Chapter One

Introduction

❖

Ever since I was an adolescent, I wanted to be a writer. Like many aspiring writers, I soon gave up the pipe dream to follow interests that would lead to a "real" career. Writing took a seat on the back burner and I dove into the sciences, eventually becoming a professor. I thought scientific publishing would satiate my yearn for the word, but my muse was not pleased. Stories still popped up in my head, filling the white board I had hung on a wall in my living room, hidden between lines of chemical formulae. Then one day I decided that if I was able to become a professor and scientist, I should be able to become a writer rather easily.

So, I sat down and wrote.

I thought that what I wrote was good, bordering on very good, perhaps.

I was wrong. Oh, so wrong.

Sure, anyone who knows how to read and write can technically write a story. But, will they write a good story? Is an idea enough to carry poor writing or are there proper steps to take to produce good writing? Like any good academic, I researched the topic.

I realized that I didn't know how to write at all. I broke every "rule" there was. Often rule-breaking can lead to innovations in art, something fantastic. In writing, this is often not the case. Also, the use of the word "rule" may be too strict when it comes to writing. Rather, "guideline" may be a better word, yet I'll keep "rule" just to simplify matters.

So what are these rules to writing? Check out your local library or bookstore, or buy a beginners book or course and you'll be inundated with information. These resources are marvelous, but take time and effort to master. This doesn't help you if you want to start writing TODAY.

The goal of this short guide is to give you just enough information to get started in writing and to finish a decently composed first draft. By decently composed first draft I, of course, mean that it's likely an utter piece of garbage that you wouldn't want even your mother to read. Without adhering to some basic tenets, that piece of garbage will be unsalvageable, but if you follow these rules then you will be able to recycle that garbage with edits and revisions to produce your very own masterpiece, your own chef d'œuvre.

There are a lot of great books out there on learning how to write fiction, so how is this book different? Those books are like an olympic style swimming pool with spectator stands and all the accoutrements. This book is merely the springboard - just enough information to get you started on your journey.

This book is broken down into six sections: writing fundamentals, world building, literary characters, scenes, dialogue, and plot. Together, these come together to form a story, your first draft. That's as far as this book will take you. To move beyond the first draft, you'll need to delve deeper into each of these topics, mastering them one by one. Revision is the best time to do that. The goal now is merely to use these six steps so that you can finish a first draft.

Assuming you have an idea for a story ready to go, you should be sitting down to begin writing within an hour or so. Best of luck and happy writing!

Chapter Two

Fiction Writing Fundamentals

❖

When I first opened a resource book and saw sections like "writing fundamentals", I rolled my eyes and thought back to the grammar lessons of school. But, grammar has little to do with this section. The assumption is that you are familiar with the grammar and syntax of the English language, or that you will hire a proofreader or line editor to fix any grammar boo-boos. The goal here is to give you the "hints" and "tips" you need to differentiate fiction writing from your other kinds of daily writing, such as an email or facebook post.

The first rule to writing is to write. **Write, don't edit!** Save editing and revising for later. The hardest part of writing is finishing the first draft. Wait until then to change and fix things. It is often said that writing doesn't actually begin until the revision stage. Right now you just need to write your story and worry about transforming it into a piece of art later.

The second rule to writing is to evoke emotions and the senses. This is done in two ways: Show, don't tell and avoid the use of adverbs and/or weak verbs.

Show, don't tell (SDT). I remember reading some of my early work and telling myself that all of the essentials were there, but somehow the story lacked the ability to draw a reader in. My writing was flat and dead, but I had no idea how to breath life into it. It was at this point I decided I needed to learn a little about writing. I bought several books and even an online writing course. The first lesson I learned was "show, don't tell" and it was like a lightbulb went off inside my head. My writing was nearly all "tell" with almost no "show" in it.

SDT is tricky, and it's one of those rules that is almost always broken, largely because any good story is a combination of both showing and telling. But, new writers tend to over-tell and under-show, so the sage advice often given is SDT. The goal of SDT is to show that something is happening rather than telling that it is happening. This allows

the reader to become immersed in the story and without immersion, the reader will lose interest. “She was sad” is telling, “Tears streamed down her cheeks, sobs replacing words when she tried to speak. Grief squeezed her crushing heart, each beat a sword stabbing her soul” is showing. “He was cold” is telling, “He cinched his jacket even tighter against the frigid gusts of wind assaulting him” is showing.

