

# How To Plan A Novel

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An original publication by Ria Kennedy.

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*How To Plan A Novel*

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To Wendy Piersall,

You do good things!

## INTRODUCTION

To be a good story teller, it takes three things:

- 1) Imagination,
- 2) The ability to tell a story and
- 3) The ability to develop your ideas and engage the reader.

You bring your imagination and this booklet will help you do the rest, so that you can plan your novel.

The concepts included will help you improve your story planning skills, and studying them will give you insights into the story design process.

This booklet will help you take your ideas, and cobble them into a string of events that tells a story. It will help you recognize opportunities and create necessary actions for story growth, development and success.

If you have questions, ask them in the comments section on my blog at:  
[riakennedy.blogspot.com](http://riakennedy.blogspot.com)

I will do my best to answer, and other writers will be able to reference this information, and discuss it.

## GETTING IDEAS

There are so many ways to get ideas, I could make lists and lists. But let's get you on the way to getting started; this is a booklet about planning a novel, not getting ideas. Here are a couple of ways to get ideas that will help you begin:

- Look at the one line summaries for TV shows or movies. You can find these in the TV Guide, or online, at a place like [epguides.com](http://epguides.com). Think of interesting things you can do with this idea and do your own take on it.
- Pick several words out of the dictionary and connect them into a one sentence idea. This can be abstract, just let your imagination take over. We're going to grounding this into an actual plot, so don't fret if it seems farfetched now. (Be aware, if you have a very abstract idea, it may work better with a non-standard reality, i.e., fantasy, sci-fi or horror.)

## RESPECT YOUR READER

If you gain people's trust, don't break it. Give them what you say or imply you will and give them something for their time and money. At the core of any reader is a little voice that says "what's in this for me?" Different audiences have different needs, but if you can figure out what they want and give it to them, your career will be a lot better off.

A lot of writers might say, "The reader just needs to buy my book. Once I have their money, I don't care if they like my book or not."

Please, tell me this does not describe you! I won't even get into how many books I got excited about and bought and started reading only to feel let down. The book didn't live up to what the marketing had promised!

And very rapidly, my mind inferred that this writer had just attempted to get my money from me and didn't really care about me or if I actually enjoyed their book. And guess what. I never forgot that, and never bought another single solitary thing by the author.

In fact, if I saw the name I remembered the bad experience I'd had with them, and just marched by. So, if you aren't more concerned about your reader having a good time reading your product, you are literally telling your reader that you don't care if they come back or not.

You need to quickly change your mindset to one of capturing your reader's rapt attention as an investment. You invest in the reader having a good experience with your book, and the reader is likely to invest in you by buying future books. What does that mean? A reader is for life. Always try to give them a good experience and they will have a reason to keep on coming back to you. You need to invest the effort not just in getting their business, but in keeping it.

Always deliver really good quality and exceptional enjoyment and satisfaction. It really doesn't matter if you're writing sci-fi or drama, a good, solid story will provide a rich experience to the reader. This should be your #1 goal.

*Some people won't like you – or your book, either.* Be reasonable. You can't please everyone all the time, but you can try to please as many people as possible.

Some people may say "They'll get what I give them and like it," but this is a very dismissive attitude of the very people who you want to earn your bread and butter from.

It's like going to your boss at the bank and saying, "Well, I understand you have policies of how you'd like things done, but you'll get what I give you and you'll like it."

Won't the boss fire you if you don't give them the kind of service or quality they need and want from their employees?

It's the same thing with your readers. I understand that you want to experiment and try new things, but do them on your own time, and only bring quality work written with the desires of the client in mind. For the reader *is* your client, first and foremost, and has no reason to be loyal to you if you have no concern for pleasing them more than anything else.

## PLANNING YOUR NOVEL

Getting things set up properly and nailing essential details down is absolutely critical to designing a successful novel. A book is a conglomeration of different characters and events that are brought together in one main cohesive story arc. So you need a plan. As they say, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

"Plan what? And how?" you might say. Well, your entire book. I'm going to take you through the stages from pre-planning right through to the conclusion of planning.

It's a matter of finding your focus. After all, you know a lot of stuff, and there are a lot of ideas you have, and a whole bunch of possibilities. But you need to pick one topic to focus on first. If you have no focus, you're going to be all over the place.

There may be false starts, or unclear goals, but a good plan can help prevent that or overcome that, or it will get you closer to your target. You may still have to hone it to a fine point, but you'll already have most of the materials on hand.

A good plan helps you be more efficient and effective in determining what you want and how to get the exact results you want. But it takes time up front, and some people think that's a waste. The truth is, this is what makes it so can write an entire book in a few weeks if you have the spare time. Here are some reasons why you need a plan:

- It helps you establish priorities.
- It helps you manage different tasks and priorities at the same time while remaining focused.
- It helps you deal with unexpected events, unpredictable delays or new developments.
- It helps you make maximum use of your time.
- It helps you maintain a clear focus.
- It helps you decide if you should sacrifice one thing for something else, and make the best choice, or to choose the best way to proceed.
- It helps you maintain control, and keep things from spiraling out of control.
- It gives you the right tools to take control of where things go and how they get there.
- It helps you avoid saying yes to things that will compromise the integrity of the story and helps you to stick to your intentions.
- It helps you avoid wasting time or duplicating your efforts.
- It gives you confidence, lets you know you're on track, and allows you to monitor and check overall progress.
- It helps you meet your deadlines.

So here we go. Here is how *you* can design *your* novel!



### NUMBER ONE: Take A Deep Breath

Do yourself a favor and have some fun with this. Let's face it you simply cannot do anything good if you're treating it like an assignment. Loosen up and let it flow to unleash your muse.

Know you're going to make mistakes, know it won't be perfect, make it as good as you can and as entertaining (fun!) as you can by having fun yourself.

This is the #1 secret to being a great writer. A good writer hits their mark most of the time. A great writer hits as often as they miss and they have a blast. People like reading their stuff because they don't take it too seriously.

You can have a ton of fun with the planning process. It uses lots of imagination and problem-solving, creating a pure, exhilarating joyride where you are originator, creator cobbling together a world and its characters and what will happen to them in your story.

Keep a positive attitude and approach this not as a grim responsibility or promise to yourself or duty to the world, but as a new way to see and explore things, safely and with only the limits the story puts on you. Be a jolly writer, and everyday you work on your story will be like a holiday.

## NUMBER TWO: Book Summary

Let's do a quick plan. This will be fast.

1) Do a book summary in 1-3 sentences. This needs to cover the beginning, the middle and the outcome. Why this order? Because it's better to create a story first and then detail that, than to start with details and try to make them into a story.

2) Create an appropriate hook that sets the story up and the final confrontation that shows the antagonist and protagonist facing off.

3) Reorder them into a list that says: Hook, Start, Middle, Climax, Outcome.

