

## Key Points from James Patterson on Outlining

Fellow writers: These are my notes from the outlining modules of the MasterClass *James Patterson Teaches Writing*.

I hope they're helpful.

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He writes between three to six drafts of an outline.  
To him, it's the most importance piece of a project.

### WHAT YOUR OUTLINE NEEDS

1. "Everything" should be in the outline, including the arcs of the characters [i.e. their inner journeys, usually including how they change over the course of a story]
2. The villains/characters need to be complex.
3. A reader of one of his outlines will have a solid grasp of--and usually a clear opinion of-- the story.
4. Each stepping stone on the outline should be so intriguing to the writer that she 'can't wait to write this scene'.

### FOCUS ON THE STORY

5. His approach to outlining preempts any concern about 'the blank page' because he is thinking about the bigger picture--the story itself.
6. During outlining, he doesn't think about the sentences. He just thinks about the story. "Just tell a story."

### BEGIN SKETCHING YOUR OUTLINE

7. James Patterson jots down countless one- or two-line descriptions of scenes.
8. He worries about organizing them later.
9. He might take a week or two to just write these short scene descriptions--subtracting some, polishing some, adding others.
10. The outlining/scene creation process sometimes takes one or two months.
11. With each draft of an outline, he adds more detail.

### ADD MORE SUSPENSE

12. His form of detailed outlining prevents him from writing himself into a corner.

13. In outline form, he can pick out flaws in his plot before he begins his first draft.
14. A couple of times during his outlining phase, all he will do is write plot twists and think through whether they will or won't work for the story.

#### EDIT, EDIT, EDIT

15. He always writes notes to himself throughout this process, including items that he feels are essential to create a workable scene.
16. My paraphrased example: "This chapter needs to show the close connection between these two characters."
17. He feels that a good outline alone should be good enough [detailed, well-conceived] to sell to a publisher.

#### TRY A CHARACTER-FOCUSED APPROACH

One way to break down an outline, says Patterson, is to follow what happens throughout the story to each of the main characters. [Does the character change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story?]

#### BE THOROUGH

18. He uses the first two chapters [he prefers shorter chapters] of the book *Honeymoon* to set up the third chapter. They are pivotal to the events in Chapter 3.
19. He refers to the interaction between the chapters as a 'cat and mouse game', one that he expects to hook readers.

#### TROUBLESHOOT YOUR OUTLINE

20. The outline will bear out parts of the story where he finds himself repeating scenes, character interactions, etc.
21. The outline needs to evolve as he writes the book. He is willing to change the plot points, expand the story.
22. If he's stuck at certain points in the outline, he just jots down 'to be determined' and forges ahead with the story.
23. "The greater the challenge [to you, the writer], the more impossible it seems, the better the chance is that it [your story] is really going to be something fresh."

#### STEP BACK AND START WRITING

