

Resources That Will Help Your Writing Career And Craft

Here are a series of articles, video links, book recommendations, and resources that I am asking you to take the time to absorb.

While many of these lessons you may already know, it never hurts to get a fresh perspective on a difficult topic.

It would be a wonderful investment in your career and craft to take the time to read and watch all of these.

STORY

The events that happen in the novel (the external plot), often seem like: *and then this happened, and this happened, and this happened*. It's helpful to watch [this two-minute clip of the creators of SouthPark discussing](#) the chain of causality (or cause and effect trajectory) and what drives a narrative forward.

Jada Johnson talks about the BOTs (because of this). Instead of: this happens, *and then* this other thing happens; **it's: this happens and because of this/that, this other thing happens**. The BOTs (you could [use 'but' and 'therefore'](#), if you prefer) help link events in a logical, consistent manner, providing a cohesive narrative where each scene is the result of the scene that came before it. This keeps the plot from being a series of random events or coincidences and ensures an agentic protagonist who is making choices and decisions that change the narrative.

Getting control of the story will result in a more cohesive and dynamic narrative for readers. And within that? Ensure that each character has a Goal, Motivation, and Conflict for every scene.

<https://storyfirstmedia.com/storytelling-tip-the-principle-of-buts-and-therefores/>

[7 Essential Questions to Help You Design a Better Arc of Change for Your Protagonist](#)

[How to Write a Scene by Janice Hardy](#)

[How to Write a Perfect Scene](#) by Randy Ingermason

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/nanowrimo-guide-outlining-find-heart-of-your-story/>

Spend some time working out and strengthening motivation for each character. Without strong, believable motivations, characters will seem flat and underdeveloped.

<https://thenovelsmithy.com/motivate-your-protagonist/>

<https://www.well-storied.com/blog/how-to-craft-powerful-character-motivations>

<https://careerauthors.com/how-to-introduce-your-character/>

PLAN AND PLOT

Make a beat sheet outlining the plot and another outlining the plot behind the plot. Ensure that everything that happens is linked to what came before — the cause-and-effect trajectory. All subplots need to be connected to the main story. Plot holes and inconsistency decrease readers' immersion in the story. Readers lose trust in the author and in the story itself with each plot hole that is uncovered.

- Save the Cat: Novel
- *How to Write a Damn Good Thriller* by James N. Frey,
- Plot Perfect by Paula Munier,
- *Writing a Killer Thriller* by [Jodie Renner](#) for ways to plot a thriller.

OVERALL STRUCTURE

Typically these kinds of stories are structured like this:

ACT ONE/Beginning: The characters early stories are laid out. Their general characteristics are set.

ACT TWO/Middle: The main characters plan out and fulfill their early missions.

ACT THREE/End: The main characters overcome some deep issue and emerge victorious.

Try to think of your story in these terms so that the structure sustains the narrative thrust. Right now it's a little all over the place. I don't get a sense here of what the main action is, that is, the main conflict that drives the story. Part of the reason that the plot does not seem tightly woven together is because you have not built it around a main action. Or at least if you have, it's not obvious here.

TIMELINE

All good stories have a fixed and finite timeline that drives the story. The story and reader are both rewarded by the author setting the time in as small a timeline as possible. Because this is several life stories, you will have a harder time keeping the tension and pacing up.

Conflict

<https://jamigold.com/2017/08/conflict-why-it-isnt-just-about-fighting/>

<http://blog.janicehardy.com/2016/12/the-easiest-way-to-create-conflict.html>

Stakes

<https://www.janefriedman.com/5-ways-story-stakes-keep-readers-glued/>

<http://blog.janicehardy.com/2019/01/three-mistakes-to-avoid-when-creating.html>

<https://jamigold.com/2014/05/ask-jami-how-to-raise-the-stakes-in-our-story/>

Story Structure

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/secrets-story-structure-complete-series/>

Core Conflict

<http://blog.janicehardy.com/2010/11/find-your-plot-fridays-building-your.html>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-create-central-conflict#how-to-create-a-central-conflict-for-your-story>

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/nanowrimo-guide-outlining-find-heart-of-your-story/>

Sensitivity Issues

<https://bookriot.com/ableist-tropes-in-fiction/>

POV

As for Point of View, the most pervasive issue many novels is the inconsistent and shifting point of view. Inconsistent POV shifts are known as “head hopping.” When this happens, readers are disoriented and kicked out of the story as they try to figure out whose head they are in. It creates a whiplash effect of being flung from head-to-head and leaves readers confused and unsure of what is going on or who is telling the story. You can use varying POVs within a story, but it’s best not to shift them within a scene. Head hopping jars readers out of the story and keeps us from connecting with the main characters.