Here are examples:

- How does the book start?  
The protagonist, Mary, is accused of a murder.
- What happens in the middle between the beginning and the end?  
The protagonist must prove her innocence.
- What is the outcome?  
The villain is arrested.

All right, let's flesh that out a little, because it's not much good to you right now.

- What is the hook?  
A man falls dead with a knife in his back in the protagonist's kitchen.
- What is the climax?  
The protagonist is chased by the villain.

So what you now have is:

- What is the hook?  
A man falls dead with a knife in his back in the protagonist's kitchen.
- How does the book start?  
The protagonist, Mary, is accused of the man's murder.
- What happens in the middle between the beginning and the end?  
The protagonist must prove her innocence.
- What is the climax?  
The protagonist is chased by the real villain.
- What is the outcome?  
The villain is arrested.

Let's call this *The Housewife And The Uninvited House Guest*. (You can always change a title later, but it's nice to have a name for your working copy, even if it's just temporary.)

In other words, you have just created a skeletal story! Wasn't that easy and fun?

### NUMBER THREE: Main Plots

Here are four categories\* with three goals each. Any one of these specific goals can function as the main plot of your whole book!

- Escape/Flee/Get Away;
- Quest/Seek/Pursue;
- Defend/Protect/Secure;
- Overcome/Conquer/Surmount.

\* There is also one other main plot, that *only* works in Romance. It is writing a romance novel, i.e., a Harlequin Romance. You need to write the romance plot as the most important thing, with everything else secondary. **THIS IS THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE**; every other plot requires a somewhat more complex story and is a little more involved.

If writing a romance novel, your only choice is to do a romance plot. You'll need to read books by the publisher you want to write for in the category you want to write and use those books as your guidelines. The information I present can help you do the rest.

What does this mean, that one of these words can make a plot for a whole book? Here are some examples that will show you what I mean. It's astonishing! The whole book could be about an attempt:

- To escape – i.e., a prison.
- To flee – i.e., an abusive husband.
- To get away – i.e., from a killer.

... and so on, with each of the other "Plots" or plot words.

There are only so many types of stories that are done. In my experience and research, these are the *main* ones. They seem to be the root of many stories.

You just imagine who or what else is involved and it gives you an idea of what the protagonist will be dealing with predominantly. Since you already have a story summary, it helps you stick to the boundaries you have set for what you want to explore most in your story.

So in the case of *The Housewife And The Uninvited House Guest*, you have several options. She needs to prove her innocence, presumably by finding the real culprit. So it depends on how you approach it and what you want to do with it. Here are some examples, she can:

- (a) seek out the culprit and attempt to prove his guilt.
- (b) defend her good name.
- (c) overcome the odds that make her seem guilty.

- You could even do (d), she discovers the real culprit and flees in terror, becoming a fugitive from justice!

You just have to pick the one you are most interested in doing and feel most confident in pulling off.

Knowing the root of your story allows you to narrow your focus. This is really crucial, because if your story doesn't have a good focus, it doesn't have a backbone. By knowing *what the protagonist wants to or needs to do over all*, or over the course of the book, you can go on and establish:

- 1) The what (What's it about? What's the cause?) (I.e., a murder.)
- 2) The who (Who is involved? Who is the antagonist?) (I.e., the villain and the police, Mary's attorney, her husband.)
- 3) The when (Is there a time frame? A time limit?) (I.e., she is out on bail and needs to solve this before she goes to trial.)
- 4) The how (How will they deal with the who, the what and the when?) (I.e., she needs to investigate, she needs to follow up on leads.)
- 5) The why (Why on earth does it matter? Why does the protagonist even care?) (I.e., she could go to prison and lose everything! That's a good reason!)
- 6) The where (Where is this happening? What are the main areas?) (I.e., Brooklyn, New York, present day.)

These are in a specific order for a reason: one thing leads to another. You may get random ideas in a different order from this, but to make it fit together, put them in *this* order when you write them down so you can see them on paper and make additional necessary connections that you may not infer if you have them out of this order. This helps things to make sense in your story. This way, things don't happen for no reason.

Let's boil it down still further and let you see the inner workings of this process and what it does for you. This is a rundown, something to use throughout the planning process, so that you understand how to use these questions to design your story :

- What: This gives a motive or catalyst. What is it over? What is the fuss about? Some examples: A nasty monster wants to eat the protagonist for dinner. A cunning General wants to sack the protagonist's capital city. The sly villain intends to capture the protagonist and make her into slippers. A treaty must be negotiated. A blockade needs to be run to bring out critical information on the enemy's movements. (There are tons of cool things to write about!)
- Who: This gives a motive or catalyst *or* an antagonist, competitor, enemy, rival or nemesis, *or* a friend or partner or boss, etc. First off, focus on the main antagonist. This is the main enemy in the main conflict.
- When: This helps you ascertain the sequence of events. If you need to blow up the bridge to prevent the troops getting through, then you don't want to leave that

until the middle of the book, when the troops have already gotten through! Or, if the troops are closing in at the end, maybe the last resort is to blow the bridge and buy some time. Scheduling is something you will work more on when you do the book outline; this is just an overview for now.

- **How:** This gives means and opportunity. Well, to put it in the simplest terms, it must be possible for the protagonist to act in his or her own interests. They must be able to accomplish objectives which lead them to attempting to attain their goals. If it is impossible for the protagonist to work on their own behalf, you have an unwinnable situation. Your only option will be to have someone rescue the protagonist and do the work for them. And audiences hate that! So you'll need to come up with a functional plan for the protagonist to follow in order to achieve their goals.
- **Why:** This gives the reason. Remember: people have to have a good reason to do something, even if it only makes sense to them. If there is no reason, the motive is kind of groundless. OK, the protagonist wants to get revenge on his ex. That's a motive. But what is the grounds for the protagonist wanting revenge? Did she cheat or something? If you have a reason, you have the beginning of a story.
- **Where:** This gives the location and world, which can affect all the rest. I.e., a fantasy world is much different from one in the 1600s or another in 2008. Technology, magic, people, would all be affected, which would in turn affect government, travel, and even food and manufacturing.

The mind is a very volatile thinker, and it may not work in strict regulated formation. It may work very abstractly, and you may make huge leaps of logic or intuitive jumps that help you to figure things out. That's great; there is no wrong way to answer these questions, just a way to help you take it to the next level by seeing it on paper.

So don't at all think I am advising you to work in a regimented way. I want you to have fun with this, and one of the first things you need to realize is that all rules of writing are rules of thumb – meaning they tend to be based on common sense but should be altered as needed – and rules are there to support the writer in making a good product. If a rule is getting in your way, throw it out!

## NUMBER FOUR: The Book Outline

All right, now we're cooking. This is not necessarily a new idea, but if you haven't heard of it, the simplicity of it will shock and astonish you.

