phase we will focus on the structural kind. In its most basic form the synopsis can be your main idea where you include the main conflict and your main characters (see below).

Creating a story outline (synopsis) – part 1

The goal in this part is to create a very general overview of your story, but an overview with all the important seeds for culturing a fully grown story.

Don't be too critic when you start writing. The important thing right now is to start creating your tale. Focus on your story idea and where it's leading you, not on plot holes or flawed characters.

Write down a short description of your story which should include *characters, conflict*, *consequences* and *reasons*.

Characters	This will be the protagonist (your hero/main character) & the antagonist (the adversary/negative force) in the story - normally the driving forces in your history (if you have other important characters thought out, include them too).
Conflict	The conflict is the fuel of any story – it doesn't matter if it's an action, horror, drama or a love story. Conflict is what creates tension and what makes your story interesting. Normally the conflict is over a specific goal and people having different views of this goal.
Reasons	What reasons and motivation does your character(s) have for wanting to reach the goal at heart of the conflict? The writer Kurt Vonnegut said "Every character should want something, even if it is only a glass of water".
Consequence	What will happen if your characters fail to reach the goal that is at the heart of the conflict? There can be small consequences or big ones (normally it's easier to hook readers with bigger consequences than with smaller ones - there is a difference between "not getting a Christmas present" and "The only child dying of a horrible illness").

Can you give me some examples?

Example 1 – James Bond
Conflict: *Evil genius wants to rule the world. James Bond wants to stop that from happening.*
Reason: *It is James Bonds job (and normally it's also personal because of some girl or friend that got killed).*
Consequence: *The world will never be the same again and Bond will probably die.*

Example 2 – Finding Nemo
Conflict: *Marlin wants to find his son Nemo. His fears and mistrust towards the world wants to stop him.*
Reason: *Nemo is his only son and he feels responsible for the death of his wife and all their children.*
Consequence: *Nemo will be lost forever and probably die.*

Example 3 – Pretty woman
Conflict: *Rich business man and working girl wants to be together. Their own (and the worlds) prejudice wants to stop them.*
Reason: *They love each other.*
Consequence: *They will probably be unhappy for the rest of their lives.*

If you are unsure of how to write your synopsis, you can use the following method.

- Create a sentence based on your **antagonist** and the main **conflict** of your story.
- Create a second sentence based on your **protagonist**, the **reasons** for "entering" the conflict, and describe the **consequences** of failure.
- Now construct a short sentence describing the time, mood and place and any message you think you would like present.

The **antagonist** can be an evil genius, the characters' inner demons, the social structure of society or anything that hinders the character from reaching the goals. Without an **antagonist** your story will have no conflict and without conflict your story will hold very little interest to a reader.

If you should end up with two or seven sentences really doesn't matter, and note that the third bullet above is not necessary, but it is a good way to fast create an overview of the elements influencing the story.

Show me the examples!

Moonraker (James Bond)
Sir Hugo Drax (**the antagonist**) wants to wipe out all of humankind to replace it with a super race that he has cultivated in his space station (**the main conflict**).
James Bond (**the protagonist**) a secret service employee whit a license to kill is ordered to investigate and stop (**the reason**) the evil plot, because if he fails he and all he has sworn to protect will die (**the consequences**). The story is a fast paced action story, without any deeper messages, taking place in modern times, all over the world and up in space.

Call of the wild – Jack London
The cruelty and indifference of man (**the antagonist**) tries to break the spirit of a dog stolen and taken to Klondike (**the conflict**). The dog (**the protagonist**) must learn to pull a sledge and how to live without being depending on man or get his spirit broken or die (**the consequences**). The story takes place during the gold rush in the 1930s, in northwest Canada and tries to show loyalty and survival when civilization evaporates.

When you have created the core synopsis you can now flesh out what you have written with the rest of your ideas for the story. Include characters, places, feelings, events etc. until you feel that the story outline you have written represent the story you want to tell. Note that at this point it is the structure of your tale that is important and not the description (so go easy on the adjectives). You should end up with something between 2 lines and 2 pages (both extremes are fine).

Exit point
This part is only for those who do not want to continue with the next step of the story creation theory!
Here you can take the synopsis you have written and go to the writing part of the theory. This will give you an outline of what you want to write without spoiling the fun in letting your story unfold in front of your eyes. We still think it's a great idea to read the chapters about genre, theme, roles and setting that are coming up.

How to use the created synopsis
You use the synopsis you have created as a goal and a remainder of what needs to happen and influence your story. The conflict needs to be present and explained, the characters need to be presented and their reasons revealed as your story unfolds. You also need to make sure that your readers understand the consequences if your character(s) fails.
On a more detailed level you can use the idea of conflict, reasons and consequences to create tension for individual chapters and scenes – every little part needs some tension!
Also remember to put a lot of work into the first chapter, because it is this part that is going to sell your book to anyone starting to read your story.

Creating a story outline (synopsis) – part 2

So you decided to have a little bit more of the theory? Great! We think that is wise.

By now you have created a very basic outline of the story you want to tell. Let's fill it with some flavor! We are going to look at characters, plot, theme, genre, settings and backstory. This is going to be the most theory intense part of the process, but also the most rewarding one.

Feel free to change to order between the items in this part. The different parts depend on, and affect, each other. It is perfectly normal to go back and forth changing and adapting the parts for them to fit together. Let's have a look at the first part.

Creating important characters and deciding roles

Here we will decide who we need to keep your story moving. Right now we don't need to find all the characters. We just need a handful to fill the shoes of some of the roles that normally inhabit a story. Further on in the Acts, Chapters and Scenes we will continue to develop our characters and to weave them deeper into your story and we will find additional characters.

First and most important: remember that the characters you create are people and that the reader want to feel, fear and care for them (or even hate them). It is your job to try to make them human by giving them strengths, weaknesses and their unique personality. To a reader your characters need be distinct in their manners, way to speak and how they think.

At their core your characters should have their own goals and their own reasons for wanting to achieve those goals. The most important goal is the one that link them to the main conflict in your story (which you have put in the Synopsis) and what will happen if they fail.

