

NOVEL WRITING BASICS

# Getting Started

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS



# WHAT IS STORY

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**Story:** a unifying narrative (things that happen and are tied together).

**Purpose:** a goal worth pursuing and necessary (by someone we care about).

**Drama:** conflict, suspense and intrigue (the outcome is unclear).

**Structure:** a comfortable reading experience with clear signposts (what's happening / why it matters).

**Resolution:** a concluding event with positive emotion (goal achieved).



A woman in a white dress is sitting on a suitcase on a boat, holding a glowing lantern. The background is a dark blue sky with a large white hand silhouette reaching down. The scene is set on a boat with a dark blue sea.

Your protagonist must be likeable.

- saving pets, children or elderly
- burdened with problems & responsibilities
- unique hobby, style or totem
- fatal flaw, fear or lack (shard of glass)
- oppressed or repressed

# CHARACTERS

## WORTH ROOTING FOR

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# BIG DREAMS

## THAT FAIL

Many stories begin when **one path closes**. Characters will need or want something enough to take action; but most often fail, at least in the beginning.

They must be **incapable** of fulfilling their desires; an inability to get what they want.



# AN IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE

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Characters must be faced with a threat, barrier or challenge SO BIG that they cannot currently overcome it.

This will *force them* onto a different path.

The story is the process through which they grow strong enough to actually overcome the obstacle.

*Hint: if they are capable of defeating all the challenges without changing... your story probably isn't big enough.*

**Active antagonist:** *your story may need an antagonist, who is trying to get, achieve or do something that puts him at odds with your hero.*



# UNIQUE SETTINGS

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Your setting or scenes needs to be vivid and different enough to keep readers interested: they will also provide obstacles and challenges, or give us a deeper understanding of your characters.

**Tip:** always try to show the setting as characters interact with it, and only during low-stakes scenes. Only show what's relevant, or what the characters notice.



# INTERESTING CHARACTERS

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Your cast or ensemble will be critical for adding emotion into your story: relationships, betrayal, lies, promises, romance or friendships or enemies...

Your protagonist should be torn between loyalties and need to make difficult moral decisions.

# ROLECALL

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- the main character
- best friend (supporter, optimist)
- best friend (skeptic)
- comedian or jokester
- teacher (in a literal sense)
- mentor (wise role model)
- boss
- parents
- siblings
- nosy neighbor
- nemesis
- cute sidekick
- main antagonist
- antagonist's henchmen
- traitor





# ATTRIBUTES

## PERSONALITY

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- where they live
- what they wear
- hair/eye color
- an object they treasure
- something they love
- something they hate
- something they'd never do
- a unique skill or ability
- a weird habit
- what they want (immediately, and permanently)





# OBSTACLES

CHALLENGES & DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Rewards must outweigh the risks (they must want goal enough to overcome dangers: must be completely committed to action). Pressure forces action, and keeps the momentum.



# BEGINNING

Knocked off course

1

**The ordinary world.** The story begins where this ends.

# MIDDLE

Forced to fight

2

**Impossible quest,** this challenge is too great.

# END

Sacrifice to win

3

**Returning changed.** They return to find the world the same, but they are different.



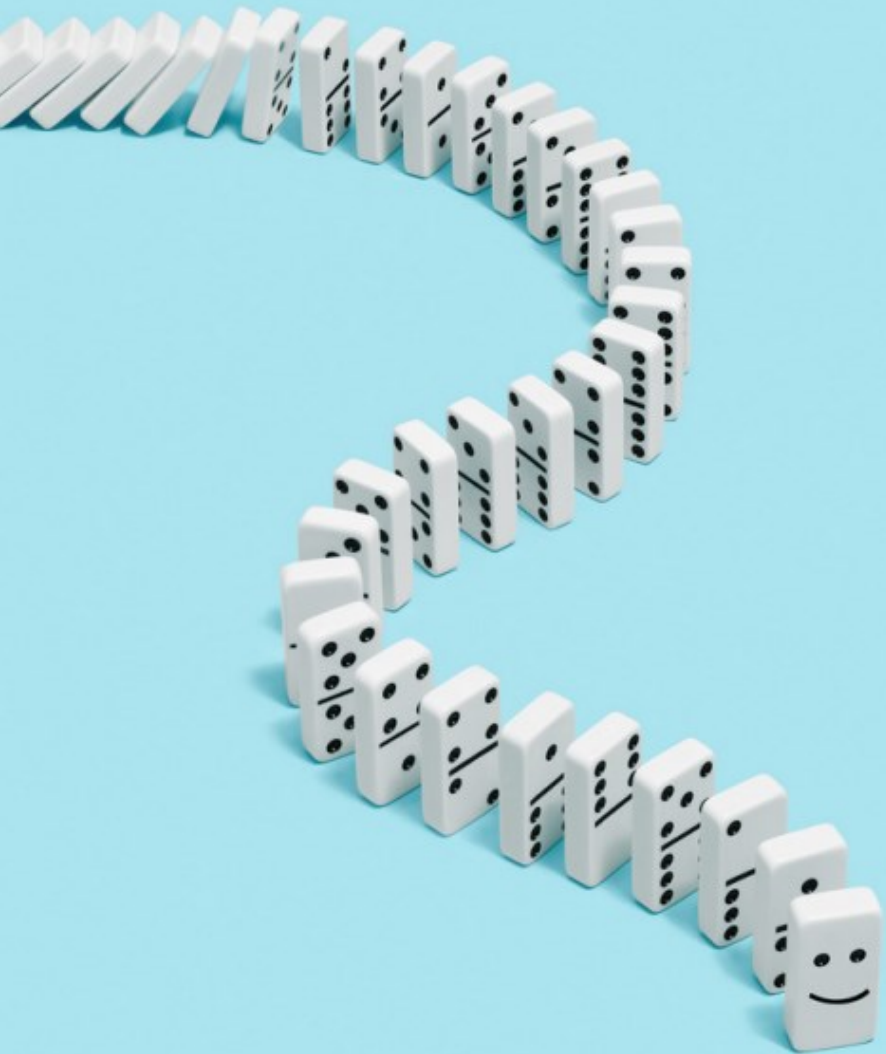


# TENSE/POV

Who is telling this story? How much do they know?  
How much can they see? Has it already happened or  
is it unfolding?

1<sup>st</sup> = "I" / 2<sup>nd</sup> = "You" / 3<sup>rd</sup> = "he, she, it, they"

*Limited or Omniscient  
Present or Past Tense*



# LINEAR

## TIMELINE

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Momentum and urgency are easier to handle when *each scene* or chapter is crucial for activating the next bit of action. Something happens or changes; the characters are forced to respond or react; then something else happens.

Think of it like a line of dominoes. If you remove just one piece – or if one piece is *not* necessary for the story to develop - the whole thing will fail.

Watch out for: *backstory and infodumps*

# YOURTURN

**See if you can write your story in a few sentences, using this formula.**

My character is a \_\_\_\_\_ who wants \_\_\_\_\_. But then when \_\_\_\_\_, they're forced to \_\_\_\_\_.

And they have to choose between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

In the end, they learn \_\_\_\_\_.\*

*\*probable theme of the book; but don't worry if yours doesn't have a crucial or critical theme, it's not necessary.*