Outline your book by saying what happens in each chapter. That's it, the whole outline plan.

But there are ways to do this and ways to do this. I have sorted out the best approach that will help you stay focused and on track and get from start to finish as quickly and effectively as possible. Let me take you through the process I use.

1) Determine how many words you need or want in your novel. The typical is a minimum word count of 80,000 words and maximum 100,000 words. As in, don't submit less than 80,000 words and no more than 100,000 words.

I usually go for 80,000 at the start, because that gives me 20,000 words to add later, when I refine, add or detail things. You'd be amazed that you could add 20,000 words in the editing and revision process, but it's not that unusual. On the other hand, if you shoot for 100,000 words and need to add 20,000 words, you could end up with 120,000 words and then need to cut 20,000. Personally, I'd rather add than take away, because I use a plan, and everything I write in the first place tends to be needed.

2) What I will show now is how to set your chapter outline up. This is essential to figuring out how many chapters you need. Decide your comfort zone as far as how many words you are comfortable writing at a spell. If you can write 4,000, great. Let's use that chapter word count in this example. Now take 80,000 (your target word count) divided by 4,000 (your chapter length) to get the number of chapters you need to plan. This gives you 20 chapters.

- $80,000 \text{ minimum word count} / 4,000 \text{ word per chapter} = 20 \text{ chapters (to start – this may change later)}$

Now, 20 chapters to start with is just an example, and not necessarily appropriate to your needs. Likewise, you may want to write chapters that are only 2,500 words long, which would change the number of chapters you write depending on your target word count for the manuscript. Substitute the numbers that suit you or your needs and use the formulas included to work out the word counts and chapter counts.

NOTE: If you are writing for a publisher, check their webpage to find out what their mandates are for manuscript word counts and follow their guidelines *exactly*.

Naturally, if you write shorter chapters, you will need more chapters and/or fewer word counts. As a rule of thumb, try not to go over 4,000 words per chapter, because the audience attention span gets tired with long chapters. Give the reader lots of chances to

break, put the laundry in the drier, cook dinner, work on the car, etc., by making shorter chapters. This will keep your audience in a good mood and raring to go.

3) Now you will just make a list from 1 – 20. I recommend you use the computer, because it allows you to make revisions very easily. Do not use bullets! (If you do use longhand, I recommend you number 20 index cards, because you can re-order or replace them as needed.) Each of these numbers represents your chapters.

Next to the appropriate number, in order of occurrence, write down a brief sentence that summarizes what will happen in that chapter. I call this the Chapter Outline Sentence.

You only care about the main arc of the story here, which you did a summary for and plotted in Steps One and Two. Lets take *The Housewife And The Uninvited House Guest*, in this story, right now we only care about how she will clear her name of murder. Things like boyfriends, non-related events, etc. are *not* done here.

We are creating a chain of events that link the protagonist's actions from Chapter One, where it all starts, to the last chapter, where it all ends. It is essential to mesh the chapters with your plan, ensuring that most activities and events are aligned with your plan. So most of *The Housewife And The Uninvited House Guest* should deal with Mary trying to clear her name and find the murderer.

All you are getting right now is the main idea of each chapter. An example of a Chapter Outline Sentence could be: "Mary breaks into the DA's office to photocopy the documents that the police wouldn't give her containing the information on the other suspects."

Write these Chapter Outline Sentence out, in the best order you can think of, but you may jump around a little as you realize what should be at 19, even if you are only on 12. You don't need to be too rigid, that's why we have a numbered list. Just add the Chapter Outline Sentences as you think of them in whatever order they come to you. You may have to renumber things or re-order them, but that's no biggie.

You may notice that certain things are suggested by other chapters, i.e., at 18 you have, "Mary realizes that the woman clammed up when Justin was there and she's going to go talk to her and find out why the woman's afraid of Justin," and at 20 you have "Mary runs from the villain and he is arrested by the police," then it might suggest to you that 19 should be something like "Mary realizes Justin did it, and calls the police, but the detective is out, so she decides to get the final proof she needs and goes to Justin's."

There you go! You have your book outline, or at least the first version of it!

4) All right, let's double and triple check. Are things happening in a logical progression? Does one thing lead to another? Does it make sense? Check and make sure. If so, go to the next step. If not, adjust things or make changes so it works better and check again. Do not pass this step until your outline is as accurate as you can make it.

5) All right, do you have the 20 chapter action statements? Now put your book outline aside and let it sit at least 1 day or more. You will be amazed, but you may have some other ideas of things that need to be added to make your book outline complete. Maybe there are other chapters you need to add, to complete the tale or tell the story how you know it should be told! So go ahead and do that. When you are sure you will have no new ideas any time soon, go to step 6.

6) OK, all done? No more additions? Then, now that you are pretty sure you have all the chapters you are going to need, let's check the chapter word count. If you didn't add any more chapters, you're done. But say you added three more chapters, going from 20 chapters to 23. No sweat. You have two options if you left yourself some leeway by going for the lesser word count of 80,000 words.

(a) You can simply add on the word count for the extra chapters. So you would add on 12,000 words. (4,000 words times three new chapters). This would bring you to 92,000 words total for the whole book.

- 4,000 words per chapter x 3 new chapters = 12,000 additional words.
- 80,000 minimum word count + 12,000 additional words = 92,000 words total manuscript length.

(b) You can change the chapter length, so you are writing smaller chapters. You do this by taking 80,000 (your minimum word count) and divide it by the number of chapters (23) to get the new chapter word count (3,479 give or take).

- $80,000 \text{ minimum word count} / 23 \text{ chapters} = (3,478.26 \text{ words per chapter, always round up so}) 3,479$
- $23 \text{ chapters times } 3,479 \text{ words per chapter} = 80,017 \text{ words total manuscript length.}$

Now you have your outline and know where you want to take this book. Time to flesh it out in more detail!



## NUMBER FIVE: The Chapter Outline

Remember, our goal for each chapter is to make sure different problems crop up or old ones change, to keep the protagonist busy trying to resolve things and keep the audience busy guessing what will happen next.

First, do a “chapter summary” for the chapter you’re working on in 1 to 3 sentences, keeping in mind the book outline and plan. The chapter summary should briefly cover the beginning of the chapter, the middle of the chapter and the conclusion of the chapter – *and it should advance the plot somehow, using the Chapter Outline Sentences you made.*

Next, do a quick outline of the essential events of the chapter, using the ideas below, again keeping in mind where things fit within the larger story of the book, as well as what needs to happen in the vicinity of the chapter to keep it interesting.

### 1) Arc Plot Goal (Specify Which Goal)

An arc is something a writer creates to make a mini-story. And here are our old friends from Step Three, our trusty Plots to help us do this. Except now, we will use to create chapter goals, as in goals that are somehow related to the main plot and appear that they might help the protagonist advance in resolving the plot in a mini-story.

