The Science of Writing Fiction

The basics you need to write the first draft of your story or novel

Daniel T. de Lill, PhD

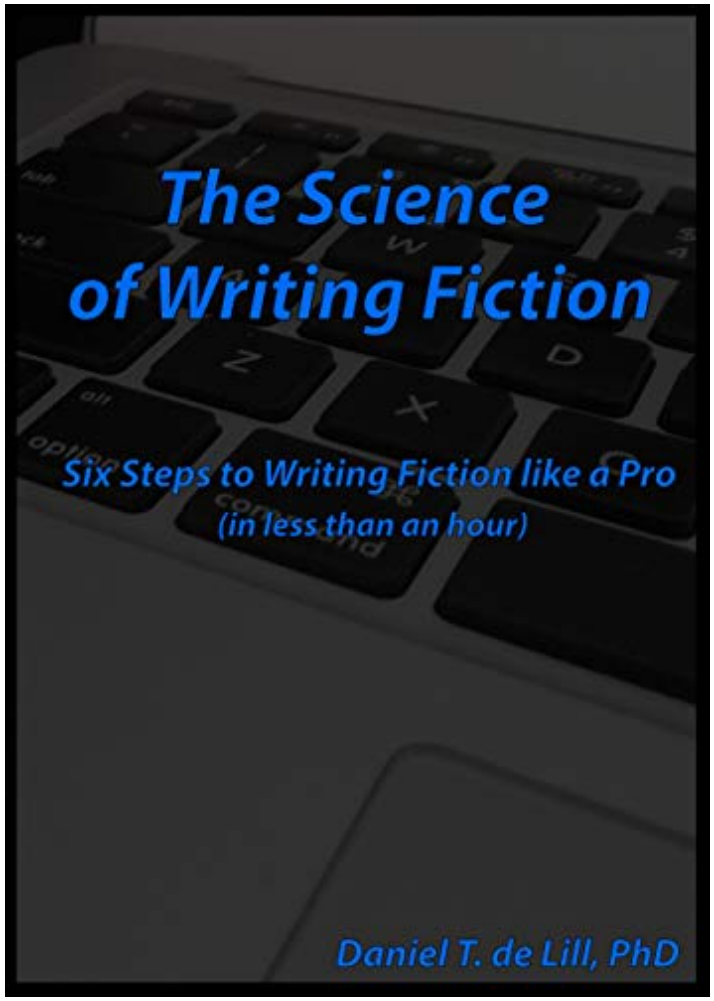
Je pense, donc j'écris...

- From Potter County, PA
- BA, French and Chemistry, minor International Studies, cum laude, Lock Haven University of PA
- Université de Haute-Alsace
- MPhil, PhD, Inorganic Chemistry, The George Washington University
- National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Nevada, Reno
- Assistant Professor, Florida Atlantic University
- Instructor, Nova Southeastern University

- Wanted to write as a teenager, but never seriously considered it as a career
- Started to dabble in writing again in 2010
- Started my writing career in 2017
  - Self-taught to write and have taken several classes and workshops on writing
- Independently published a novel and a few eBooks
  - Novel was a result of NaNoWriMo in 2017
- Blog for the Florida Writers Association
- Some recognitions (Honorable Mention in WOTF, Esalen Writer's Camp Fellowship finalist)

The "Textbook"

