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# 2

## Story World

storyworld deserves attention and planning because it touches every single aspect of your story; it is present on every page and in every situation.

Most books about novel writing start with character or plot development. I have chosen to start with the storyworld, not because it is the most important aspect of the novel but because the setting informs everything else in the story. For example, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, Narnia would have been a completely different story if Lewis had decided the wardrobe would dump the Pevensie children on a tropical island instead of a snowy forest. The setting of Narnia influenced the characters and actions. The ice and snow lent to the characterization of the White Witch, and the journey would have been so different if Narnia was not the magical kingdom Lewis created.

Let's revisit what setting is from the previous section.

### **Setting - The world we live in**

Setting is far too often minimized as the location and time of your story. This is only a fraction of this element's value because setting encompasses the entire storyworld. Setting informs the characters and their lives, the culture, how people dress and speak, their history, and what motivates them. The

Building your story's physical and cultural world is vital to convincing your reader that your story is "real." Setting should be a part of every aspect of your novel. It's not just description (detail mode) but also part of the summary and dialogue. What sort of world does your hero inhabit? Is it a fantasy world with mythical creatures and gravity-defying citizens, or historic America with its plantations and factories? Every world will have its own geography, landscape, weather, architecture, temperature, and language.

The setting will help create emotion by showing the readers what you want them to feel in that scene. A great example is in Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*. The setting is a gloomy 2045, and the late James Halliday's parallel virtual universe, metaphorically called the "Oasis," removes the burden of depressing daily life for its millions of online users who prefer the vast and colorful cyber world over their own depressing reality. The young hero, Wade Watts, comes from a deeply depressing situation that Cline describes in such stark terms I cannot help but be depressed about life in 2045. The setting does more than just usher the reader into a dystopian future; it sets the standard for how every character action is motivated by desperation or resignation.

Before you start brainstorming every detail about your opening storyworld, just remember that setting can be as much in what you show your readers as what you don't show them. When I was a kid, we used to watch an old show on TV called the *Twilight Zone*. It was the great "suspense" show of our generation, and it only came in black and white. You would

think that would hamper the ability to set the scene, but not so. I remember a particular episode that stood out from the many others in my memory. The scene opened in what appeared to be an average Midwestern town. There were homes and cars, businesses and billboards, but what I quickly noticed about this little slice of Americana was that there were no children. None! There were lots of “normal” adults going about their idyllic lives, but not a single child in the entire town. The absence of children in a traditional small town set a more dramatic story plot twist than anything else could.

We experience life as feelings. We have events in our lives, but those would be nothing without the accompanying emotions, like feeling the fear of jumping off a cliff into water forty feet below or the peace of sipping lemonade in the shade on a warm summer day. **The**

**character’s setting may not be as important as how he reacts to that setting.** If it’s hot and everyone is dehydrated, sweating profusely, and wretched, how do the characters react to those conditions? That is the approach your setting should take, not just the world around the inhabitants, but how they feel and interact within that world.



For example, I love cold weather. Anything below fifty degrees is my happy place. I’m not sure why; it just is that way. My husband prefers suffocating warmth. Ugh! Recently, we were caught in a freak snowstorm where it dropped a few feet of snow overnight. The temperature hovered between four and seven degrees! In this scenario, I am thrilled as long as I have my heavy jacket, boots, and gloves. I will play in the snow for hours! My husband is absolutely miserable. His teeth chatter, and his lips turn a deep shade of purple. He wants to stay indoors all the time and would almost rather starve than go out in the freezing snow. He’s missing out, in my opinion, but you see that creating a setting is not as important as the added dimension that comes from the characters’ interaction with that setting. If I were

a character and you put me in the snow, it would be a winter wonderland. If my husband were a character and you put him in the snow, it would be impending doom. Same setting, different experiences.

We will take a sectional approach to building your storyworld. You will begin here with an overall storyworld sketch, and then you will have a worksheet for each of the five elements for a relevant aspect of your storyworld. Use these worksheets to map out an overview of your storyworld. This is a general brainstorm, and you can come back and make changes as your story develops.

Start by researching the civilization of the primary setting. This is a very general overview. If you have a historical novel, focus on details about the time era and local specifics, or if it’s set in the future, research sci-fi details and look at futuristic technology ideas so those can become your novel’s reality.

# 4

## The Story Goal

The story goal is the driving force behind the plot of your adventure novel. It's what the hero wants or needs to obtain. In Lord of the Rings, the story goal is to destroy the ring. In Star Wars IV A New Hope, it is to destroy the Death Star. The hero is working toward one end to achieve the story goal, and that is the fuel to the engine that drives him forward.