Sometimes, though, it’s necessary to just tell something rather than show it. There can be any number of reasons for this and the key is to tell sparingly. Backstory is often one place where telling is done, the dreaded “info dump”. I read a lot of sci-fi, where info dumps are infamous, so I actually don’t mind the occasional info dump. In general, however, the info dump is usually frowned upon. It is rare that a reader absolutely must know any of the info dump at the jump start of the story. Instead, it can usually be weaved subtly into the story throughout the first chapter or two.

The second way to evoke the reader is to avoid the use of adverbs and weak verbs. Arguably, this is just another version of SDT, but it’s useful to separate the two from each other. The reason we wish to avoid the overuse of adverbs and weak (or “filter”) verbs is that they tend to detract the reader from the ever-important reader immersion experience.

Let’s explore **weak verbs** first. What is one? Weak verbs, sometimes called filter verbs, are vague, bordering on telling instead of showing. These are fine words, but are generally considered “lazy” with stronger synonyms available to strengthen the writing. At the end of this book I’ve included a list of commonly used weak verbs. This list is not inclusive, but it’s a good reference to have. And, like all of these guidelines, you’ll see these weak verbs littered throughout my own writing. Again, sometimes “look” is just the verb you want, where “glimpse”, “glance”, “regard”, “gaze”, “peer”, “stare”, etc. just don’t fit as well.

Why are **adverbs** bad? Well, they aren’t. But, they can be overused in writing, especially by a novice writer. The use of adverbs is considered lazy writing because they are often used to modify a weak verb and there is often (but not always!) a strong verb that would work better in its place. “He told her quietly that he loved her” is a fine sentence, but a tad vague. “He whispered to her that he loved her” is better. “She walked quickly to the bathroom” could be changed to “She jolted for the bathroom”,

"She scurried to the bathroom", or "She ran to the bathroom" - each example is stronger and gives a different sense of evoked urgency.

Every time I use an adverb in my writing, I ask myself if I can somehow say it differently. Sometimes I can but I don't like the other options, so I opt to keep the adverb. Sometimes I simply can't find an alternate word. Adverbs aren't evil or bad, but they should be used with discretion and discrimination.

"She was watching TV intently until she saw a spider scurry across the screen. Her arachnophobia took hold and caused her to shriek loudly." vs. "The glow of the passing scenes on the TV held her in a hypnotic trance. In the upper corner of the screen a tiny dark spot appeared and scurried across it like drops of water dancing on hot oil. She shrieked and her legs shot off the floor and onto the couch - a spider!"

Another depth of evocation is the use of **active voice** versus the **passive voice**. I tend to disregard this "rule" more than others. The claim is that the active voice is stronger, but for me the difference is not enough to warrant a blanket rule against the passive voice. Perhaps I'm prejudiced on this aspect, for in scientific writing the passive voice is preferred to the active voice. As such, I do not hesitate to use the passive voice in my fiction writing if I feel it works fine as written. "He wrote the play" is stronger than "The play was written by him", but is the difference enough to sweat about? For me, no, but for an agent or editor, it may result in a rejection letter. Sometimes it's better to err on the side of caution and just use the active voice.

So, in general, to produce decent fiction writing, the following "rules" apply:

1. Write, Don't Edit.

2. Show, Don't Tell.

3. Avoid Adverbs.

4. Avoid Weak Verbs.

5. Use the Active Voice.

Writing Assignment: Right now, there is none. Once you begin writing your story, take

the first 1-2 paragraphs (or any 1-2 paragraphs you wish) and revise them using these suggestions. I know I told you just to write and not to edit, but go ahead and give this a try. Don't edit any more of your story until the first draft is done, but this will give you a sense of the kinds of revisions you'll be looking forward to once your story is finished.

Chapter Three

World Building 101

❖

World building is one of my favorite aspects of writing fiction. World building is exactly as it sounds - the creation of the world in which your story takes place. It can range from a Caribbean pirate thriller to a gladiator saga in Ancient Rome. It can be the moons of Nictop-8 to the streets of today's Seattle. It dictates the entire ambiance of the story, from the dynamics of the characters to the nuances of dialogue. Genre, defined as the type of fiction that you write, dictates more or less how much world building you need to do. Science fiction and fantasy (aka, speculative) writers have significantly more world building to do than a mystery set in modern day Paris, but all genres will have some world building to do.