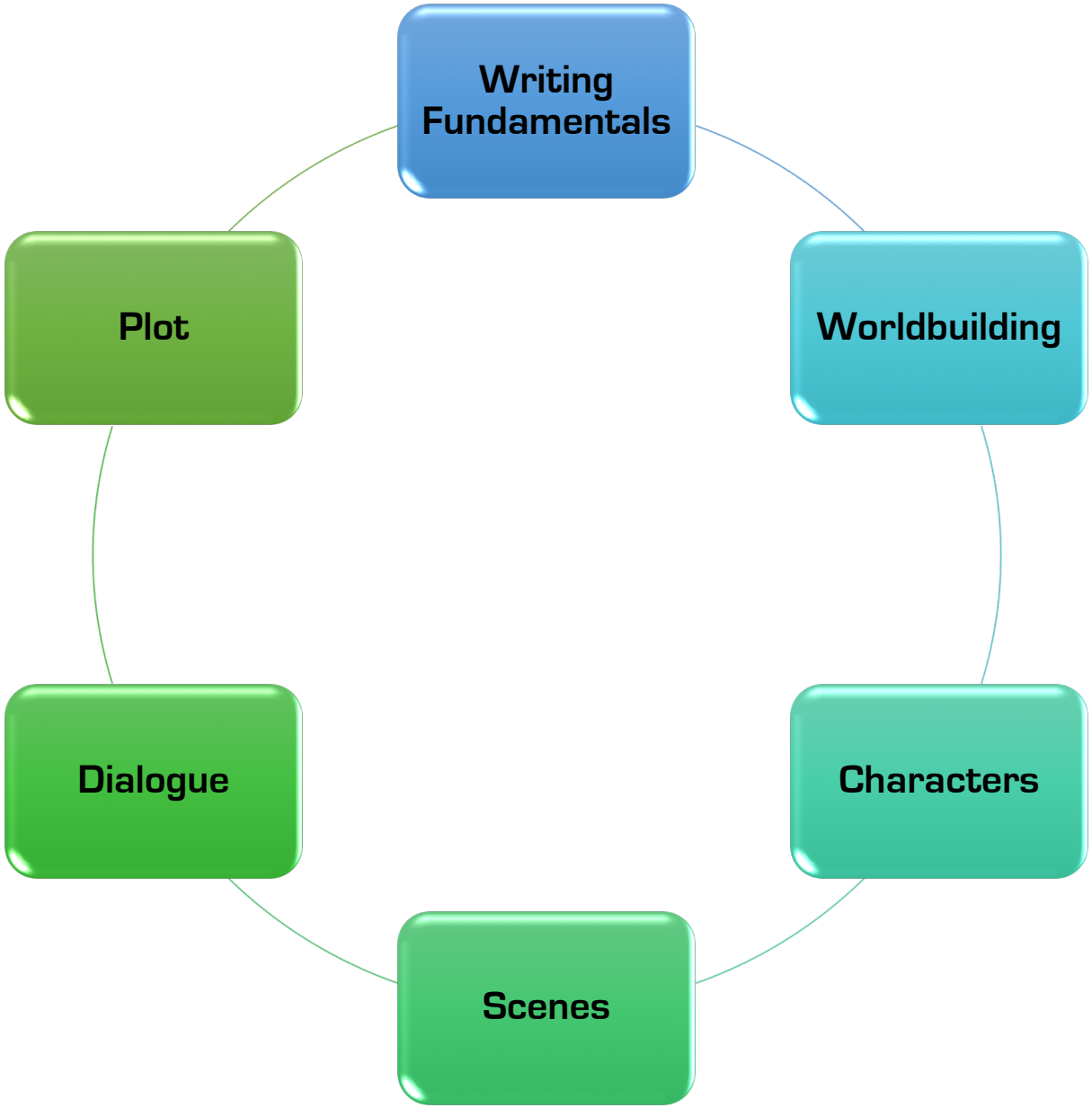
- Available on Amazon as an e-book for $0.99
- First in the series entitled "The Science of Creating Fiction"
  - Others will be released within the next year or so
  - The Science of Revising Fiction
  - The Science of Editing Fiction



What this course is and isn't

- This is a springboard to completing the first draft of a story or novel
  - You will be provided with the *fundamentals*
  - During the composition of your first draft, you'll begin to see where your strengths and weaknesses are
    - You will want to work on these aspects of your craft in more detail
- This is **not** an exhaustive course
  - Again, you're getting the basics and that's about it
  - The "real" writing often begins during the revision stage
    - This is where you will need to address your weaknesses to improve your manuscript