You also need to think about how your characters will change or grow throughout your story. Normally in an action oriented story the characters will mostly be unaffected by what is happening and the important part is the actions and events taking place (this is called a **plot driven** story). In dramas the characters are more in the focus and they will often learn, change and grow as your story unfolds (this type of story is called a **character driven** story). And of course you can mix the two.

Example – plot driven story
Indiana Jones is the same person at the start of the films as in the end of them. The important is the sequence of actions which takes him from the start of the story to the end of the story.

Example – character driven story
In Nick Hornby's "About a boy" the main character goes from being a self-centered egocentric and lonely bastard to being a more compassionate person with actual friends.

An easy way to make sure a character is linked to the core of your story is to construct the following sentence for your main characters: **character** wants to achieve **the goal** because of the **reasons**, but the **conflict**…. may force **consequences** for the character.

The Lord of the Rings – Samwise Gamgee
Sam wants to help Frodo destroy the one ring, because he thinks he is the only one who can help Frodo - Frodo is his best friend and he has promised Gandalf. But Gollum, orcs and most of the world tries to stop them which will lead to the end of Frodo, the death of their friends and breaking of his promise to Gandalf.

You don't need to put the equal amount of energy into every character in your story, but you should try to put some work into your main characters (any character that is going to follow the reader much of the time in your story). A waiter that will bring your main character a glass of water in a scene and never to be seen again should not have anything more to him than the wish to deliver a glass of water and a perhaps a name, while your protagonist (see next page) could have a full CV and a biography.

Go over your characters and try to cut away unnecessary ones (do we really, really need the waiter to come and bring a glass of water?). They should have a dramatic function, if they are not adding anything to your story then cut them away! What will happen to your story if you remove the character? Remember don't complicate characters and goals - simplify! It will make it easier for you and for the reader.

One way of to get a quick impression of a character is to create a working title for the character. The title is an adjective and a noun put together.

Examples

Scary psychopath – Michael Myers in Halloween.
Golden hearted whore – The pretty woman in Pretty woman.
Brave little fish – Nemo in Nemo.
Nameless Waiter – a waiter with no importance to the story (have you not cut this guy away yet?).
Nice cop – unimportant cop who helps our hero in one scene.

Roles

Which characters do we need? Different characters fill different purposes. Some move the story forward; others show differences between characters or between beliefs. Some just put a little flavor to your story. Right now we will only focus on the major ones in the story. Later we will see who else we can find.

A good way to see which characters we need is to have a look at the different roles that usually exists in a well written story. The roles are stereotypes that will make it easier for you to create interest, conflict and to make sure goals, problems and themes are seen from different points of views. It will also make the characters easier to distinguish from each other. A character can in reality have several different roles and have different roles at different times in your story, but normally you can assign one general role of a character in your story.

Structural roles

These are roles that are needed for the structure of any story. Normally they come naturally when you think about your history, but sometimes it can be worth the time playing around and changing these roles to see if the story can become more interesting.

Protagonist – This is the person driving the story forward. It can be several people, but normally one character is more in the center than the others. In Tolkien's "Lord of the rings" we follow several characters that move the plot forward, but the main character is Frodo and his way to destroy the ring. Note that in many action and horror stories the "bad" guy could, strictly speaking, be considered the Protagonist, because he moves the plot forward be trying to take over the world or trying to find new horrific ways to kill the main character. Still we will consider the Protagonist to be the character which the reader follows most closely.

Antagonist – This character or force that normally is trying to stop the Protagonist. It can be the other love interest in a love story, cancer in a tragedy, the corrupt landowner in a social drama or the really scary alien trying to eat our heroine. Remember that even a bad guy needs to be described with strengths and flaws to be interesting. It is also important that the Antagonist is as strong as, or stronger than, the Protagonist. There will be very little tension if the reader knows from the start that the Antagonist has no chance because your Protagonist is such a superior human being. It is more interesting seeing your Protagonist fighting to conquer cancer than a normal cold.

Viewpoint character – This is the character from whose point of view the reader sees the story unfold and learn about the world where the story takes place. It is often the same character as the Protagonist, but it can be any other character that is involved in the story. In all Sherlock Holmes stories the view point character is not Sherlock Holmes (the Protagonist), but rather doctor Watson (the Sidekick). This lets the reader be in the dark as much as dr Watson even when Sherlock knows the solution to all of the mysteries. Try to see your synopsis from the eyes of different characters: how will the dynamics of the story change? The history can also be told from the viewpoint of several separate persons, but this can easily get complicated.

Narrative point of view – Another major decision you have to make is to decide how you will present your story. Will it be from a first person or third person point of view? In the first person view the Viewpoint character will tell the reader the story himself ("**I** gave Sherlock my revolver"). In a third person view the viewpoint character is the character the reader follows most closely ("**He** gave the revolver to Sherlock Holmes"). The first person perspective is normally more intimate, but also put more focus on only one character in your story. We will explore this subject more in Phase 3 (Writing) and you do not have to decide anything yet. If you want to know more Wikipedia has some okay descriptions and links to lead you further on.

Apart from the structural roles that are important for how the story is going to feel, we have other roles that could be filled by characters in your story (you will find them under many different names in the literature and a character can fill several roles). The more important characters in a story normally fit into one or more of these roles.

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Common roles

Contrast roles – the characters will be clearer and issues and conflicts will be easier to show if you put two or more characters as opposites in their behavior. For example, having a logical and an emotional character trying to solve a problem is bound to create an interesting situation. Example of contrast roles: Angry/Calm, Neat/Untidy, Fat/Skinny, Religious/Atheist etc. Normally you use contrasts to show a problem or an idea from different angels or to create conflict.