Point of view issues are often what keeps otherwise sellable authors from selling. With so many characters, I worry that you are using too many points of view – or omniscient POV. Here are some general POV rules that you ignore at your peril:

- 1) No omniscient POV. (It's considered old-fashioned these days, at least in the U.S.)
- 2) When writing first-person POV, stick to one POV per book.
- 3) When writing third-person POV:
 - a) Stick to third-person limited POV;
 - b) Only one POV per scene;
 - c) Only five POVs per book; and
 - d) the protagonist's POV should predominate.

WHOSE STORY IS IT

Determine whose POV each scene should be in and ensure that only the thoughts and feelings of that POV character are shown to the reader. You may find a review of POVs useful prior to beginning your edits.

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/third-person-pov/>

If we can't stay in the protagonists' heads long enough to understand who they are, we won't be affected by what happens to them. A review of how to spot and fix this in your writing might be helpful before beginning edits:

<https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/common-writing-mistakes-goody-goody-characters-2/>

Other POV Lessons

<https://careerauthors.com/third-person-close-pov/>

<https://careerauthors.com/omniscient-pov/>

<https://www.janefriedman.com/point-of-view/>

<https://mythcreants.com/blog/respectfully-depicting-a-character-adapting-to-a-disability/>

<https://writingalchemy.net/2017/08/14/trope-of-the-week-9-metaphorical-disability/>

DRAMATIZE RATHER THAN SUMMARIZE

At the scene-level, the narrative is mostly summarized rather than dramatized (told rather than shown). This keeps readers on the surface and not immersed in a character's head and not immersed in the story and grows monotonous over the course of the novel.

Immersion into a character's perspective and senses is what keeps readers "locked in the story world and dreaming the fictive dream". To create a page-turning novel, an author must prevent pulling readers out of the fictive dream.

It's about bringing the scene alive and putting the reader right there, inside your character, experiencing her fear along with her, feeling the sweat on his brow and his adrenaline racing, our pulse quickening right along with theirs, muscles tensed, ready to leap into action. A common mistake among aspiring fiction writers is to describe or narrate (tell) events as if they took place at some point in the past, instead of putting the reader right in the middle of the action and showing the events as they occur, in real time, along with the characters' reactions, feelings, and actual words (direct dialogue). (Renner, 73)

Rendering scenes in a more life-like fashion that engages reader's emotions and senses provides for a dynamic reader experience and prevents the monotony and boredom of telling scenes.

"Showing means presenting the story to the reader using sensory information. The reader wants to see the story, hear it, smell it, feel it, and taste it, all the while experiencing the thoughts and feelings of a living, breathing character. Telling means summarizing the story for the reader in a way that skips past the sensory information and goes straight to the facts." (Renner 73-74)

A great article about this: <https://www.janefriedman.com/backstory-and-exposition-4-key-tactics/>

Show us what happens, don't tell us! I cannot recommend Janice [Hardy's Understanding Show, Don't Tell \(and really getting it\) enough](#)

A practical method for showing: [Motivation Reaction Units](#)

STYLE

These points address your author voice, writing style, and other broader story notes. Though you'll likely make extensive edits at the structural level, I wanted to highlight some issues that distracted me from the narrative and winnowed the tension as I was reading. The examples given are not an exhaustive listing of every instance, but instead a sampling to show how the problem manifests throughout the manuscript.

Passive sentences - Passive voice can lead to clunky, awkward sentences and can sound dull and uninteresting. Active voice makes sentences more dynamic and provides a more active and engaging immersion for readers.

Inconsistent Tense: When a book is written in the past tense but often defaults to present tense and in some cases uses future tense. Tense inconsistency pulls readers out of the story.