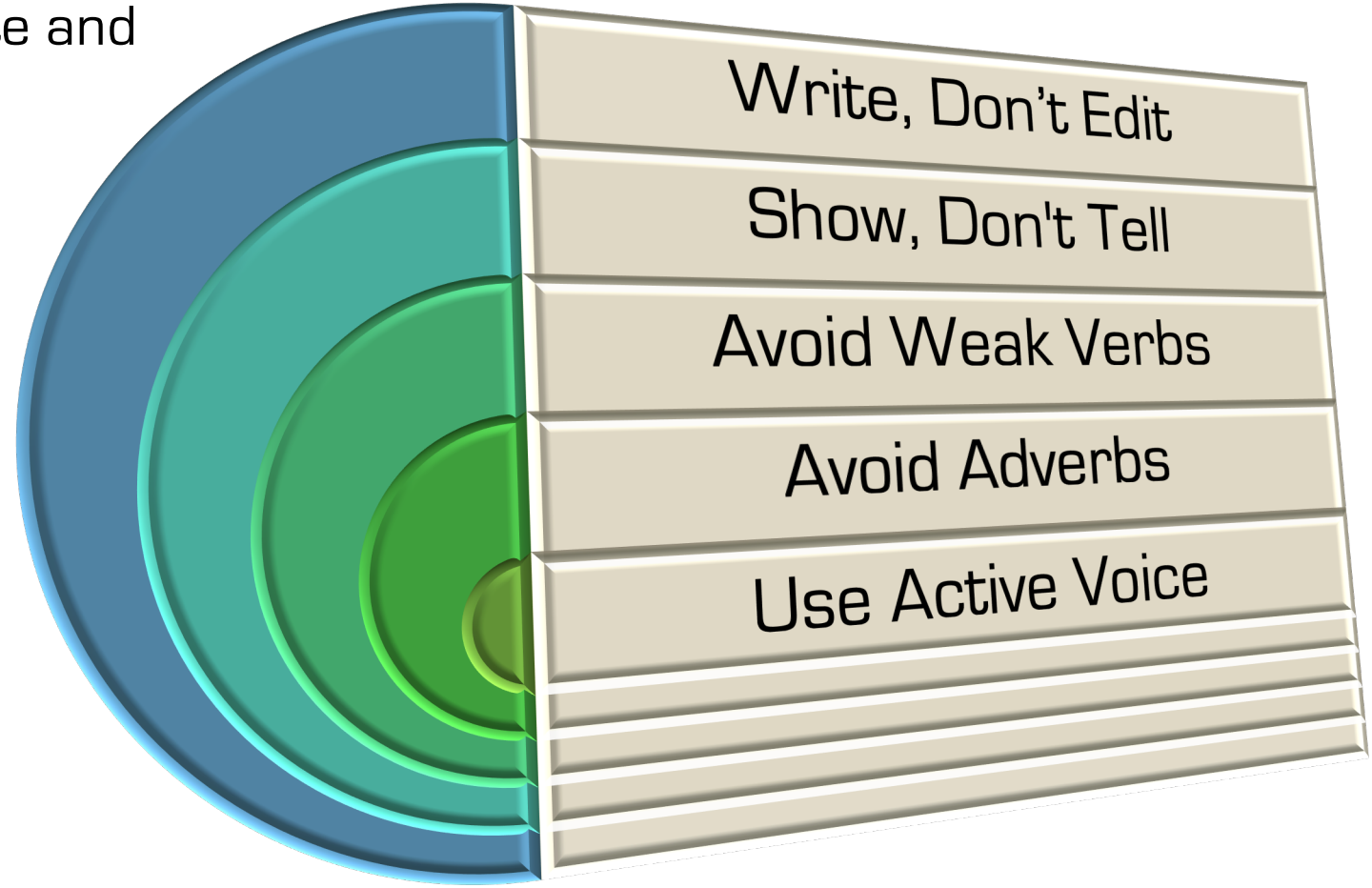
The Six Steps



Writing Fundamentals

- This is **not** about grammar
  - Grammar is important! If you need help with grammar, you'll need to look elsewhere
- This **is** a collection of tips and hints to writing decent fiction
- Two "rules" : Write and evoke emotion