We referenced this earlier as the plot.

It may seem logical to you that to write a truly epic novel, you have to have a complicated plot with intricate goals and hidden agendas. However, the most memorable story goals are ones that can be summed up in one moment and one picture. In Lord of the Rings, everyone wanted to see Frodo drop the ring into the fire of Mount Doom, and in Star Wars, we just wanted the Death Star to blow up. When that happens, we know the story is essentially over, and we can rest from all the tension that has built up to that point. We got what we wanted.

Let's review what the story goal is:

### **Story Goal - Something we want**

The story goal is what the hero wants to happen in the end. It may be what he wants to change or gain or, in many cases, to take back. It is the driving force behind everything

he does, and it's what the reader expects to happen at the end. Achieving the story goal is what completes the heroic quest. The reader will identify with your hero and willingly take the journey right along with him. It is vital to fully develop this area so the reader wants it as much as the hero does.

The story goal is not necessarily your hero's initial desire or motivation. In some cases, your hero must go against what he wants in the beginning to reach the story goal. Frodo wanted to protect those he loved, so he chose to take the journey to destroy the ring. What he really desired was to be left alone in the Shire. The contrast between what the hero desires for himself and the story goal can make for a compelling contrast and opportunity for personal suffering. The hero will obviously accept the challenge and save the world, but it doesn't mean he started with that mindset.

**Remember, the goal of all stories is to create an emotional experience.** To plan out a noble quest for your character to embark on and your reader to care about, you need to understand the story goal in terms of need and want. Your character will pursue the story goal based on external goals and internal needs. The external goal is the resting place of the plot. In Frodo's case, the story goal was to destroy the ring. The internal needs are what create the emotional experience. Frodo wanted and needed to save his friends and loved ones.

Answer the following questions:

What does the hero want to happen at the end?

Why does he want that?

What is the barrier to that goal?

Donald Maass writes brilliantly about the story goal (plot) in terms of something we want:

*We all yearn. Things happen to us. We cope, solve problems, suffer setbacks, get somewhere, and pursue our dreams. What, though, actually drives us to do those things? Something inside that has little to do with our challenges and goals. It's a need to relieve inner anxiety, prove something, love and be loved, rage at what's unfair, fit in, stand out, or find what will make us happy. You have to understand that the inner journey and the outer one work together to create an emotional journey*

Just remember that internal motivation will be the fuel the hero will run on. Maybe your hero will save the refugees because he wants to avenge the death of his friends, or perhaps she will fight in the civil war as a spy because she desires freedom for all slaves.

External motivation will be those things that are thrust upon your hero. He might be a merchant ship's crewman during wartime when the crew is attacked and shipwrecked on a beach in enemy territory. He must survive the natural elements like weather and hunger as well as the continued threat from his enemy, all while trying to get home. Your story goal is an intertwined relationship between what needs to happen and why the hero is willing to do it.

Write the story goal here:

Complete the following world-building exercise for what the hero's world will look like AFTER he achieves the story goal. This is his ultimate motivation.





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# The Mentor

Obi-wan to Luke, Gandalf to Frodo, Professor Xavier to Wolverine, Albus to Harry, these are all familiar famous mentors. If the hero has something to learn, he must learn it from somewhere. Events may teach the hero lessons, but typically in an adventure story, a person comes alongside and teaches the hero about his situation, himself, and life. That person is the mentor.

The mentor is a character specifically created to prepare the hero for the mental, physical, or emotional hurdles he will face in his journey. He helps the hero overcome an inner conflict to achieve the story goal. He will help unlock the new world for your hero and, therefore, can be an integral character in your story.

If your hero doesn't already have the knowledge, skills, or determination needed to complete his mission, creating a mentor can be a great way to keep your story moving forward and make the hero's ultimate success more plausible. It helps the reader believe the simple country farm hand really can turn around to save the kingdom from the evil prince in fewer than twelve chapters.

Please note this is your story, and you do not have to include a mentor. There are many stories where the hero can plausibly achieve

the story goal without an experienced guiding hand. That being said, if you decide to include one, make sure that the mentor truly serves a purpose.

Author Kristin Keifer shares her ideas for ways mentors can assist the hero and further the story goal. A mentor can:

- **SHARE A LITTLE WISDOM.**

Making mistakes is a hallmark of any hero's journey. Fortunately for your protagonist, his mentor has likely been in his shoes before and can offer a little wisdom to help him better navigate his struggles.

- **SAVE THE DAY.**

Your protagonist will probably find himself in a tough situation more than once throughout your story. To give him the tools he needs to overcome, a mentor can lead by example, helping your protagonist out of a bind early in your story's plot.