If your story takes place in modern times, then most of the world building is already done for you. You just need to use that as a template to construct your own world from that. Historical novels follow in a similar fashion, requiring a tad bit more research, perhaps. There is a certain degree of freedom in novels that take place in a historical versus modern setting, the freedom increasing the further back in time the historical novel takes place. This stems from the fact that there is simply less information available in historical records the further back you go, so the author has more freedom to fill in the gaps in knowledge as the author wishes.

World building in science fiction, on the other hand, is a different kind of challenge than those taking place with some kind of already-established template. Arguably, science fiction is filled with its own tropes, as with any genre, that set forth an established template from which to build a story, but we will set that aside for our discussion here.

In science fiction, there are four basic areas that will need to be addressed, the degree to which will be dictated by the necessities of your story. A story set on a future Earth will need to address these four areas differently than a story about a galactic war between humans and a dozen nefarious extraterrestrial species. The speculative fiction

writer will need to address the areas of **Habitat**, **Biodiversity**, **Society and Culture**, and **Extrasocietal Interactions**.

Habitat is the physical location of the story and everything that supports that location. Are you on a planet or a ship? What is the environment like, the landscapes? You may even need to address the atmosphere, climate, weather, and/or seasons. If on a space ship, how do they breathe? Are there cities/towns/villages in your setting? Research in astronomy, geology, geography, engineering, and/or meteorology may be required.

Biodiversity is the creation of all sentient, animal, plant, and microbial species needed for your story. A story set in a near-future Earth may not have the need to address this as much as a story set five hundred years in the future after a nuclear holocaust unleashed by invading alien species on a terraforming mission. The writer may need to do research in zoology, microbiology, anatomy, or botany for inspiration.

Society and culture will need to be built as required by the story. Topics that may need to be considered include language, food, religion, customs, ceremonies, celebrations, government, education, legal systems, penal systems, military, technology (including interstellar travel if it's in your story), architecture, physical and civil infrastructure, social hierarchy, origin and history of your world (as relevant to the plot). Not all of these need to be included and addressed, but you may be surprised how many of these actually do pop up somewhere in your story. The only limits for speculative fictions writers is their imagination (and, to some degree, science).

The last aspect to consider is how your newly created society interacts with other societies out there, their extrasocietal interactions. Are they xenophobic or xenophylic (xeno- meaning any society different from their own, not necessarily a different species)? Are they at war or in a state of peace? Is war looming, perhaps? Who are their allies? Who are their enemies? If they are an extraterrestrial species or some non-human fantasy species like elves, what are their feelings and attitudes toward humans?

World building is a spectrum. Some writers will need to spent a lot of time and effort in building their worlds, where others will be able to rely on their own experiences and/or some research to build theirs. Either way, world building is an exciting and fun part of the fiction writing experience.

Writing Assignment: Build your world to the extent it needs to be built. If you're writing that modern day mystery in Paris, do some research and write a few lines of scene descriptors that you may use. A boulangerie or café? A side street with markets and the very tip of the Eiffel Tower peeking over the buildings? If you're writing a speculative fiction piece, describe what your alien or elf looks like. Describe their clothing, their habits, the way they carry themselves, etc. The goal is to write 5-7 lines of world building descriptors that you can place in your story where appropriate.

Chapter Four

Creating Life - The Characters

❖

Characters are the heart of every story. Not only do they drive the story, but they are why we fall in love with certain pieces of work. If you can create characters that your readers will love and find unable to forget, then your story is well on its way to becoming a hit. While none of the aspects of this book alone can make a story shine, this is the one piece that will definitely sink your story even if every other aspect is top notch.

Your story will likely have an entire cast of characters, each of whom needs to be brought to life through backstory, physical and emotional descriptors, and personality traits. Their role within the story and their interactions with other characters is also important. One term you'll hear often when talking about characters is their **arc**. Not all characters will have an arc, which is defined as the transformation that takes place in the character throughout the story. Perhaps you start with a frightened, shy student who has low self-esteem, but through the story the student gains self-respect and finds the courage to save the school from some malicious force. That transformation would be the student's arc.