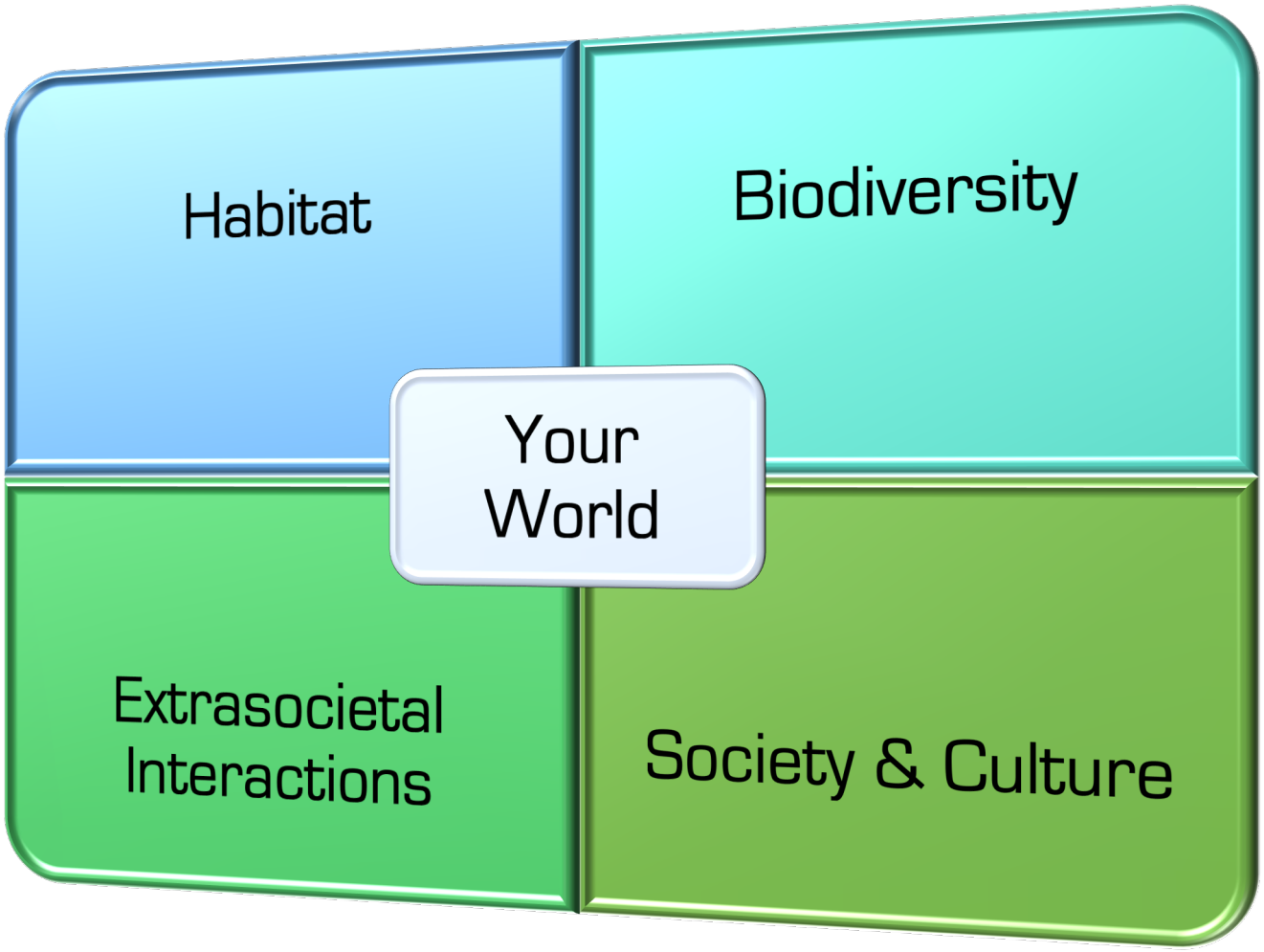
These "tips" are generalities, not absolute rules!