Mentor – Aids the protagonist with knowledge (or other means). The mentor is normally in contrast with the protagonist in some ways (calm/impulsive, organized/disorganized etc.). *Examples:* **Yoda**/*Luke Skywalker,* **Gandalf**/*Bilbo,* **Clint Eastwood**/*million-dollar baby.*

Shadow – This is the negative influence in the story and normally wants to stop the protagonist. It is normally the antagonist, but not always and it doesn't need to be a person. It is used to put conflict into the story. *Examples: The illness the protagonist has to fight in a drama; the depression in Grapes of wrath, the Joker in Batman.*

Shapeshifter – A character to put uncertainty into the reader's mind by questioning the ideas of the protagonist (or antagonist). The Shapeshifter can change roles and alliances during the story. *Examples: Darth Vader, Julia Roberts in Notting Hill, Gollum.*

Sidekick – This is the person always by the protagonist or antagonist side – a friend, an employee or a character otherwise emotionally attached to the protagonist/antagonist This person can provide the reader with additional information, skills and different views in regard to the main characters. *Examples: Batman/***robin***, Sherlock Holmes/***dr Watson***, Don Quixote/***Sancho Panza***.*

Trickster – This is one or more characters that put some comic relief into the story. They easy up the tension and offer a different perspective. They are also the ones to break the rules and put a chaotic element into the story. *Examples: Dory in Finding Nemo, Han Solo, Jack Sparrow.*

Skeptic – A character that is not supportive at all. Normally this character forces the protagonist to argue and display his reasons and goals to make them clearer to the reader. *Examples: The mother that doesn't believe that the son has seen a monster, the president that doesn't believe that the earth will be destroyed.*

Herald – this is the person or event that, in the beginning of a story, shows the protagonist the story's main problem/conflict. *Examples: the doctor that tells the protagonist about his cancer, the lover that leaves our poor heroine or the little robot that tells Luke that princess Leia really, really needs help.*

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Down below is a template that could be used when you create your **more important** characters. You don't need to fill all the facts in the list and you can add other items if you feel the need – try to find the balance and not to overwork the characters.

The important thing is that you as a writer know your characters; that you know what they want, what drives them and how they react in different situations. Note that this doesn't mean that your reader should know all of the traits you have set for a character! Some you will tell, some you will hint at and some will be hidden. Your goal is to create a character your readers can feel and care for.

- **Name** – Gives character to your character. You get a different feeling if you name the evil witch Jane Johnson, Edwina von Krakowa or Baby Pinkfluff.
- **Role** – Which is the main purpose of a character in this story (see the roles above). For less important characters it is normally the same as their job.
- **Gender** – Gender can change dynamics of a story. Making the fearless test driver a woman will change how the reader sees the character.
- **Age** – Age also change dynamics of a story. Is your fearless female test driver 14 or 68?
- **Job** – Normally a big part a character personality is what they have chosen to do with their life. Gives a character a skill set.
- **Hobbies** – Provides skills for and deeper understanding for a character.
- **Biggest fears** – Fears often explain why a character behaves in a certain way.
- **Highest hopes/goals** – What drives a character?
- **Love situation** – Is the character happily married, a lonely sad bastard or a swinging single? Who/what does the character love?
- **Problem solving style** – How do the character approach a problem? Does she run away? Does she think about a solution? Does she try a hand on solution? Does she ask for help or not? A story normally creates interest by introducing conflicts and therefore problem solving style is more important than it first seems.
- **Friends/Good relations** – Who are the people surrounding a character?
- **Enemies/Bad relations** – Who are the bastards surrounding a character?
- **Religion & politics** – These are important factors to get to know your character.
- **Ex-job** – It's often more interesting to see why a character quit/got fired from his last job than to see where he is working now.
- **Ex-love interest** – The same principle as above. Why did it end?
- **Weaknesses/strengths** – Helps building the character of your character.
- **Clothing style** - Helps building the character of your character.
- **What does the character like with herself** - Helps building the character of your character.
- **What doesn't she like with herself** - Helps building the character of your character.
- **Manners/ticks/behavior** – How does the character behave and interact with people and the world around him?
- **Health** – Perhaps the protagonist would be more interesting if she had a wooden leg, are color blind or have diabetes?
- **World view** – Create a sentence of how the character sees the world. Is the world a big, gray and scary place or is it filled whit promises, flowers and shiny happy people.
- **Short backstory**: parents, childhood, accidents school years etc.

Ok, at last! Let us write down the characters you have thought of so far. Try to find your protagonist(s) and your antagonist(s) and see if you can think of any other important character.

The importance of group dynamics!

You should not look at the characters in your story one and one, but rather as a group. You want to create an interesting group with many differences – small or big – and some similarities. In this way you can build tension and conflict into your story, and this will keep the reader interested. The similarities between characters will create natural bonds between them, and the differences will push them apart.

Imagine throwing all of your main characters – good and bad - into a room and then throw a big problem at them. How will they act and talk, how will they be different and which conflicts will arise between them? The reader needs to see the dissimilarity between all your characters.

If, in your story, four friends go for the week end to a rented a cabin in the forest. What creates interest is the relations and problems within the group and how they react to the problems - it will not matter if it is a horror, romance, action, drama or fantasy-story.

Theme – Your message

Normally you have an underlying subject or an issue you want to explore or use as a background to your story – this is your theme. Often it is in the core of the conflict you have set earlier in the synopsis. It is also true that a story can survive without any theme, but then it is easy that your story will lose color, consistency and feel "less meaningful".[1]

Every now and then you let your theme show in the story: during dialogs, conflicts or in character behavior. Try to show it from different point of views – good and bad - and in different aspects during your story.

Bigger themes can create more interest from the reader, but also, if done badly, more melodrama. Try not to lecture your reader. As a writer you seldom state your theme clearly, but rather you let it influence the decisions in your story and you let it hold your story together. You can have more than one theme in a story (in fact many great novels are loaded with themes), but the risk is that the overall story feels divided.

Try to formulate your theme as a sentence or a word and then keep this sentence in the back of your mind when you are structuring and writing your story. **Don't let your theme take over your story –** done well it can deepen your story; done badly it can ruin it!