You can have one Goal and arc per chapter, or several Goals and arcs per chapter. Each Goal creates a *new* arc of the following (numbers 2-4).

- Escape/Flee/Get Away;
- Quest/Seek/Pursue;
- Defend/Protect/Secure;
- Overcome/Conquer/Surmount.

All you are doing is expounding on the Chapter Outline Sentence for this chapter. How? You already have the main focus of the chapter, now, pick one of the above goals that will help the protagonist work with your plans for the chapter.

For example, one of Mary’s Chapter Outline Sentences was: “Mary breaks into the DA’s office to photocopy the documents that the police wouldn’t give her containing the information on the other suspects.” One thing she will have to do in order to accomplish this is overcome the security of the building. So the first Loop of the chapter might be the goal of getting past security.

### 2) Hook: Mystery/Question/Problem/Challenge/Incident/Situation

- This is why the goal is set: this is the catalyst.

With this outline sentence, it’s clear that Mary has learned the defense attorney has information that she is not sharing with Mary. Mary needs it to clear her name.

### 3) Results in...

- A Fight/Argument/Debate/Discussion/A Chase
- Finding Something (I.e., a location, thing, item, or person.)
- Following Up On Something (I.e., information, revelation, plot twist, connection.)
- A Deception/Hold-up/Delay

In Mary's case, maybe she has to hide in the bathroom until she can get through.

### 4) Activities Related to Attaining The Goal (Specify)

Specify what tasks or undertakings are needed, and in what order. This means you may start with Find, go to Link, then to Stop and then back to Race, then to Find, etc., repeating the loop or changing the goal and starting a new loop as your story dictates.

- Find
- Stop
- Link
- Race

Mary sneaks in when the janitor isn't looking, and has to find the documents fast.

### 5) Leading to...

The arc concludes with a new Goal (1), a new Hook (2), new Results (3), or a new Activity (4), which starts a new arc. Then you can go back to the top and start over again on the new arc, in the same or next chapter (unless you just finished the main plot!). This means for each Goal, you have a new Hook, new Results and new Activities. For example:

#### *The Next Arc...*

Let's say that in this case, Mary discovers something of interest in the DA's office in addition to the suspect's names and addresses, and she needs to follow-up on it.

This is new information developed in-chapter, and is not part of your Chapter Outline Sentence. Nevertheless, it should still serve your leading sentence. The new Loop is when Mary gets the "hook" that a mute man lives in her apartment building and he may have seen something the night of the murder. Mary sets a new "goal", to seek information from this man.

Incidentally, and "off-topic", as in this is secondary to the main plot, Mary sees and talks to the handsome detective prosecuting her case. Or more accurately lies to his demanding questions about what she's doing. Her heart flip flops and she tries to think of her husband out of guilt. But boy, that detective is smoking hot!

Then she sneaks off to bug her mute neighbor to see what he has to say, the brief, terse discussion with the detective playing in her mind. Meeting the neighbor could be the start of a new chapter, or a continuation of the same chapter.

## NUMBER SIX: The Five Sections Of A Novel

This is some very heavy duty detail of what parts a novel (any novel) can be broken down into. It is not essential to know this, but it might help you avoid some problems, help you to take advantage of some situations, or to locate elements appropriately.

The sections go in an order, because they build on each other, and create the sense of mounting tension and challenge, as well as showing the state of the story and the protagonist's mind. This all goes toward creating a story that starts more lightly and becomes more difficult and tense as time goes on and the struggle intensifies.

Generally there is the struggle of the protagonist, as he or she attempts to overcome and conquer the challenges of the story. In addition, there is the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist, which affects what happens and creates more problems. Only by resolving this conflict will the problems stop. (Of note, in romance, the main antagonist is may be the love interest, with the villain as a secondary antagonist.)

Part one may last only one chapter, and then go immediately into part two in chapter two. Or, part one may go over several chapters before segueing into part two. There is no right number of chapters that fits into any of the sections, this is determined according to your writing style and where your sections "naturally" break.

A natural break is where one section alters in tone and tenor and transitions into the tone and tenor of the next section. This varies from book to book, so there is no specific method to apply this, it's just something to be aware of.

### 1) Problem appears.

Recognition of danger or threat or need is created. This sets up the rough boundaries of the conflict and indicates some of the practices and methods that may be employed to resolve the issue.

The problem is somehow personal to the protagonist. There is an antagonist that is the source of the problem and this sets up some conflict with the protagonist. At this point, the protagonist sets a goal to resolve this problem, with or without a stated goal to also deal with the antagonist (that may come later, or now).

The protagonist may not realize that it won't be so easy (the struggle), or how much conflict there will be. But the rules of fiction dictate that the protagonist *cannot* know this when they start, or there is no story. A lot of the story is finding things out as it goes on, and watching the protagonist grapple with what to do. The protagonist cannot have all the answers to begin with; he or she needs to discover these as they go on. They must figure out how to win, what to do, how and why, or there is no struggle. No struggle, no tension, no reader interest.

Important questions to answer to complete this section:

- What is the catalyst that provokes the protagonist to get involved?

- How is the antagonist involved? Did they do it themselves or are they using henchmen and staying behind the scenes?
- Does the protagonist know that the antagonist is responsible, or will a suspect have to be tracked down?
- How much does the protagonist know about the antagonist, or will the protagonist have to find that out about the antagonist over the course of the story? Is the antagonist an unknown quotient that must be discovered?
- Is an overt conflict planned (i.e., two opposing rulers fighting one another for resources), or covert conflict planned (i.e., one ruler is secretly conducting raids and stealing resources), or cat and mouse conflict planned (i.e., the protagonist is hunting an anonymous killer or a monster is chasing the protagonist)?

Also, the problems may change or new ones may appear, so the protagonist does not have any real idea what he or she is getting involved in. But the starting problem must immediately make the protagonist resolve to accomplish some goal to begin the book.

## **2) No Going Back**

At this point, you may need to reinforce the protagonist commitment so there is no going back. You may do this by creating a scene that demonstrates they have made their bed and must lie in it. The “bed must lie in it” thing may be a request or offer they can’t refuse, i.e., an appeal to the heart, morality or greed, or a threat that is too real to ignore. After this, the protagonist may not like it, but has to reconcile with the fact that their course is set, and the only way to get out of this is to end the conflict and win.

The protagonist sees the affects the antagonist has and on who or what, giving them more reasons to continue – or stop. But they have passed the point of no going back because of the choices they made, either because they burnt their bridges, the antagonist knows about them and they are now a target, what they have seen compels them to put an end to what’s happening, it is “the right thing” to do, it’s their job, or they have no choice (i.e., they have nothing left or have to protect what they have), etc.