While many of your characters may have arcs, the one that certainly requires one is the **protagonist**. This is your main character, the person whom your story is about. This is often the "good guy", but it doesn't necessarily have to be so. You could, for example, be writing a story about a very evil character who ends up finding absolution through changing their ways by the end of the story. There are plenty of stories that tell the tale of a seemingly perfect hero, but the best protagonists are imperfect, just like you and me. The imperfections make them more real. In some cases, the protagonist may be so "imperfect" that he/she is labeled an antihero.

The second major character is your **antagonist**, the one who antagonizes your protagonist, the proverbial "bad guy".

The **sidekick** is going to be your protagonist's main accomplice throughout the story. The sidekick often contains traits that the protagonist lacks, either to compliment or contrast the protagonist, or both. In simplistic terms, you can think of the sidekick as being the embodiment of the protagonists emotional turmoils. In my novel, Amia has Kint who is laidback and a charmer, serving as a constant reminder to Amia of her boyfriend as well as a contrast to Amia's own rigid and disciplined self.

A **mentor** is often included in many stories, especially those that tell the Hero's Journey (see Chapter 7). This character is often older and wiser, helping the protagonist get started within the story. A common fate for the mentor is an early death or disappearance, before the protagonist is fully trained or let in on the full backstory, leaving your hero to struggle and fumble throughout the story until the climax is reached. In my novel, the mentor is not one person, but several that each guide Amia at different stages of her adventures in Lunar One. One of the most well-recognized mentor characters out there is Obi-Wan Kenobi from Star Wars.

There are other **archetypes** that may pop up in your story and you'll likely instinctively place them in your story where they are needed. An archetype is a kind of character that needs little explanation or backstory. A reader will intuitively understand a lot about any character you place in the mother, lover, fool, or bully role. Understanding various archetypes and their role in the Hero's Journey is one area that you can delve into during revision if you feel you need help in building characters. But, in general, archetypes can be used for minor characters that need little or no development and backstory.

Each major character needs to have their own **backstory**, one that you will let the reader know through evocative dialogue and carefully crafted writing rather than a large "info dump". The reader may care little about your character's backstory, so you will need to carefully weave only that which the reader absolutely must know throughout the story. But, the backstory is important to reveal the motivation of each character, which includes their ambitions, values, and overall goal in the story. Your character's ambition will be the one abstract thing that your character desires whereas the goal is the one concrete thing that the character wishes to achieve. When combined with the strongest beliefs of your character (values), you have the motivation

behind everything your character wants. It is the difference in these traits between the protagonist and antagonist that creates the ever-important conflict needed in your story.

In Lunar One, Amia's ambition (she wants to be married and lead a normal colony life) and goal (first, curiosity and desire to explore colony life, later to overthrow the colony's government) contrast each other, creating internal conflict for her.

The overall goal is to create characters with life and depth. Humans are complex individuals, often with conflicting desires coupled with inherent personality flaws. Your characters should be similar. The more important the character, the more developed you'll want them to be. For minor characters, falling back onto archetypes with little or no character development is completely fine.

Writing Assignment: Write 5-7 sentences of descriptor for your Protagonist and Antagonist. Write 3-5 sentences describing one or two of your supporting characters. These sentences can include physical and/or emotional descriptors. The idea is to write these sentences and place them within the story where best suited.

Chapter Five

Permission to Speak - Dialogue

❖

"I can't believe you're not as furious as I am," Griggor said in a tone so flat that Lora knew he was using a Unity meditation technique to keep from exploding.

"I am, Grig, I am. But, what point is there in making her upset with us? We're not going to change her mind. She's doing the Stage regardless of what we think."

"It's dangerous." His voice was somehow even more flat.

"We have to trust our daughter…"

Griggor threw back the covers and leapt out of bed, a hunter ready to pounce upon its prey. Fury beamed from his eyes as he glared at his wife. "I trust Amia! I trust her more than you probably do! You know damn well this has nothing to do with trusting our daughter and everything to do with her being a walking target for nine Creation-forsaken months while she traipses around the other pagodas!"

Griggor had never screamed at Lora before in her life. Sure, they had arguments, but never screaming. Thank Creation the walls were soundproof!

Lora collapsed into a pile of sobs and tears.

"Don't you think I know that?!" she accused.

❖

The above text is from my novel Lunar One. Many authors find that dialogue is one of the easier things to write in a story. In fact, when I have writer's block, I'll often only write dialogue to create the framework around which I can write the narrative text at a later time. Great dialogue can add texture to your scene and provide the most memorable parts of your story. When the story is finished, do people quote narration or dialogue more? Usually it's the dialogue, what the character says that makes an

impression.