Thematic examples[2]

- ***Old versus new –*** Absolutely everything was better before! Even mobiles!
- ***Love conquers all –*** Love is the strongest emotion and will beat hate, greed and jealousy.
- ***Money corrupts –*** Nothing good will ever come from choosing money over love.
- ***Happiness is an illusion –*** We just imagine that we can be happy. Reality is a gray world without joy anywhere or anytime – ever!
- ***Small-mindedness creates much of the unhappiness around us.***
- ***Run for your life*** (strange, but it can work) – In this life you always need to be on the run to survive.
- ***Bob Marley – Redemption song*** (a song can be the underlying theme if the lyrics, rhythm and music even though many would call it mere inspiration).
- **Hate –** Let's explore all the different faces of hate and where it leads us.
- **Coming of age –** How you, by the influence of the world, are forced to grow up.
- **Social injustice –** Like in *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck.
- **Survival of the strongest –** In this life only the strong among people and companies will persevere.

Short example of how to use a theme

Story: Tragic love story. **Theme:** Money corrupts everything and everyone.
Let the characters have discussions about what they want in life and. Show how some make choices based on love and other based on money and how the ones that makes choices based on money change into worse people. Make the main character chose the "wrong" love interest in the end and base her decision on money.

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[1] Some authors like Stephen King don't start out with a theme, but find one during the writing process.

[2] We at Story Companion don't take a strict theoretical view of the use of Theme. We try to be practical and use it as an underlying current to all of a story and we do not separate it from *message* and *morale*.

Genre

Genre is the general mood and "rules" you commit your story to. A thriller and a romantic story will have a different set of rules and expectations associated with them. A western and a science fiction story will normally have a very different frame and setup. Every genre has its own set of guidelines and elements expected from it, and a reader will expect some key elements to be there.

Following the rules too close can lead to a predictable and boring story, but not following a genre at all can leave the reader confused, frustrated and the story can feel not held together. The lines between genres can be blurry, but readers (and editors) expect you to state a specific genre. You could combine several genres (horror/science fiction like in *Alien* or romance/action like in *African Queen*), but be careful not to alienate your readers by mixing too many genres!

Think about what genre(s) you want to use and which genre elements that that you want to have in your story. It can be a good exercise to write down settings, actions and characters that normally exists in your chosen genre. Later this list can come in handy when you are insecure of how to move your story forward – following a standard genre development of your story can give a helping hand. Also try to think about which genre elements you want to break.

Genre examples

- **Action-adventure** – Normally a plot driven story involving a lot of physical action.
- **Crime** - Normally centered on criminal activities and can be everything from light weight heists to darker plots of gruesome crimes.
- **Detective** - These stories are about solving a crime (normally a murder) by a, more or less, professional problem solver, detective, reporter etc.
- **Fantasy** - Fantasy is created or modified worlds where normally exists strange creatures and magic.
- **Horror** – Stories where the writer tries to frighten the reader in different ways. A good way (used in almost all of Stephen King's stories) is to build a story foundation of normal-day-boring-life and then put the horror in contrasts to that base.
- **Mystery** - Mystery fiction are stories in which characters try to discover a vital piece of information which is kept hidden until the climax. Often as a synonym for detective fiction.
- **Romance** - Romance is currently the largest and best-selling fiction genre in North America. It has produced a wide array of subgenres, the majority of which feature the mutual attraction and love of a man and a woman as the main plot. Normally have a happy ending.
- **Science fiction** - Science fiction is defined more by setting details than by other story elements. It normally takes place in the future or in an alternate history.
- **Western** - Western fiction is defined primarily by being set in the American West in the second half of the 19th century.
- **Comedy** - Comedy focus on humor and trying to keep the reader amused and usually having a happy ending (if it is not a drama comedy or a black comedy).
- Drama - Drama normally has a more character driven story with a serious tone, dealing with realistic problems and realistic characters.
- Tragedy - Normally a variation of drama with a suffering and a sad ending as important ingredients.

I don't need a genre!

Sorry. You do…

Publishers look for genre specific writings. For them it is easier to understand and to sell a story with a clear genre. Often they expect your story to fulfill genre specific criteria (which can vary and sometimes only be known by the specific publisher in question).

Readers as well are most of the time looking for a specific genre to read. "I feel like to reading a thriller, but not a horror story. I never read horror stories!" So do yourself a favor and give your genre some thought!

Settings

Setting is the places, the time and the senses of the characters. Normally it is described through the eyes and senses of your main character. It needs to be linked to your plot, genre, characters, theme and the mood you want to achieve. Your choice of genre will normally give you a lot of the setting for free (a western, a science fiction or a historic romance taking place in the south will provide you with a lot of setting that are expected from corresponding genre).

The settings can change a lot over a story or they can be the same from the start until the end. Even if your story takes place in many different places you can keep the overall setting consistent by trying to using the same colors, smells and feelings in all the places (or you can keep them distinct by changes all these variables for different places).

In this part we will just create the big overview setting – the general placement in time and place of your story. Later in Acts, Chapters and Scenes we will go into more detail for specific parts of your story.

Choose the general time and place where the story takes place. Think about the general mood that you want to create. For now, the setting can be a short line or a full page depending on your level of detail. Now, write it down!

Short setting examples

Time: future - during 250 years **Place**: the moon **Mood**: gloomy

Time: the present **Place:** western Europe **Mood:** At first happy and bright but changing to darker and darker to end in total hopelessness.

Time: the present day during 24 hours **Place:** Jacks apartment **Mood:** Intense, passionate and sexy.

Backstory

The actions of the past create the present. The backstory is all that has happen before the reader starts reading the first word of your story (we don't count prologues). Backstory is not necessary, but it can be a great way of anchor your story. Having references to the past will make characters and events more believable.

The most important role of the backstory is to help the writer create the actual story and **not** to provide information to the reader. Presenting too much backstory in your story will make the reading cumbersome and the tempo slow. Even if it can be tempting to give away all the backstory that you have put a lot of effort in, restrain yourself and let the reader know only what is important to the story.

Look at your synopsis and think about what could have led up to your story – write it down.

The backstory can be everything from a few words to many pages. You actually don't need to know all of the backstory at this moment. Parts will come to you later on while structuring Acts, Chapters and Scenes.

Consolidate – keep it all together!

Now you have got everything needed for getting started!