This results in an exodus from the everyday and mundane life in some way, where the protagonist must confront and deal with things and people outside their ordinary life. This is because the conflict has supplanted daily concerns or overshadowed them.

In this section, the protagonist is trying to catch up with the antagonist, but tends to be one step behind. This may add insult to injury, along with outrage over what has been done, fostering a real burning need and desire to stop the antagonist. As a result, the protagonist may state openly their intentions to get the antagonist or stop them.

Also, the situation is changing and not static, so the protagonist may be struggling to get a handle on things in order to resolve the conflict or stop what is happening from continuing.

The protagonist may think they just have to catch up to the antagonist, and then lights out, problem solved, but they may have an overly simplistic or optimistic view of how things

will play out. The protagonist may begin to flesh out some approach to deal with the situation (which will not work for some reason).

Important questions to answer to complete this section:

- What does the protagonist learn about the antagonist?
- How is what the antagonist does contrary to the protagonist's ethics, beliefs or needs, feeding the conflict?
- How does this affect their beliefs about the conflict and their enemy?
- What thing or event provokes them to try to resolve the situation?
- How does the protagonist intend to defeat the enemy or overcome and win? Why will this fail?

### **3) Rude Awakening**

Rules and practices may not be working and may in fact not be having the desired effect in turning the tide or may be very unhelpful or even work against the protagonist at this point. The reason why is that the antagonist may ignore laws, do the unexpected or play dirty.

This is a rude awakening, where the protagonist finally wakes up to the facts of the situation and the people he or she is dealing with. This may be an end of innocence moment, or an awakening to the facts/wisdom moment.

The protagonist may question the course they are on, but the antagonist is busy working to achieve their goals. The antagonist may be trying to avoid the protagonist and stay low, to continue working to further their own ends, but the protagonist knows the antagonist is out there, plotting and working to achieve their diabolical plans.

The protagonist can't or won't quit, but now must resolve themselves to the fact that this will not be an easy or fast battle and the outcome may not look so rosy. The protagonist may have to learn to go outside his/her comfort zone and try new things.

At this time, the protagonist may feel they are making no headway and are having trouble staying on top of things and have to "tread water" to maintain. Things may be (a) happening too quickly to keep up with, or, (b) things may have stopped happening and the antagonist has dropped off the radar. If (a), the protagonist must find the right thing(s) in amongst the other things and may go through a number of false leads. If (b), the protagonist may have to work to pick up the trail again.

Important questions to answer to complete this section:

- What is happening?
- What is going on behind the scenes, things the protagonist does not know? (No mistakes, the audience should have some glimmer of this to further their understanding of what's going on in the story and to create suspense.)
- What isn't working and why?

- How has the antagonist surprised the protagonist?
- What other problems are there or what else has gone wrong?

#### **4) A Journey Into The Wilderness**

At this point, things are not at all predictable, and they are usually going wrong. They are also becoming more complicated, more risky and more may hang in the balance. Just when things begin to matter a lot, there is less of a guarantee that things will go the right way, no matter what the protagonist does.

At this point, you need to show that the protagonist has gone outside civilization. Possibly they have actually “gone wild”, or simply this just means they are dealing with things, people and events that are volatile, chaotic and corrupt.

Protagonists are nearly at the end of their rope and their resources may be severely limited. Yet they are tasked to achieve what has been an endless battle to accomplish their objectives and the battle is getting harder and the antagonist more dangerous or difficult.

In addition to the main conflict, they may have some personal problems. The protagonist may be having some very uncomfortable moments if he or she recognizes some of themselves in the antagonist, if they have immoral or wicked thoughts themselves, or if they are having problems with their loved ones because of the conflict.

The protagonist needs to think and act carefully but creatively and keep going. Each side may be getting very serious and playing for keeps. The protagonist needs to reconcile to the fact that things are getting worse, and they need to stop it soon, although the method to do this may be unknown, causing much frustration and even despair in the protagonist.

Important questions to answer to complete this section:

- How are things escalating?
- How does the battle heat up?
- Does the protagonist keep perspective or are they succumbing to doubt or rage or some other emotion?
- How do goals and objectives change based on what the antagonist does (for the protagonist) or the protagonist does (for the antagonist)?
- How are the stakes being raised?

#### **5) A Journey Into Darkness**

The protagonist may now be in the hot seat and desperate, pressured for time or even targeted by the antagonist. The antagonist wants to achieve their goals and is mustering his/her/its strength and resources and coming on hard. They do not intend to lose any more than the protagonist does and they intend to win just as much.

It is now all or nothing. Either the antagonist is at the brink of winning, or things have gotten to a point that they must be stopped now. This may be sooner than the protagonist

anticipated, or the protagonist may just be relieved that they caught up enough to do something and try to end conflict once and for all.

As this section goes on, there may be secondary problems or considerations that must be dealt with or kept up to win. Does the protagonist have what it takes to best their opponent once and for all, even though things are coming apart? It's all coming to a head, where it will be an all or nothing or a one-shot deal where the protagonist will win big or lose big.

Getting through this final bit will be hard on the protagonist. They may second guess themselves, lose something they care deeply about or have to make some sacrifice in order to go on. I call this "the ring of fire". They must collect themselves and resolve to step through this mire of doubt, fear and confusion and into the final showdown.

The ring of fire, in a nutshell, is either a last challenge, i.e., rescue someone, or a personal issue the protagonist must overcome, i.e., their fear of heights or something, or both. Only by passing through this ring of fire do they enter the final circle, the last face-off where both sides enter but only one emerges – or only one wins.

After that, the book may just end, or you may wrap up a few other things that the protagonist has been dealing with as well, but it should be very brief and go on no more than a page or two longer past the showdown. Otherwise, it can spoil the ending because it goes on too long.

Important questions to answer to complete this section:

- What motivates the protagonist to step through the ring of fire? How does it become personal? Why?
- What can the protagonist learn from the history that has come before in the novel and how can he/she use that to try to gain an advantage? What new plan can the protagonist devise? What thing can they do differently?
- How does it all come to a head? Over what or when? What is the setting?
- What happens to resolve things? What is the outcome?
- Hypothetically, what is the last ending sentence?

## NUMBER SEVEN: Risk Assessment

There needs to be a risk identification stage. This is when you look over your work and think things through. For example:

- If A happens does it make sense that B would happen?
- If I introduce C at this point, won't it be too far away from when it will actually be used in chapter five (or too close)?
- Is too much going on?
- Are there too many characters?
- Do things connect logically?
- Are things left unfinished?
- Are there holes in the plot?
- Is something missing?
- Is it on track?
- Does it reach its goal of leading logically to the ending?

Things need to belong, or they will stick out like a sore thumb. They need to belong in the world and reality, they need to fit with the scene and event, and they need to fit the plot and characters.

If you don't like what you've made, take it apart and start again, keeping the parts you like. Or, throw it all out and start fresh.