We won't discuss the mechanics of writing dialogue; you should know this through a combination of high school English and lots of reading. Instead, we will look at the purpose of dialogue and how to make it shine.

The purpose of dialogue is simply to advance the story, to advance conflict through creating and maintaining tension within a scene. Sometimes it is also used for exposition, to describe something about the story or its setting. It is also used to evoke character; Gizans in Lunar One speak quite differently than other characters and is a reflection of the rigid and strict order of their society. Unique character voices and idiosyncrasies in speech help bring life to your characters.

Ideally, dialogue is a type of controlled conflict between two or more of your characters. It should be off balance; if dialogue is predictable, then it's pointless to the story. There are techniques that can be used to spruce up your dialogue to achieve this imbalance. You can introduce new characters, events, or facts to unbalance boring dialogue. Compelling dialogue creates tension and often includes subtext, things that aren't said directly but are inferred instead. Bad dialogue is that which is just talk with no advancement of plot (just two characters chatting away) and/or when it's used to explain what is happening in the story (which should be showed rather than told, in most cases.) Ask what the goal of the conversation is and what's at stake for the character, then make sure your dialogue addresses these by the end of the conversation.

In my example above, a husband and wife are in conflict over a decision their daughter Amia (the protagonist) has made. They want to find a solution including forbidding her to do what she has decided to do, but in the end, they reach the conclusion that their daughter is a grown woman who they must trust to do the right things and keep herself safe. Much of this is not said directly but inferred through subtext. As the reader, we are left wondering what is so dangerous about what the daughter has decided to do. The daughter isn't concerned, so why are the parents? This is the question that drives the reader to continue reading, to satiate the seed of curiosity that this dialogue has planted.

There are two types of dialogue: **external dialogue** and **internal monologue**. We've been focusing primarily on external dialogue, but internal monologue is just as important. Internal monologue are the thoughts of the character. Characters often do a lot of internal monologue, especially the protagonist. It offers us a glimpse into the mind of the character, to understand the thoughts and reactions of the character to what is happening in the story. While external dialogue is separated from the narrative using quotations and **tags** (e.g. - "she said") to show who is speaking, internal monologue appears as normal narrative. Sometimes a tag is used for interior monologue ("she thought"), but often not frequently so.

Dialogue or character tags are used in external dialogue to identify not only who is speaking, but it can also be used to get across context that is unclear from the dialogue. ""I hate you," she screamed" is vividly different than ""I hate you," she joked." There used to be an obsession of avoiding "said" when using a tag by incorporating complex synonyms or other action verbs instead. Nowadays, simplicity is preferred, using "said" is now perfectly suitable. Just keep the tags simple! In fact, the tags are often not consciously read by a reader unless it's important in understanding the context (as in the "I hate you" example just now), so why waste time making them extravagant when it's not necessary to do so?

Point of view (POV) is the perspective from which the story is told. POV can be a rather complex topic for a simple concept, so we will only introduce the basics here. POV needs to be chosen early on for it can affect everything from how the story progresses to how other characters are seen and perceived. In general, there is first-person (I, me) and third person (he/she, him/her), though these can be broken down further: subjective or objective first person and omniscient, objective, or close third person. While switching between first and third person is not something that is usually done in writing, it isn't uncommon to see slight shifts in POV based on the subtleties between their various subcategories. For example, while close third person is often the POV selected by contemporary fiction writers, there may be sections that are written more in the objective or even omniscient third person. Sometimes this can hurt a story, other times it can strengthen it. For now, stick with just first person or third person and worry about POV only if it becomes an issue during revision.

Writing Assignment: Take a scene that you have had problems building and outline it using only dialogue. Go back later and fill in the narrative, using the dialogue as the scene's framework. Remember that the dialogue needs to have some kind of conflict and can be used to show minor exposition and/or evoke character.

Chapter Six

Setting the Scene

❖

A scene in a story includes all the action and dialogue that takes place in one setting during a specific timeframe.