Remember that all of the parts work together to create a better and stronger whole. If you want to show the horrors of war then your theme could be *the horrors of war*, your genre *war/drama* and your setting *the second world war in France,* the mood can be set to *detailed and horrendous* and the characters can be part of an army brigade. The challenge here is to find the balance between what is expected from a story (and especially a chosen genre) and trying to surprise the reader. Using too much of war elements will create a predictable and uninteresting story, but breaking the rules and what is expected from a war story can leave the reader confused and frustrated. A good way of knowing if you manage to keep the balance is to let someone else read your story/synopsis.

What you normally (but not necessary always) want to do now is to rewrite your first synopsis and try to incorporate main characters, theme, genre, setting and the important parts of the backstory.

Exit point

If you feel that what you have got so far is enough to start writing - let's go! Otherwise jump to Acts where we will continue to structure your story (it will become easier and easier and there will be less and less theory).

How to use the created synopsis

You use the synopsis you have created as a goal and a remainder of what needs to happen and influence your story. The conflict needs to be present and explained, the characters need to be presented and their reasons revealed as your story unfolds. You also need to make sure that your reader understands the consequences if your character(s) fails.
On a more detailed level you can use the idea of conflict, reasons and consequences to create tension for individual chapters and scenes – every little part needs some tension!

Use your genre, theme, setting and backstory to create the mood

Also remember to put a lot of work into the first chapter, because it is this part that is going to sell your story to a new reader.

Acts

Now we are getting somewhere!
Here we will break down your story into a few manageable pieces. We will still keep an overview, but we will start planning for the details to come.

Start by dividing your story into a desired number of acts (normally three or more). The number normally corresponds to the beginning (act 1), the development (act 2), and the conclusion (act 3) of your story. If you feel the need for more acts it is normally the middle act you break up into additional acts. Remember that the acts are used by the writer to structure the story and a reader will perhaps never know about them.

In this guide we will use three acts when we continue to develop your story. At this point we don't look at prologues and epilogues (normally you put them as the last thing when you have finished structuring your story).

Let us start by looking at the synopsis you have created and how we can break it down into acts. What is the main goal of your story? What goals can you set for each act and how will they lead to your story's main goal? Look at your plot and see if you have any natural breakpoints – what do you consider to be the start, the middle and the end? Whatever you chose will be ok!

What is Plot?
Plot is what your characters do and what happens to them during your story. The plot is the conflict and the actions characters perform to reach their goals...

Every act can be constructed in the same way as you have constructed your synopsis: by creating an outline that includes conflicts, settings, characters and their goals. Think about the goal of the act and what major conflicts that will take place here. Remember to keep what you already created, in the synopsis, in the back of your mind when you structure the acts. New characters and settings will normally be added together with subplots, smaller goals, problems and conflicts.

Hint – getting past writer's block - part 1
If you feel stuck in how to continue, when structuring your acts and chapters, then take a look or two at your genre, theme and settings.

Write down all the typical ingredients of your selected genre, theme and settings – anything you can think of! Can you use any of them in your story? Is there anyone that you could put a twist on or break? In this way you can find actions, characters, settings and ideas that you may not have thought of before.

Act 1 – The setup

This is where you set up your story. Where you show the normal life of your main characters and where you introduce the big conflict (from your synopsis). Here is where your main characters try to learn more about the conflict and decides to challenge it in some way (which leads to act 2).

See how you can break down your synopsis to get the natural starting point of your history. Remember that right now we are just structuring the story, so don't worry about details and how to express everything in the best way. The important thing for now is how to get the structure done! Like the synopsis, the description of the act can be everything between a few lines to a few pages.

A problem you normally run into in the first act is that you need to describe much of your settings, characters and their goals and conflicts, and this makes the reading slow and, in worst case, very boring. To avoid this, try to mix slow parts with faster and more plot driven parts. See what descriptions can wait until later in the story, while still trying to set the most important traits of your character, the basics of the big conflict, the settings and the consequences of failure.

Normally the first act ends with some decision, regarding the main conflict, being made.

Examples – Act 1

Indian Jones
This is the act where we see Indiana Jones work at the university and we first learn that the Evil Nazis are planning something. Indiana travels to learn more and meet an ex flame. He decides to go to Egypt to stop the Nazis.

Drama
This is the act where the happy 16-year-old girl hangs out with her friends in the mall, but later learns that she has cancer and after some time of hopelessness decides to fight it.

Act 2 (or all acts between Act 1 and the final Act) – The struggle

Even if this part can start on a hopeful note it normally ends in despair - this is normally the darkest act. Now it is time to develop the plot, fleshing out characters and relationships that you have set in the first act. Let the conflicts and problems increase!

Normally you present a twist (for the worst) to the story in this act. You do not have to set the characters, main goal and settings as much as in Act 1 and therefore you have the chance to make this part of the story faster and easier to read.

Here also the character relationships that have been set in Act 1 starts to change and. If you use a theme, which is recommended but not necessary, this is the part where you can start to put more focus and different perspectives of it. The horrors of war perhaps can bring something good? Perhaps true love has some downsides?

Normally this part ends with a decision being made and with your protagonist seeing the main goal slipping away.

Examples – Act 2

Indian Jones
Indiana Jones goes to Egypt to find out more. The Nazis are trying to find the lost Ark. Indy's relation with Marion deepens. Indy recovers the Ark but the Nazis steal it and take the girl (again…). Will Indy stop the Nazis, save the world and get the girl?

Drama
The sixteen-year-old girl learns more about the sickness and what it takes to get well. Even at first it seems that she is getting better at the end the treatment doesn't seem to work. Upset with life she rejects her best friend and her parents. She feels that there is no hope for her and decides to give up.

Everything in this act should lead up to the big confrontation that will resolve the main conflict. This is the climax. Here we will try to build tension and uncertainty of the outcome. It is also here you tie up the loose ends.

If you use a theme, here is where you show it most clearly. Every important relationship and each main character should come under pressure but at the climax the reader should know the true nature of the characters and the relationships. *Will Romeo and Julia be together or not? Was Darth Vader really evil in his heart? Will Katniss Everdeen, in The Hunger Games, finally bow to the system or will she manage to break it and will she let love enter into her life?*

Normally Act 3 ends with a conclusion to tie up loose ends, to describe the aftermath of the climax. This gives the reader time to cool down after that the heat of the main conflict has been resolved and it gives you an opportunity to tell the reader if the goals were achieved and to describe the status of your characters.