If something modern is in a fantasy world, then it's not going to mesh with that universe and won't be believable. If you see a child's toy at a black tie affair, it will be extremely out of place. If a character hates guns and doesn't use them, that character should never use a gun and avoid them except to destroy them or turn them in as evidence.

Or, apply a twist. If something modern is in a fantasy world, perhaps someone from the future has arrived or another dimension has opened. Then it fits with the story. If someone kidnapped a little boy, maybe the stuffed animal is a clue that someone at the party has the child and again it fits with the story. Or, if a character says they never use guns, maybe that is a false claim to lure the protagonist into a false sense of security – and again it supports the plot, when they turn a gun on the completely unsuspecting protagonist.

It's important to remember that even the rules of writing can be played with, but they still need to work with the story. When in doubt, make sure it supports or helps the story and you should be safe.

Keep notes on things you don't use or toss them, but don't try to include everything you can think of when designing your book. Try to include things that are *most* relevant.



## NUMBER EIGHT: How To Know Which Action To Take

This can be a paralyzing fear, that as a story-teller, we make a bad call and it ruins our whole story. So first off, let me tell you, that just isn't so. You can *always* change something back, change it out, or tweak it to make it just right.

Nothing is permanent in writing until you go to press, at which point you are pretty much committed. But up until then, you can change your mind as often as you can stand (though I don't advise it unless it's necessary).

Basically, you need to consider two things when evaluating your plan. It can go in either order; there is no one way to check this. That means sometimes one type of check is the priority, and you should focus on that.

- Check for fitness. This means, you check to see if the idea will even work. It is not advisable to put "broken" ideas into your story, because they can have a chain reaction, or a cascade effect of failures related to the broken idea. We don't want that. There are a few tells: (a) it's illogical, (b) it has no beginning, middle or end, or (c) it's not linked to anything.

(a) If it's illogical, why? Is it patently broken? An example of a patently broken idea is one that is completely unsound or irrational, i.e., having cars fly in modern day Brooklyn with no effort to create the story in an alternate reality. If you are demanding your audience to suspend their sense of disbelief, you have to meet them halfway, and inform them of how this impossible thing is so. You don't necessarily have to make it really scientific, but you do have to show other things that match with the flying car reality.

(b) If it has no beginning, middle or end, this means your idea may be workable, but at present it is not viable. There needs to be a process that brings it about, the beginning – what starts it, middle – what happens between the beginning and end – and end – how it ends.

(c) Or if it's standing out like a sore thumb, you will have to ascertain whether you can bring it into line with the rest of the story. How? Give it a reason for it to be happening, and consider how and what affects it, or who, as well as what *it* affects and how.

Simply put, the way to tell if an idea is fit is to determine whether it works and how to fix it, or if you can. If you cannot, save the idea for another time. You would be surprised, but you may yet decipher a way to use it!

- To tell if an idea is appropriate to the story, you need to consider if it helps the plot, conflict development or story along, or if it arrests its progress and development. There are a few tells, (a) you cannot make it work with the story, (b) no matter how you try to squish it into to work it won't fit in with the overall story, (c) you have to spend a lot of time trying to explain to yourself how this would work, or (d) you have a "magic wand" idea.

(a) You may not be able to make it work with the story, because it is not a good match. This means it is of a different tone or tenor than the story. For instance, in *The Housewife And The Uninvited Houseguest*, you would not have Matt Damon-like action. It would simply jar, because this sample story is aimed at women who like mystery, not action.

(b) You have your heart set on something and really want it, but it just keeps causing problems. You solve one dilemma, and then another, and another. The idea is causing a cascade effect of failure, even though on the surface it should work. This happens, and is no reflection on your talent. It is a reflection of experience, and you may get better at recognizing a flawed idea sooner as time goes on. The only thing to do is eliminate that puppy.

Conversely, you could mutate the idea so that it *will* work. This will vary in each situation, but you may have to knock some parts off the original idea or add others to shoehorn it in there. Do this by figuring out what's not working or what would make it work.

(c) Or, this may be some clever invention of yours that is a little too grandiose to mesh with the story. Meaning, you have gotten too clever. I do this with every book and even short stories, so don't feel there's anything wrong with you if you have problems with this. The difference is I know I do this and try to catch it, the sooner the better, so I don't allow it to undermine the integrity of the story.

You can recognize this "plum" of an idea, because it overshadows everything else, or at least everything next to it. It is often the idea that keeps you up at night, because it doesn't quite work, and you keep trying to figure out how to make it fit.

Another "tell" is when you have to change the rest of the story to match this idea. This is a bad road to go down, because now you are literally allowing this one idea to subsume the rest of your story. Beware this insidious idea, and have no compunction deleting it as soon as you realize it's there.

(d) And this is the really sticky one. You are somehow convinced that a certain idea will save your bacon. It's the "magic wand" idea, you slip that baby in there and all your problems will be solved. Well, I'll tell you now, there is no magic idea that can do everything. You'll probably need multiple different ideas to bring the story about, and each idea you use is important to story success. Instead of looking for one magic idea, look for several good enough ideas that will serve the story and function well, dropping them in wherever they are needed.

Try to be clinical when you are reviewing your ideas, make sure they work *together*, make sure they work *on their own*, and make sure they help you tell a better story. The idea is not the thing; the weaving together of ideas into a stable and sustainable story arc is the thing.

## NUMBER NINE: Room To Grow

As you write, you will get to know the protagonist and his or her feelings, as well as their goals. The protagonist is like an alter-ego, and you should let this protagonist explore the world and their feelings while they take care of the all important plot. Maybe they get the hots for someone they meet, develop a passionate dislike for someone, or feel a great need to get involved with something, or to help someone.

Let it happen. Now, and here is the essential thing, the main plot affects the, i.e., romance. Or vice versa, the romance affects the protagonist – and through that, possibly the plot.

- How the plot can affect the romance: Mary, our poor housewife is smitten by the detective who wants to lock her up and throw away the key. If Mary proves her innocence, can she win over the detective and gain his love?
- How the romance can affect the plot: Maybe the detective doth protest too much. He too pines for Mary. And he gives her some information that is totally confidential so she can prove her innocence.

Now, here's the thing. Mary is, well, married. Her husband might have a thing or two to say about the hot Detective.

- **THIS IS A COMPLICATION OR DEVELOPMENT.** It can complicate the plot, or Mary's personal struggle to win over the detective, or both. Or it could lead to new things to explore. Maybe hubby gets rid of some evidence Mary put together to clear her name, thinking this her being in jail will give him time to reason with her about saving their marriage. Or maybe hubby breaks the detective's nose.
- **The Follow-through:** Does hubby go to jail for breaking the detective's nose? Does Mary's lawyer get him out, and they find true love, clearing the way for Mary and her detective, all things ending well?

