

Brainstorming Your Book with Index Cards

We're going to start brainstorming your story with a technique that is a staple for screenwriters, and really lifesaving when you have to come up with a plot really fast, like overnight, which is sometimes what happens when you're up for a writing job in Hollywood.

Get yourself a pack of index cards. You can also use Post-its, and the truly OCD among us use colored Post-Its to identify various subplots by color, which can be really useful, but let's just keep it simple for now.

A movie has about 40 to 60 scenes, depending on the length and pace: a drama more like 40, an action movie more like 60. Every scene goes on one card. Now, if you're structuring a novel this way, you may be doubling or tripling the scene count, but for me, the chapter count remains exactly the same: forty to sixty chapters to a book.

So count yourself out 40-60 index cards. This is so satisfying! You're holding your book in your hand!

Now, all you have to do is fill in the cards.

But that's a whole lot easier than you think because you already KNOW a lot of the scenes that will go on these cards, or you wouldn't be thinking of writing a book to begin with.

Once you start putting the scenes you do know on the cards, dozens more scenes will start occurring to you. You'll start combining scenes to make killer sequences.

So write down all the scenes you know about your story, one scene per card (just one or two lines describing each scene—it can be as simple as: "*Hero and heroine meet*" or "*Detective gets called to a case.*" "

You will find it is often shockingly fast and simple to structure a whole story this way.

➤ **ASSIGNMENT:** Get a pack of index cards or Post-its and write down all the scenes you know about your story.

You don't have to put them in order yet! We'll get to that shortly, but we're just brainstorming right now.

And yes, I understand that there are software programs that simulate the index card method. But I really, really, REALLY encourage you to try this physical method. Working with actual cards or Post-its is **kinesthetic learning**. It activates different parts of your brain and creative processes than typing does. Brainstorming with a software program is *not* the same as using your body as you work. Do both if you want to, but you'll be

doing plenty of typing as it is. Why not try a different kind of creativity and see where it might take your story? Everyone I've worked with who tries it has thanked me for it.