Not tying up the plot or leaving the reader in doubt about the true nature of characters and relationships will normally leave the reader frustrated and feeling bereft of answers. But some genres (like horror) use it frequently to leave the reader a bit unbalanced. If this is the effect you are after (if you want setting up a sequel etc.) then use it!

Examples – act 3

Indiana Jones
Indian Jones goes after the Nazis and the girl. He gets caught. Everything seems really, really bleak, but in the end the Nazis dies, Indy and the girl survives and Indy gets the girl and everything is explained – imagine that!

Drama
The sixteen-year-old girl's life are spiraling down, but her best friend, decides to come to her aid, despite the sick girls attempts to push her friend away. The parents are furious over the girl's behavior and turn their back on her. The theme of true friendship is finalized when the sick girl survives with the help of her friend (at the cost of alienating her own family).

Tie up the acts

Check all the acts to see that they have all the important story ingredients, and to make sure that the acts go well together.

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Finalizing Acts – checklist

- Do the acts tell **all of** the story that you have structured in your synopsis?
- Do the acts tell the story of your synopsis in more detail (it should!)?
- Do you have conflicts in all the acts? Tension captures the reader!
- Does your theme (if you have one) show in all acts?
- Does your genre show in all acts?
- Are all your **main** characters and the relationships between the characters presented?
- Does the development of characters, relationships and plot (from the first to the last act) feel natural?
- Have the setting(s) for each act been presented?
- Is the main conflict of the story presented (and present in all acts)?
- Are all the main (good and bad) characters goals and reasons explained (to you as a writer!)?
- Is it explained what will happen if the character fails to achieve the main goal of your story?
- Do the characters so far in the story fill different roles and have a good dynamic as a group?
- The acts should have their own goals that together go towards your story's main goal.

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It may seem a lot, but in reality the description of the acts doesn't need to be more than a few lines!

Exit point

If you feel that your structuring is done and you long to start writing – jump to the next phase (Writing) to start put words to your structure. If you feel you want to break down your Acts into further details skip this section and jump to Chapters.

How to use the created acts

You use the acts you have created as a goal and a remainder of what needs to happen and influence your story. Each Act should have the ingredients you have written down. When writing the story, you look at you Acts and not at the Synopsis (the Acts will have a better and more detailed description of your story).

Chapters

Now we will start structuring our story in more detail; we will break down each of the Acts you have created into smaller parts: Chapters. We are still not fully focused on detail, but rather looking for parts of your story that belongs together in time, place or plot – it's up to you to decide the size of the Chapters. Name or number your chapters, for your own use, for easy reference later on. Remember that you are now creating a structure for you as a writer (even if the Chapters here can be the same ones as a reader will see later on).

Normally short chapters will provide a reader with an illusion of movement and the progress of the story will feel fast, while long chapters can halt the tempo and provides the reader with more time for reflection. Use the length to create the feeling you want to achieve. Keep in mind that done badly, short chapters can lead to a chopped up and un-rhythmical feeling, while long Chapters can leave a reader bored.

A Chapter can be everything from a few lines including setting, characters and some words about the plot, to more elaborate with a carefully described outline of setting, character, conflicts, reasons, goals and plot. Here you still can be very coarse and it is not until next part - Scenes - that you need to start to get into specifics. Remember that all your Chapters should together form the Acts and that the goals of each of your chapters should lead to the goals of your Acts.

As a writer you should have a purpose with every chapter (it can be to create sympathy for a character, to reduce tempo, to show your theme, to create conflict, backstory or to move towards the goal of the "parent" Act). Think about the motivation and the goals of the characters in each chapter. Will the chapter be fast paced with a lot of conflict (a conflict can be anything from a fight for life to a camaraderie bickering between two old friends) or will it be slower and more descriptive (or a mix of the two)?

Think about how you want the chapter to end. If it ends in unbalance or turmoil it can create interest to continue to read (Dan Brown is an expert on this), but too much and it can look forced and it can leave the reader feeling cheated or manipulated (we're looking at you again Mr. Brown).

Normally action stories (plot driven stories) will have shorter chapters, with a lot of conflict, that end in turmoil, while dramas (more character driven stories) will have longer chapters with more descriptions and less conflict. But no matter what genre you chose it is normally good to have a change of pace at some points. Let the reader rest a little by having a slower chapter in an action story. The fast parts of your story will feel faster if it can be set in contrast to a slower part (the

opposite is true as well). And a heavy drama will normally gain from having a lighter and faster chapter as contrast to the more serious ones.

Before **and** after constructing a chapter you need to think if the chapter really is necessary to your story. What will happen to your story if you remove it? **If it doesn't contribute – throw it away!** Many writers' instincts are often to describe and explain too much, please don't be one of those…

Using backstory in Acts and Scenes

When you have come to the Chapter and Scene level, you want to think about if a part of your story should include some backstory or flashbacks. This parts describe what has happened before your story begins: what caused this world full of zombies; how did this strange cave creature get hold of the ring; why can't Anna trust in any man she encounters. Remember that it is easy to want to describe and explain too much of what has led up to current events. This can slow the pace and take focus from the story's main conflict (and later an editor will probably want to cut it away anyway). But if you feel that the story really needs some explanations of what has happened before or if you want to slow the pace for a moment, put it in the chapter.

When do I start and when do I end my story?

Normally something special will happen at the start of your story – the instigation. From this starting point events will continue to build up to the climax and to the conclusion of your story. The instigation can be the arriving of a love letter, the breaking down of a car in the dark forest or the destruction of the world as we know it.

If you start your story long before the instigation point you can have time to build the setting and your characters, but it can become boring to the reader (and it is very important to keep the reader interested from the start!). If you start the history when the instigation occurs (or close) the reader will not know the setting and characters yet and will perhaps feel less connected to them. If you start after the instigation it can create interest and curiosity, but normally just confusion. Test out all three and see what works for you. You can even move around your chapters at any time to see what order they should come to fit your story best.