It's easy to add in a complication or development and do something cool with it, as you can see, but what I am trying to show are two things:

- (a) the plot affects the protagonist or relates to almost everything that happens to the character and the things the character does affects or relates to the plot.
- (b) changes or developments can happen any time, so try to pick things that enhance the story or make the reading experience more pleasurable.

Also, you will need to think ahead to whether a complication or development will cause more problems than it solves. Sometimes a complication looks good on the outside, but it actually causes a detour that totally takes away from the main story. In fact, it may "eat" the main story because it begins to be what the writer focuses on. This happens to good writers all the time; they just get caught up in the excitement.

If it happens to you, you need to back away from this and get some perspective. Once you are thinking clearly, you will have to be ruthless. The main story must be put back at

the top. How will you accomplish this? Will you trim things from the development or complication? Lessen how much time you devote to it? What can you afford to keep? What has to go? And how will you keep this complication or development on track but not overshadowing the main story?

With your plan, you've cobbled together the important things with your story design and planning, and have a good starting place, but the rest will have to develop as you go. You should always be aware of the impact a choice or decision will have on the plot and conflict, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't include it, you should just be aware of it and make sure it doesn't "get too big for its britches". Remember, you're the boss!

Use the boundaries you set based on your plans as guidelines, but don't be so rigid as to ignore new possibilities. As you write, things will present themselves as viable or preferred options, and you should go for it. At least try to make them work, and if they don't, you can just snip them out of your manuscript later and try something else.

If you make changes, update your book outline or chapter outline accordingly, and write according to those updates. Also, make any necessary changes to the manuscript.

### NUMBER TEN: Double-Check

Try to get the cause and effects, timing and sequence right at this stage. Make sure the story holds water and that the main focus is on the protagonist dealing with the main conflict and related situations. At this stage, your main concern is to have things:

- Convey intention, motives, needs, reasons and concerns properly.
- In your plan, you should have visualized connections and influences of events and elements and you should have moved them around to get the proper placement or alignment. (Even if it turned out differently than you expected.)
- It's OK if this plan is sparse – you will flesh it out when you write your first draft. In fact, you can save a copy of this plan and call it “First Draft – Working Title, i.e., The Housewife And The Uninvited House Guest”, and write directly on your plan!

## THAT'S IT

You may adapt this method, taking notes on what changes you make to suit your own style and needs, for use in future projects. If it doesn't work, you always have this method to go back to.

It's important for you to understand that this is a system I came up with over fifteen years of story-telling, and a lifetime of writing, having written several novels and finding out what works in general. But I still can't customize this *just for you*, only you can do that.

Don't be afraid to "go off the ranch" and try different things. They will have various degrees of success possibly, failing or succeeding by turns. And what works for you may not work for someone else, and vice versa.

Don't be worried about it, it's a process. And processes are often altered, updated or changed to make them work better for the individual involved. I assure you, I am just happy if I inspired you to go for it!

## QUICK AND DIRTY RULES OF WRITING

1) You might have to write something to see what is really there – or not – and bring it out properly, while deleting some of it. That’s right, even with all the planning and preparation, something might still need to be tweaked to get it to work. As they say, no plan survives contact with the enemy. In this case, the “enemy” is the actual work. Until it really *actually* works, you still need to test the theory that it will, and fix it if it doesn’t.

2) Make the characters “dance” to the tune of the plan, or nothing is happening for a purpose. Incidentals not related to the plot should get less “air time”, meaning they should be shown and dealt with less.

3) Transitions should fade through to the next scene *or* cut away. A transition is a gentle closure to a scene, and gentle opening to the next scene, i.e., “He fell asleep to the sound of bird chatter. When he awoke, it was past noon and his wounds were paining him fiercely...” If it cuts away, it is an abrupt transition, i.e., “He went out into the day and dropped the note next to the beggar. The beggar looked at it and nodded. At the subway station, a dirty child was promising a shoeshine, while her cave-pale mother looked on indifferently...”

4) Tweak the design of the work so it’s very strong. Add some memorable detail. Play up the important points. Make emotional scenes more poignant and action scenes more vivid.

5) Bring it all together. Make sure events match with cause and effect. Make sure it’s in order. Make sure it makes sense.

6) Ask: Is it done yet? What’s missing? What is unnecessary? What needs to be played up or played down?

7) Edit, fix, and tweak some more. Then give it a proper title and let it rest for two weeks, then review and tweak again.

8) When to quit: this is the art of knowing when enough is enough. When you can improve no more, you’re done. Doing any more will take the life out of your work by refining the fire right out of it.

## A FEW LAST THOUGHTS ON THE PLANNING AND WRITING PROCESSES

### Have Only What You Need

1) Highlight the important things and downplay or brush-off the unimportant things. Try to make sure to give the most attention to the most important things, so the reader doesn't get confused about what's a priority.

2) Reduce characters down to the essentials that are needed to make your story happen, and it will be less to manage and easier to remember and maintain. When in doubt, try to reuse a character from before, or use a character with no name, so the reader doesn't feel obligated to keep track of unimportant characters.

You will need to do these things throughout the planning and writing of the book, and if it gets confusing or you lose track of what's going on, ask, is there too much happening and what's really important? Or ask are there too many people and who can I get rid of? Works like a charm!

### Don't Beat Around The Bush

Being too indirect makes the writer seem uncertain, uncommitted and unready. If you are direct on the other hand, if you do not beat around the bush, or if you keep things moving towards the conclusion, the reader will think you are very sure of yourself, deeply committed, and prepared for anything that might arise.

This gives *you* confidence and the reader confidence, because they feel they can trust you and you can feel you can trust you because you know the story. This means you know that things lead to results that direct the protagonist to the next part of their journey, and that things make sense overall.

This is why a good plan is optimal: it helps you to ascertain where things are going and why and gives you the edge in telling a strong and consistent story. And it helps you start strongly in this manner on the first page!

It also means that when you're writing, you need to just spit it out. Readers have to do more now than ever these days, and just do not have the attention span, time or energy to muddle through thick writing. Try to keep it on track and relevant, so people can follow along without too much effort.



## FAILURE IS NOT UNCOMMON

Also not having things live up to our expectations is common, but you can often fix it and build on that. And you can often do this with failures, as well, but not always. Lots of books fail. But you truly can make lemonade from lemons.

- Reuse ideas in future books, when they've "seasoned"
- Track down the problem, fix what's wrong and proceed.

And know you'll be a better writer after the failure than you were before. Failure is a rite of passage and a badge of honor. It indicates you are humble enough to recognize you screwed up and dedicated enough to fix it or put it aside until a better time. In other words, that you're big enough to take it on the chin and still go out and try again.