Open a book from a hundred years ago or more. Read a passage from Madame Bovary or Wuthering Heights. Now, open up The DaVinci Code or Divergent and read a random passage. What's different? The general way in which these stories are told is drastically different from one time period to the next. Before the internet, before television, and even before photography, people were forced to imagine what far away places were like or what a rhinoceros may look like. A writer would dedicate time and countless pages to painstakingly describe everything the reader is supposed to see, to set a complete scene for someone who has never left their tiny isolated town. Not only is such description redundant in today's age, but today's readers also don't have the patience for such drudgery. Pick a few (two or three) things from your setting to describe in some detail, something to draw the reader in and place them in the middle of the scene. Set the scene, but don't spend any more time than absolutely necessary to do so.

But, a scene in a story is more than just its physical setting. A scene is the entire action that takes place at that time frame in the story. Each scene contains five basic elements: **Setting**, **Characters**, **Goal**, **Action or Conflict**, and the **Setback or Conclusion**. Scenes can be broken down into any variety of types depending on overall goal, including action scenes, contemplative scenes, flashback scenes, suspense scenes, etc.

The setting is simply where the scene takes place. The sights, the sounds, the smells - be sure to evoke a minimum of two different senses in each scene. There needs to be at least one character in the scene, though several are possible. The more characters in the scene, the more careful you need to be to keep your dialogue straight.

The goal is what you need that scene to accomplish. What information do you need to

make sure the reader learns from this scene? What do the characters need to have done by the end of the scene?

Each scene should have either some kind of action or some kind of conflict. Sometimes they can be one in the same. Either way, you need something happening to keep the reader wanting to turn the next page and continue reading.

Once you have finished the scene - the information needed to be conveyed is conveyed through action and/or conflict - you will need to leave the reader wanting to move on to the next scene. Either a major conclusion should have been revealed in the scene or some kind of setback to what the characters want should be introduced.

Pacing considers both how fast a story reads and it varies by type and genre. Literary works tend to have slower paces than an action thriller, for example. One aspect of pacing is how long a scene should be. This is a time-old question that has no concrete answer. A scene should be as long as a scene needs to be. Personally, I don't like long scenes. I recently finished rereading The Worthing Chronicles by Orson Scott Card. It's a neat story, the first and only other time I read it was 20-25 years ago. But the scenes are long and finding a good stopping point is not easy. When a new scene does present itself, I had to ask myself if I really wanted to spend the time reading the new scene or stop and wait. I often stopped and waited. You don't want your readers to do this! You want them to keep moving forward, but humans have limited attention spans. You need to give your reader a place to stop and breathe for a moment before moving ahead. I personally recommend that scenes be around 3,000 words, give or take. Some authors prefer one scene per chapter, while others prefer to put several scenes in a chapter. In the end, the choice is yours, but be cognizant of your readers and how they may feel about long, drawn-out scenes.

Each individual scene must do two things: Move the story ahead and keep the reader hooked. If you scene does only one or none, then you'll need to develop that scene more until both objectives are achieved.

Writing Assignment: For now, I'd like you to plan out at least one of your scenes, though you can plan them all if you'd like. Who is in it? Where is it? What is happening? What question is answered (if any)? What setback or conclusion are you

left with at the end of the scene? When you get to this scene in your writing, be sure to reference back to this plan.

Chapter Seven

Weaving a Web - Plot Basics

❖

Plot consists of all of the main events in the story arranged in a meaningful way to tell the entire story. Most plots will consist of one or more series of rising and falling actions capped by a beginning and end sequence. Each rising and falling action culminates in a climax until the final climax is achieved near the end of the story. There are a few different names out there for what is essentially the same thing - **Freytag's Pyramid**, five-act structure, three-act structure, etc.