> **Three different beginnings of a story where a motor failure is the instigation point**
>
> 1. We meet the six friends at school talking about the road trip they are going to take next week.
> 2. We meet the six friends in the car talking and laughing and they don't even notice the strange engine sounds.
> 3. We meet the six friends for the first time walking on a dark forest road arguing about why their car broke down. *Wait! Isn't it a light coming from that scary house?! Let's go there and split up!*

Tie up the Chapters

Check all the Chapters to see that they have all the important story ingredients, and to make sure that the Chapters go well together.

Finalizing Chapters – checklist

- Make sure that the actions or the consequence of the actions from one chapter are picked up in the next one. This is for avoiding plot holes and inconsistences and making the chain of chapters from start to end logical.
- Do your chapters add up to what you have described in the Acts in terms of plot, goals, reasons, conflicts, settings and characters? Check for inconsistencies!
- Try to let your theme show every now and again in some of your chapters.
- Is your genre present in the chapters (it doesn't need to be in **all** chapters)?
- If you writing a character driven story check if your characters grow and develops through the chapters.
- Make sure you have some conflict in most chapters (too many chapters with too much conflict will tire the reader in the end. Try to let the reader breath by having slower parts with less conflict).
- Do you have a goal with the chapter? If not – skip the chapter!
- Does the chapter contribute to the story? If not – skip it!

Ok, we know it still seems like a lot of writing and structuring needs to be done here, but you actually just have to write a few lines for each chapter (or a few pages if you feel that it suits you better). Remember that you are creating a structure that will be used as the foundation for writing your story!

Exit point

If you feel that your story structure is done and you long to start writing – jump to the next phase (Writing) to start putting words to your structure. If you feel you want to break down your Chapters into further details skip this section and jump to Scenes.

How to use the created Chapters

You now have a good structure for your story. Dress your Chapters with words and make sure that all the ingredients that you have written down in the structure are still there when you write the chapter. When writing the story, you look at you Chapters and not at the Synopsis or Acts because the Chapters will have a better and more detailed description of your story.

Scenes

Ok! Finally! We have come to the point where we will describe our story at a detailed level. Here we will break down the Chapters into smaller parts: Scenes. Normally the reader will never know that you have scenes in your story, but you as a writer use them to create a detailed description of what to write later on in the Writing phase.

You can think of a Scene is a set of actions and descriptions that belongs together in time. One or more Scenes make up a Chapter.

So what should you put in a Scene? Well, you want something to happen; you want some conflicts or/and descriptions. You want your characters to move towards their goals and your story's goal. First of all: look at what you have written in the Chapter that the Scene is part of. You break down this Chapter to one or more Scenes.

> **Example**
> *Chapter 1*: Joe goes the hospital to find out that he has cancer.
> **Here we could create three Scenes.**
> *Scene 1*: Going to the hospital in the car with his best friend.
> *Scene 2*: At the hospital meeting the doctor.
> *Scene 3*: Going home from the hospital with his best friend.
> **Note that the example above is just describing the basic plot (which is fine), but every scene could also include instructions of character development, setting, theme, conflicts, goals etc.**

In every Scene you should have the goal of the "parent" Chapter in the back of your mind (in the example above you need to know the goal of the Chapter 1 when you construct the Scenes) and when creating the Chapters, you need to keep the goal of the Act in the back of your mind. It will be a chain from the smallest part (a Scene) leading to the main goal of your Story. Normally this comes naturally when creating your story.

You control the pace of your story by adding Scenes without conflict and instead focusing on descriptions or backstory. The more conflict free scenes you add, the slower the pace of your story. Too many Scenes in a row with conflicts will exhaust your reader, but too many scenes without conflict and your reader will get bored. You need to try to find the balance.

Every scene should add something new to your story. If it does not – throw it away (start to see a pattern here?). So what is "something new"? It can be a developing of a conflict, settings, background, goals, facts, decisions, a new conflict etc. but **it should lead the reader towards the main goal/conflict of your story**.

So where do you start and where do you end a scene? It depends on the pace you want to set and how much you want to unbalance your reader. If we look at Scene 2 from the example above, we can decide to describe it in the following ways:

> **A -** We describe the whole chain of events from when Joe is entering the hospital until he leaves the hospital (asking for directions, announcing his arrival, waiting in the waiting room, getting the diagnosis, leaving the hospital).
> **B -** We start the scene when Joe is in the middle of a conversation where the doctor gives the diagnosis and then you end the Scene with him asking the doctor if there is any hope.

These two alternatives will have radically different pace, but the choice of which to use will not affect Scene 1 or Scene 3. There is a saying that goes: enter late and leave early – and this is generally good advice.

A scene should be told from only one character's point of view (but you can have two Scenes describing the same situation from the point of view of two different characters). The length can be just a line up to a few pages, but normally a few lines telling setting, characters, basic actions, (keep your theme, if you use one, in the back of your mind together with the goal you have with writing the Scene) is enough.

Remember to use contrasts in Scenes and between Scenes when you want to highlight important notions in genre, conflicts, characters, goals and themes. If you want to highlight an action Scene let a slow Scene precede it; to show horror use the ordinary (this is Stephen Kings specialty); to show the terrors of war show an idyllic peaceful village first etc.

A scene does not need to be perfect at this point – it is your basic outline for knowing what to write. If you are not happy with a scene, but unsure of how to fix it, just leave it for now. Continue with the next scene and come back later. In reality you don't even need to work on the Scenes in chronologically order – you can jump and write a scene further on in the story if you feel more inspired (doing this will increase the risk for inconsistencies and plot holes).

After creating the last Scene, you should have a very detailed blueprint of what to write and in the Writing phase you "just" have to dress your structure with words to create your story!

Tie up the Scenes

Check the Scenes to see that they have important story ingredients. Make sure that the Scenes go well together.

Finalizing Scenes – Checklist

- Do all the scenes together represent the story you want to tell?
- What is the goal of the Scene?
- What is the motivation of the characters involved in the Scene?
- What is the conflict (if any)?
- How will the Scene end (normally with something to keep the reader interest to continue to the next scene)?
- Remember settings, theme and genre (they don't need to be present in every scene but you should have them in the back of your mind).
- Check that the all the scenes in a scene describes the overlaying Chapter.
- Does the Scene really contribute to your story? Really? If not - throw it away!