What's more, failure is guaranteed at some point, now or later, off and on throughout your career! No writer doesn't have failures; they just stop worrying about it. It's kind of like having a lot of cookbooks, and trying a new recipe. Well, a savvy writer knows that if the recipe succeeds, that's great, but they know they will try other recipes in the future so it's not that big a deal. Or, if it fails, they may be out some time and ingredients, but they know there are other recipes to try in the future, so it's not that big a deal.

What's that mean? It means as a beginner or even an intermediate writer, you may attach a lot of importance to success and failure. But as an old timer, you keep it in perspective because ideas are a dime a dozen and the only ones that matter are the ones that help you write your novel successfully. You know that there are a lot of stories in you just waiting to get out of your imagination and onto the paper, so there is always a new opportunity on the horizon, and you can chalk it up to a learning experience.

- 1) What's important is trying – and persevering – through as many attempts to get the right idea and plan as possible.
- 2) Realize there are risks involved, the risk of being wrong, making the wrong call, or the wrong choice, and that the more inexperienced you are, the more times you will fail. The more experienced you are, the less times you fail (but you will still fail sometimes).
- 3) Don't allow yourself self-pity, self-doubts or remorse. Be brave and keep fighting for what you want and what you believe in. No risks, no rewards.
- 4) Don't judge yourself too harshly. This only makes you feel stressed, afraid and incompetent. In actuality, many writers have probably made the exact same mistakes (and some still do, myself included – just hopefully less often!). What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.
- 5) Treasure your hard won experience, but don't get complacent. Keep working to improve and get better.

6) Continue to build new plans and dreams and continue to participate in making your writing career a success. The community needs good writers, and society is bettered when ideas and stories are shared, so think of the benefit you can give the world if you keep at it.

7) Once you find the reason you failed, you will be able to avoid doing the same mistake again.

8) Accept that it's challenging and you won't always get it right. But if you keep trying, you will get it.

9) Above all, have the courage to pursue your convictions and go for your dreams.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Writing is actually pretty easy; you have woven a fine tale with your plan, now you just need to flesh it out. Go straight through your outline from start to finish and fill in the gaps.

It takes hard work and time. Less than you expect once you get going, but more than you might want. Be prepared to commit for the long-haul and plan a schedule accordingly. Project management helps you make progress so you can see that your efforts are paying off, i.e., set a goal to finish a chapter a week, or every two weeks.

You will have to push yourself to finish, to work when the time comes, and to do better than you think you can. It is easy to make excuses, to put off completing your project and it's easy to slack off or allow your work to suffer. However, the more you get right on the first go around, the less you have to fix later, so it's worth doing and it's worth doing well.

For this reason, I advise you set deadlines and use them to keep and stay on track. This helps you be accountable for how you spend your time. You can make a project deadline, i.e., you want to have the book finished in 3 months, as well as a daily or weekly deadline.

You will have to try different things to see what types of deadlines serve you best, but I find the simpler the better. It's best for me if I saw I'll have the outline done today, or 20,000 words this week. Then I can see very clearly if I made my goal or not.

The more you get done before your deadline the less stress you have when it comes due. And the more often you write, the more enjoyable it is because it becomes a habit, and not such a struggle.

Not to mention the sheer pleasure of accomplishing your goals and seeing how things develop and work out.

Be patient. It's like chiseling something out of stone, especially the idea parts, but when it happens, it's magical.

### Daily Advice

- Build up momentum and get into the flow. You may not start at your top speed, but you can build up to it. And if you're really flagging, work on something non-critical until you wake up or get inspired; this way you still benefit and get things done, but you don't risk anything critical or put undue stress on yourself.
- Pick an area of main focus and let things orient around that. If you have several difficult things you need to initiate, pick one to start with, not both. (Just maintain in the other areas.) When you get one area running, concentrate on another area.
- Enjoy yourself, both the thrill of the challenge and the eventual accomplishment.

## PUBLICATION

You only get better if you lay it on the line and somehow get published.

However, publishers are leery of taking on unpublished authors, and there is a huge pool of people who are willing to do just about anything to get published.

But now there is another way. It's called Lulu.com. That's just one self-publishing place where you can put your work out there for the world to see, and there are many others. If you can't get published the "old-fashioned way", you can the "new" way for free or a hundred bucks depending on what options you choose (or more – prices vary per publisher).

Why would you self-publish? Well, to make it real, for one. For two, if you just have a manuscript in a drawer somewhere, it doesn't make you accountable to the public, and as a writer, you *must* be to get better. Otherwise it's too easy to settle for "good enough". And three, to surmount your fear of public scrutiny and prove you believe in yourself.

If you cannot or will not do what it takes to get published by the big publishing houses or to self-publish, what is holding you back? Please address that at the soonest opportunity, as overcoming this and dealing with it will make a huge difference in your life.

Don't be shy. Put it out there.

## TAKING NEGATIVE COMMENTS PERSONALLY

You can make yourself sick worrying about what people will say about your work, and I lost many a sleepless night fretting over this.

If you target to the right audience, it makes a huge difference in how you feel. That means your work is written for the people you are trying to attract to it.

But the inevitable will happen. Someone will say something you don't like. There are two kinds of comments (a) feedback and (b) obnoxious.

Feedback may sting, but it could be valuable. Is there any truth to it? Might following the advice given improve your writing? Might you be able to use some of it? Then keep that, and throw away the rest.

Sadly there are obnoxious people out there and some of them find baiting and trying to humiliate writers quite entertaining. This is the category where what is said may be helpful but usually isn't and may be better off ignored. The worst thing you can do is react angrily or sadly, because it will make you look unprofessional to the rest of your readers, and it will just show the meanie they scored a direct hit.

You will need to learn to discern between constructive criticism and harassment. In either case, you must be like an ice man or ice woman: you absorb only what you need to, you don't take it personally, and you congratulate yourself that someone at least noticed you and your book!

## FINAL WORDS

Don't overwork it and don't allow things to become muddled. Study the nuances and use them to create meaning and relationships. Your plan may be functional and boring, but it will support those little things that come in the writing process, the unregulated emotion, the *burn*, that will sell it. Without a good plan, you would have all flash and no substance.

Needs and wants develop and change. Don't be afraid to gut something to make it better, and don't be afraid to add or change something if it will make it better. As you're working, consider overall design. You should try to project what will happen as a result of a decision you make. If it isn't working, look at what is needed and try to forecast how such a change will affect other things.

Don't worry too much about word count, worry about quality. Word count is important, but if you want the audience to keep buying your books, then you have to give them a reason to, and word count is not the reason why they will. If it makes you feel any better, five 20,000 word stories make a 100,000 word book! You can do that!

Pretend it's impossible to fail. And it really is impossible to fail: you can always correct any problems you encounter. Or if it really sucks, you can delete it and pretend it never happened. It will be between you and the ether, and no one else has to know.

Work every day you can, work with passion, work with humility and a sense of humor, and you will succeed.