World Building

All fiction requires world building, not just speculative fiction

World building will require research



Characters

"Main" characters
Need backstory and character building

Protagonist	Sidekick	Antagonist	Archetypes
• Hero • Antihero	• Compliments • Contrasts	• Bad Guy • Person, demon, other	• Supporting Characters • The Mentor

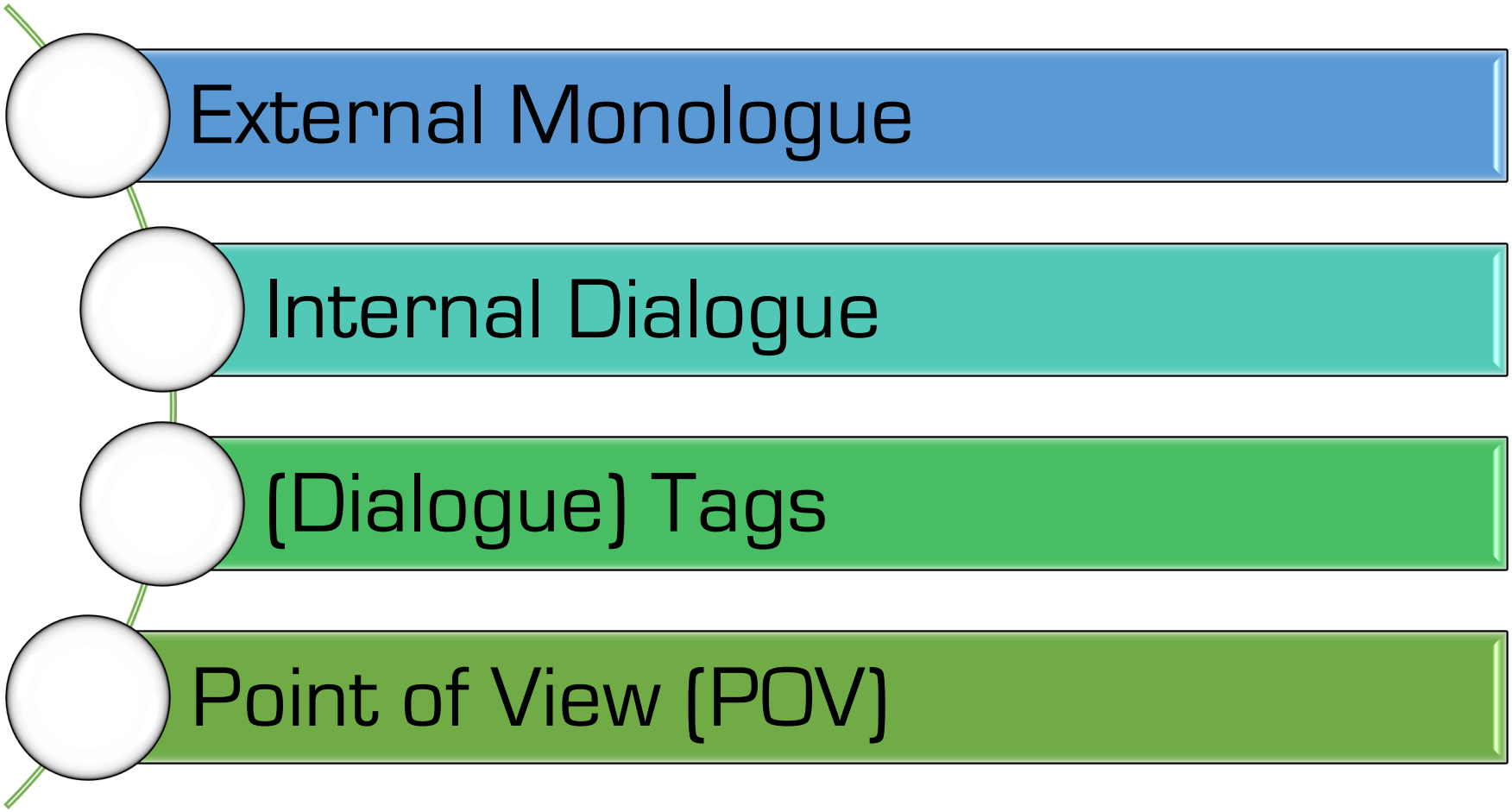
Backstory

Character Building

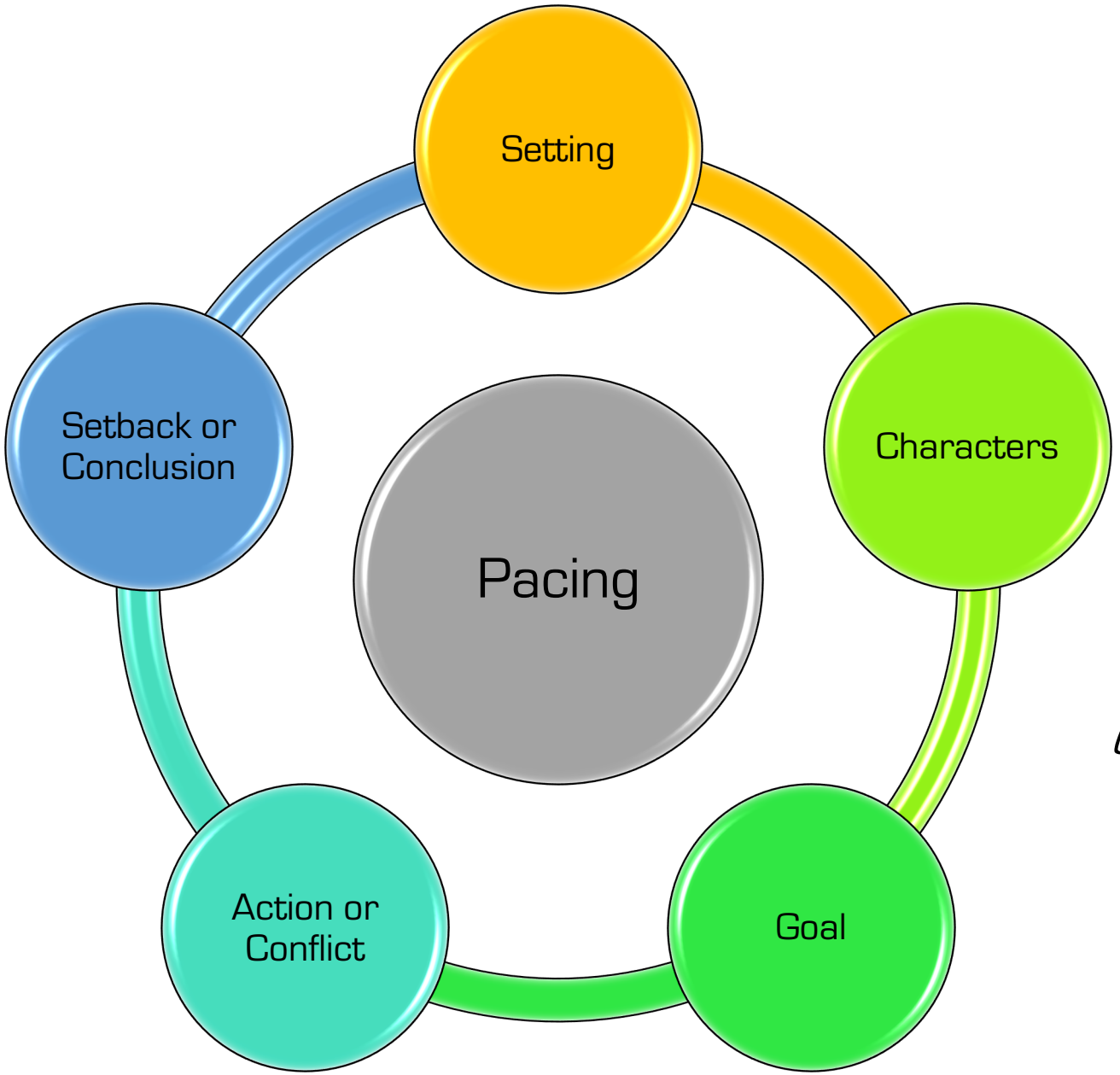
Character Arcs

"Built-in" backstories and character traits ("stereotypes")

Dialogue


External Monologue
Internal Dialogue
(Dialogue) Tags
Point of View (POV)