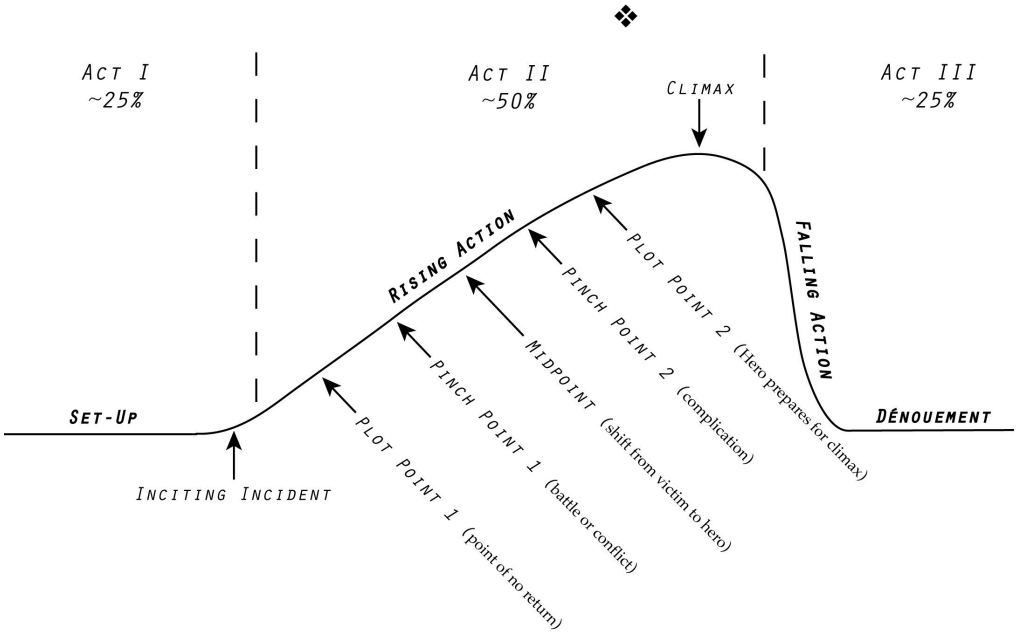
Plots usually follow a pattern similar to the one shown below. The first quarter or so of the book is **Act 1**, the set-up that leads to the **inciting incident**. You are introduced to the protagonist and possibly antagonist, you see the characters living out their normal lives, their normal routines. You'll introduce conflict here by showing what the protagonist has and what the protagonist desires, including the stakes involved. The inciting incident is what launches the protagonist toward achieving their goal and ends the first act of the story.

Act two is where the storyline progresses to its ultimate finale and takes up about 50% of the story overall. In the classic view, it's a series of continually rising actions until the penultimate **climax**. But, act two can also consist of a series of rising and falling actions each capped with a mini-climax until the last hill in the series near the end. Either way, you need to develop rising action here. This can be done in any number of ways, but a common approach is to divide the rising action into a number of alternating plot and pinch points centered by a midpoint scene.

Plot points are scenes where the protagonist decides (or the decision is made for them) to take some kind of major action to move the plot forward. **Pinch points** are scenes that introduce some kind of conflict or complication, usually resulting in a set-back for the protagonist. Before the midpoint, the protagonist takes on more of a victim role. The **midpoint** is the scene where this changes and we begin to see the protagonist as the hero instead. The plot/pinch points after this the protagonist will

often have a more proactive approach to what is happening around them rather than the more reactive kind of approach they had before the midpoint. The final scene where the protagonist and antagonist meet for the final conflict is known as the climax. Our hero either attains their goal, fails to do so, or some combination of both resulting in a partial success. Either way, the outcome of the story has been dictated by this scene.

The last quarter or so of the book is used to wrap everything up. There will be a short period of falling action followed by the dénouement. The **falling action** is where all the storylines are wrapped up, any loose ends taken care of. Does the protagonist now return home or perhaps stays behind to lead? **Dénouement** is where we see what happens after the outcome has been reached, what effects that outcome has. It may also hint to the future of the characters or even a future sequel. The dénouement is not long or drawn-out, it's meant to be the period at the end of a sentence, something to give a sense of closure and finality to the story.



If you're having problems plotting, you may be able to draw inspiration from what is known as the **Hero's Journey**. In this plot format, the hero goes through three stages: **Departure** or **Separation** (the hero leaves the familiar world behind), **Initiation** (the hero learns to navigate the new, unfamiliar world), and **Return** (the hero returns to the familiar world with a changed perspective). A total of up to 17 discreet events combine

to form the overall story and takes advantage of archetypes to build a strong foundation of minor characters. I find the Hero's Journey to be very inspiring, but it is also complex. I recommend reading a little about it on your own and judging if you'd like to know more or not.

Writing Assignment: Write an elevator pitch for your story (see example below), something to answer when someone asks, "What are you writing?" It should be no longer than one, perhaps two sentences. Next, write a more detailed 5-7 sentence "back cover" summary of your story, something to use when the elevator pitch is successful and the party wishes to know more information.

Elevator Pitch for Lunar One: "A dystopian adventure about a young women's quest to unlock the ghastly secrets behind life on her lunar home."