(Note: Try to avoid using this technique later in your story, however. A mentor should never serve as the savior at the story's climax, saving your protagonist from a situation he can't get out of himself.)



### ■ PROVE THE VILLAIN IS EVIL.

To showcase the consequences of the villain's abilities and desires, a mentor can serve as a story's sacrificial lamb, prompting the protagonist to actively engage in overcoming the villain. Think Aslan in the Chronicles of Narnia.

### ■ SERVE AS A ROLE MODEL.

Whether your protagonist finds himself a fish out of water or in desperate need of a little maturity, a mentor can teach him how to better acclimate to the life he'd like or needs to live.

### ■ GUIDE THE WAY.

If your protagonist finds himself in new terrain, who better to serve as a physical guide than one with knowledge and experience of the landscape? Allow your mentor to lead the way!

### ■ TEACH THE HERO NEW SKILLS.

Whether it be a physical skill or a new body of knowledge, let your story's mentor be the one to teach the protagonist exactly what he needs to know to keep moving forward.

### ■ DISH OUT SOME HUMILITY.

Your protagonist will win some and lose some, but early success can poison his perspective. Fortunately, a mentor can pop your protagonist's ego bubble and put him in the proper mindset to tackle further obstacles to come in his journey.

### ■ PROVIDE HEALTHY ENCOURAGEMENT.

With wisdom and experience on his side, a mentor can offer the kind of grounded encouragement that has the power to push through your protagonist's mental roadblocks and set him back on the path to success.



Use the following worksheet to brainstorm the mentor character if you think you will be using one. Skip this step if you are absolutely certain you will not have a mentor.

# CHARACTER WORKSHEET

Character Name \_\_\_\_\_

Sketch or Paste Image



NickName \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Description

POSITIVE IDEALS

Personality

NEGATIVE IDEALS

Habits / Quirks

Goals and Motivations

Background

# 5

## Prologues, Epilogues, Scene Breaks

### Prologues:

There is an ongoing debate about whether an author should include a prologue. There is a heavy bias on the NO side from book publishers and industry professionals. We should probably listen to them. That being said, they have been used, and, at times, very effectively. However, the authors who have done so are professionals with a catalog of successful books and a fan following.

Let's review the pros and cons of including a prologue in your story. Regardless of the divergent opinions, there is one thing everyone agrees on: a prologue **MUST** be a great one and **absolutely necessary to the story**. As a first-time author, that is asking a lot of you. The first question you need to ask yourself is, *Does the prologue really enhance my story?* My recommendation is to skip the prologue and reveal parts of the backstory through conversations and memories.

If you decide to include a prologue, I suggest writing it **AFTER** you finish your entire rough draft. That will ensure that it connects sufficiently in every way. At the very least, go back over it as the last revision and make sure

it lines up with the proper information and foreshadowing.

Pro	Con
Can reveal valuable information that will directly affect the plot	A poorly written or lackluster prologue can turn your reader off to your entire story
Can hook the reader by giving a glimpse into the plot	Ends up being an information dump
Allows a big time gap which is difficult within a story	Is considered a lazy author's tool to give backstory
	Can feel disconnected from the story

### Epilogues:

Epilogues do not have the same negative opinions swirling around them as prologues do. However, ask yourself again if it is necessary to the story. Chapter 12 is the denouement, the closure chapter that will be discussed in Unit 7. In light of that chapter, there should not be any loose ends to tie up.

Sometimes, you may want to reinforce a theme or subplot, and you have a scene that would

# RESEARCH WORKSHEET

Research Topic \_\_\_\_\_

## KEY INFORMATION

## STATISTICS & DATA

LANGUAGE &amp; SLANG

## Notes

## Website Resources Used

# WORLDBUILDING WORKSHEET

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description

What are the people/culture like?

How is the climate & terrain?

Describe using 5 senses

What do people do all day?

Website Resources Used

Notes

# CHAPTER KEY ELEMENT PLANNER

## Goal

What does the hero want at the beginning of the chapter?

## Conflict

What stops him from achieving his goal?

## Disaster

What happens & how does the protagonist end up worse than before?

## Reaction

How does the hero react emotionally? + or - ideals?

## Dilemma

What are possible options available at the hero?

## Decision

What does the hero decide to do? (what is their new path?)

# CHAPTER TIMELINE

Note the main events in this chapter.

Include general time event occurs (day/night, etc), duration (how long), location, and characters involved.



Subplot / Foreshadow Introduced

Subplot / Foreshadow Resolved