Scenes



Scene Types

Action Scenes

Contemplative Scenes

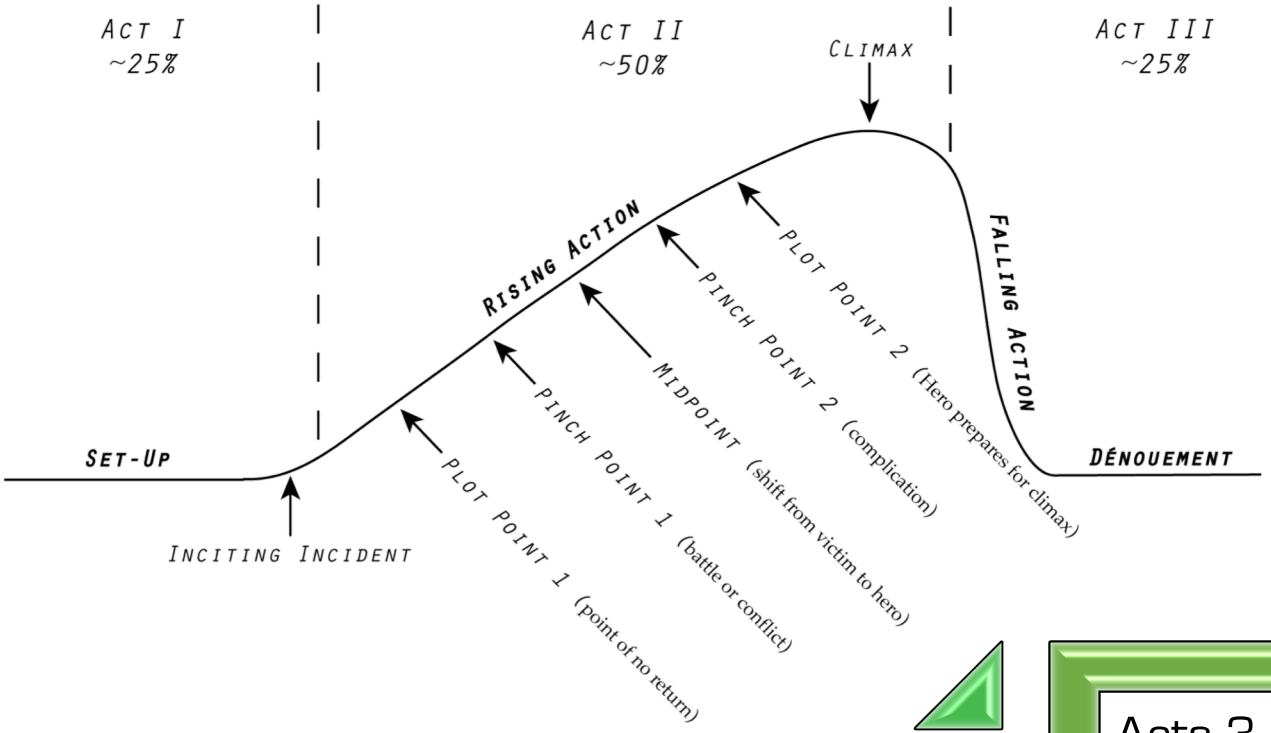
Flashbacks

Suspense Scenes

Etc.