Back Cover Summary of Lunar One: "Two hundred years after all life on Earth is annihilated, the last of humanity survives on a moon colony, Lunar One. Young Amia undergoes the Stage to live among its different societies and her idyllic world unravels as she learns the ghastly truths behind colony life. A sinister web of danger, betrayal, and mystery makes the most difficult decision of her life impossible. With enemies lurking around every corner and uncertain who to trust, can Amia bring down an obsolete and unjust system?"

NOTE: This back cover summary is intentionally a bit vague. You will see some summaries online or on the back cover of books that go into more specifics about the plot. How much you divulge here is a personal preference, but remember that the goal of this is to hook the reader and entice them to buy and read the story.

Chapter Eight

Summary

❖

Congratulations! You are now ready to take your idea and transform it into a workable first draft! There is a lot more to learn about becoming a good writer and I am still learning myself. But, you now have the tools necessary to build the house that is your story. On the next pages you'll find a one-page summary of the major points discussed in this tutorial and a list of weak verbs for your reference.

❖

Writing is both challenging and intimidating, but with a little determination and motivation, you'll be on your way to developing great fiction. Just remember that every story boils down to six basic elements:

1. Writing Fundamentals, particularly Show, Don't Tell.

2. Creating the world of your story.

3. Creating characters and using their interactions to further the story.

4. Dialogue needs to be strong and relevant - full of tension and conflict.

5. Each scene must have a purpose. Conflict and (un)answered questions are paramount.

6. Advance your plot through plot and pinch points. Conflict, again, is key.

❖

Also, don't forget that the "tricks" described herein are more "guidelines for best practice" rather than hard set "rules". I break these guidelines often in my writing, but I do question each and every time I do so. Always ask yourself if there is a better, clearer, and stronger way to say something. If there is, then consider using it. If there isn't, then you can rest assured that you tried to follow the guideline but the available alternatives

didn't work as well for you and your story. While this book can get you started and help you finish a first draft, many more tricks/rules/guidelines exist that you will come across as you mature in your writing. For now, don't worry about learning those. Worry about that during the revision stage, where the intimidation from finishing the first draft is gone and replaced with some writing experience.

❖

I hope that you have found this book useful. You can download a free copy of my Quick-Start Guide to Planning your Novel by signing up for my email list at http://www.danieldelill.com - I only send a couple of emails a year and/or when I'm releasing something new. There is also a YouTube tutorial to accompany this book at https://www.youtube.com/user/dtdelill.

Thanks and be well!

Happy Writing!!!

Chapter Nine

The Essential Elements of a Fiction Story

❖

1. Writing Fundamentals

    a. Write, Don't Edit!

    b. Show, Don't Tell!

    c. Use adverbs sparingly

    d. Avoid the use of weak verbs when possible

    e. Avoid use of the passive voice

❖

2. World Building

    a. Habitat

    b. Biodiversity

    c. Society and Culture

    d. Extrasocietal Interactions

❖

3. Characters

    a. Protagonist, Antagonist, Sidekick, Mentor

    b. Character Arcs - how the character changes

    c. Develop backstory and motivation (values, ambition, goal)

d. Use archetypes for minor characters

❖

4. Dialogue

a. Interior versus exterior

b. Create conflict and maintain tension

c. Include subtext and new characters/events/information to help create conflict and tension

d. Use dialogue tags and unique character voices/idiosyncrasies in speech

e. Point of view selection

❖

5. Scenes

a. Setting

b. Characters

c. Overall Goal

d. Action and/or Conflict

e. Setback or Conclusion

❖

6. Plot

a. Freytag's Pyramid and the Hero's Journey

b. Maintain proper pacing

c. Scene I: Set-up and inciting incident, ~25%

d. Scene II: Rising Action - Plot Points and Pinch Points, Climax, ~50%

e. Scene III: Falling Action and Dénouement, ~25%

Chapter Ten

Weak (Filter) Verbs - Use Sparingly

❖

Watch out for the (over)use of these verbs in your writing, both present and past tense versions!

Replace these verbs for alternative, strong verbs when possible.

❖

To be (was)

To be able to; can (could)

To decide (decided)

To experience (experienced)

To feel (felt)

To feel like

To hear (heard)

To know (knew)

To look (looked)

To note (noted)

To notice (noticed)

To realize (realized)

To remember (remembered)

To see (saw)

To seem (seemed)

To sound (sounded)

To sound like

To think (thought)

To touch (touched)

To watch (watched)

To wonder (wondered)