A final look at your structure

Here there will be no Exit point because you have reached the lowest level of detail. Now it is time to start writing!

With the Scenes finished you have a detailed plan of what to write, but before jumping to the Writing phase it is wise to take a good look at your final structure to see if there are any inconsistencies, things to changes or anything you can cut away. Normally it is wise to leave the story for a few days, before doing the final overview, to see the story with fresh eyes.

Feel free to break all of the rules and suggestions we have provided here – you need to find the way that fits your style of writing. Experiment! Try! Write!

For many writers conflict is the engine driving their stories. It doesn't matter if it is a horror, comedy or drama. But it is good to remember that too much conflict can get tiresome and that there are writers like Orson Scott Card that doesn't agree that conflict is the most important part of their stories.

When writing the story, you look at you Scenes and not at the Synopsis, Acts or Chapters because the Scenes will have a better and more detailed description of your story.

Let's start writing!

Some short words about the use of Prologue and Epilogue

Prologue

Prologue is an additional opening of the story that comes before your first chapter; it normally provides an important piece of setting, vital background information or sets the mood of the story. Perhaps you have a Scene from the past that is important to core of your story; perhaps you want to create tension and mystery right from the start (where your first chapter could be slow) or you want to set up a conflict or a theme (but, **please**, don't solve any conflicts here). It can also be a piece of crucial information that you cannot find any other way to give the reader (like another point of view) – you can show a quick glimpse from the killers' point of view in a crime story.

It is important that the prologue captures the mood of the rest of the story. It's the first thing a reader will see and if it is not in line with the rest of the story the reader will feel cheated.

In fantasy and science fiction literature a prologue is often used to describe the unique settings and prerequisites of the imaginary world that the story will take place.

A good prologue doesn't mean that you can skip creating a good and interesting first chapter to hook the reader – the prologue and the first chapter is normally two different beasts. You need to think if it adds anything of importance or if you can provide the information of the prologue in some other way during your story.

A prologue can be everything from a few lines to several pages. It can be written any time during the creation of your story and in many cases its best left to when the rest of the story is created.

Note that a prologue is not necessary and in many case should be avoided because it can drag down the tempo, destroy a good start of your first chapter. A prologue that drags on for several pages can easily bore any reader. Messing with point of views and time lines can also confuse even the smartest reader and many readers tend to skip prologues. So for the sake of your readers: if you use a prologue keep it short and to the point!

Epilogue

Epilogue is the ending of a story that comes after your last chapter; it normally provides closure, or it is preparing the reader for a sequel by creating uncertainty about the ending. It is often a glimpse of the future telling what has happened after the conclusion of your story. You can use it if you feel that you need tying up loose ends and showing the status of characters, to really show the consequences of actions taken or just to sort out the aftermath after a big climax or really surprise/abrupt ending. It can also be used to finalize or underline any theme you have woven into your story.

Before creating an epilogue, you really need to think if you cannot put the epilogue information in your last chapter instead (which is the recommended way to go).

If you really think that your story benefits from an epilogue try to see how short and concise you can make it. You don't want to start to bore you readers after you got them to read your final chapter!

The quick fix[3]

If you quickly want to create a story structure to see if it could be a story worth pursuing and putting more energy into follow these short steps:

Quick story creation method

1 – Start with creating a short Synopsis that tells you what your basic idea is about.
2 – Break down your Synopsis into Acts and Chapters **but** just focus on what is going to happen (the plot) and don't look at theme, conflict, characters, genre, settings etc. As a name for each Act/Chapter you create a short sentence that tells the basic plot for that part. This will lead to a quick structure where you get the spirit of the story just by looking at the structure and the names of the Acts and Chapters.
3 (optional) – If you, after looking at your story, think that the story seems worth telling, just develop the parts that you feel are important and add conflicts, character development, settings, theme etc.

Short example of the Quick story method:

Synopsis: Darkness is rising again; threatening to destroy the world as we know it. A young woman is slowly finding out that she is the only one that can stop the evil from engulfing the world.
This is dark coming of age story, with fantasy elements, taking place in a shadow clad, big city without a name - time: now.

Act1: Darkness is rising and Sarah is finding her magical powers.
Chapter1: An ancient darkness stirring in the rich side of town.
Chapter2: Sarah has an accident and something awakes inside of her.
Chapter3: Mystical events taking place in Sarah's building and Sarah's first use of her powers.
Chapter4: A stranger is seen following Sarah and her best friend dies in a mystical accident.
...
Act2: The darkness takes form and spreads through the top part of the city society. Sarah befriends the Broken and starts to learn to control her powers.
Chapter 12: We follow the CEO of Evencourt oil as she kills a board member that is getting close to the secret of the Dark vault.
Chapter 13: Sarah learns about the Dark vault and that her brother Marcus is in the core of the evil.
Chapter14: Sarah makes a journey to the richer parts of town hunting clues and by accident saves the life of an innocent millionaire named Martino.
...(more Chapters and Acts should come here)

After getting a good overview of our story, by looking at the structure, we decided NOT to continue working on this particular story (but we enjoyed the 23 minutes it took to create the example).

If you need further help, consider using the Story Companion software that is made for using the method presented in this guide. The program will make the whole story creating process easier and quicker, but it is not necessary for using this guide! Pen and paper or your favorite word processor will do for creating a great story structure. It's your story - write your story your way!

Final remarks

Following all the steps and making sure that all the theoretical ingredients are in place in every part is good practice, but sometimes the task can make you feel overwhelmed. You don't have to do it - the important thing is telling your story! Put more energy and focus on the parts of the story that you feel are important and don't go into deeper detail on the other parts. Keep the story telling theory in the back of your mind when you structure your story and soon great improvements will start showing in your stories.

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[3] The Quick fix should be used with a basic understanding of storytelling concepts like conflict, theme, character development etc. and with knowledge of this guide's concept of Synopsis, Acts and Chapters.