The Classic "Three-Act" Structure

Plot



Act 1

- Set up world
- Introduce 1^{o} characters
- Inciting Incident
- 10-25%

Act 2

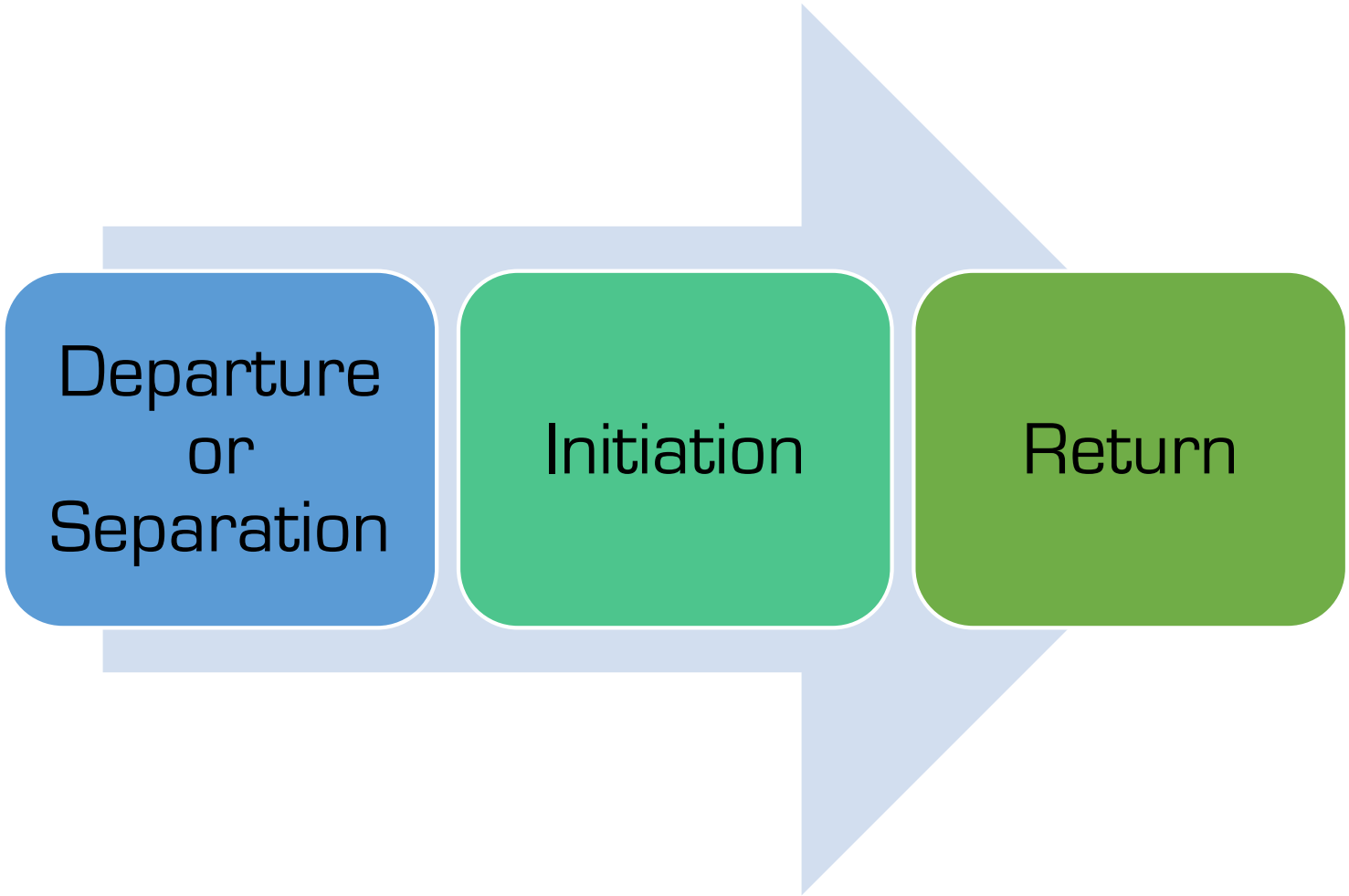
- Rising Action
- Plot Points
- Pinch Points
- Midpoint
- Climax
- 50-75%

Acts 3

- Falling Action
- Dénouement
- 10-25%

The Hero's Journey

Plot



Summary – Six Steps

- Master the writing fundamentals.
- Create a vivid world for your story.
- Create characters and use archetypes for minor characters.
- Dialogue needs to be strong and relevant, full of tension and conflict.
- Each scene must have a purpose (further plot or develop character)
  - Conflict and (un)answered questions are paramount.
- Advance plot through Plot and Pinch Points. Again, conflict is key.

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. Limit the use of weak verbs
    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, Hero's Journey
    b. Maintain proper pacing
    c. Scene I: Set-up, Inciting Incident
    d. Scene II: Rising Action - Plot & Pinch Points, Climax
    e. Scene III: Falling Action, Dénouement,

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)