Dialogue Tags and Action Beats and punctuation issues. A review of punctuation for dialogue tags and action beats and how to differentiate between the two might be helpful before you begin your edits. <https://thewritelife.com/dialogue-tags/> / You cannot “snort, sneer, breathe, hum, chuckle, sniff, growl, purr or chortle dialogue. These are physiological actions humans can perform, but not simultaneously with speaking. If your characters perform these actions, just make sure it's a separate clause or sentence rather than using it as a tag.” (Martin, 220)

- <https://www.rabbitwitharedpen.com/blog/writing-dialogue-tags-action-beats-punctuation>
- <https://allwritealright.com/action-beats-what-they-are-and-how-to-use-them/>
- <https://thewritelife.com/dialogue-tags/>

Overusing Character Names There is a tendency to repeatedly address characters by their names. This puts some distance between the reader and the narrative as we're taken out of the story each time the author tries to re-establish character identities. Unless you're trying to get their attention, how often do you use someone else's first name in a given conversation? Rarely. When this is done in fiction, it becomes repetitive and gives a stilted feeling to the writing and tends to take the reader out of the character's head.

- <https://theeditorsblog.net/2015/03/07/using-names-in-fiction-4-tips/> (#4 deals with the issue of using character's names repeatedly.)
- <https://www.lisapoisso.com/2018/09/18/overusing-character-names/>
- <https://www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com/blog/addressing-others-in-dialogue-using-vocatives>

Ways to Render Thoughts

- <https://www.louiseharnbyproofreader.com/blog/3-reasons-to-use-free-indirect-speech-in-your-crime-fiction>

Normative Whiteness

While a full sensitivity read is outside the scope of this manuscript assessment, it's worth mentioning the ways white normativity shows up in the text and how it conforms to SFF's "conventions of whiteness" and contributes to the anachronistic feel of the text. White normativity assumes white people as the "norm" or the standard by which all others are measured. This makes people of color (POC) "abnormal" or "nonstandard" and readers (like authors) default to whiteness unless told otherwise. One of the ways this often appears in novels is through physical description. Whiteness goes unremarked and unmentioned and remains invisible as an organizing principle in the both the story world and our world.

However, white people's conscious racialization of others does not necessarily lead to a conscious racialization of the white self. Indeed, here we return to the proposition with which we began: that whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends.¹

None of the white characters were identified as such in the novel though hair and eye color were used as a marker of whiteness. For instance, in the very first scene readers meet the high marshals and a grand marshal, "whose ebony skin" (pg 2) is described while the skin of her companions and the queen is never mentioned. Colonel Boleslaw and Princess Marie-Christina of Stelsylvania are similarly raced when readers first meet them: the colonel's ivory-white teeth flashed in his dark face (pg 20) and "I saw her bronzed skin, brown-black hair, warm brown eyes, and demure smile" (pg 35). Other members of the Commonwealth's diplomatic team and allies' skin color are never mentioned and therefore presumed to be white since "whiteness a default setting is a much a feature of the Fantasy genre as it is of western culture and society" (Young, 15)

Highlighting the skin tone of POC characters while never mentioning the skin tones of the white characters upholds the normativity of whiteness and "others" characters of color.

Identifying whiteness disrupts the status quo of whiteness as the norm and makes visible that which often goes unremarked.

¹ Frankenberg, Ruth. *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1999, pp. 6–6.

As [Renee Harleston puts it](#):

When authors avoid physically describing a character's whiteness but put effort into to pointing out non-whiteness what you're doing is increasing the invisibility of whiteness, standardizing it, making white the norm and making everyone else the "other." **When you do this you are helping to increase the privilege of being the standard that everyone else is compared to and judged by. (emphasis in original)**²

Emotion on Top of the Story

This is an ambitious story and there are big emotions that come with it. Significant moments in the story sometimes lend themselves to melodrama. There's a tendency in writing with excessive emotion that can come off as overwrought or hyperbolic with the emotions on top of the story vice interwoven into the story.

One way to spot this tendency of over-emoting is in the overabundance of exclamation marks. Exclamation marks are infrequently used forms of punctuation in fiction which means, when you use them, the reader notices and they become conspicuous and pull readers out of the narrative. The overuse of exclamation marks kept me from experiencing the story.

Generally, exclamation points were used to show that characters were upset or having strong emotions. The exclamation marks make the scene tend towards melodrama instead of highlighting the depth of the emotion the characters are feeling.

One way to approach strong emotion is by showing readers body language, thoughts, visceral responses, and internal monologue. Let readers understand the character's emotions by their reactions. Exclamation marks are like using a hammer to get your point across when a scalpel would do. It might be helpful to review the myriad ways of expressing emotions:

<https://writershelpingwriters.net/2017/06/keep-it-fresh-10-ways-to-show-your-characters-emotion/>

I also recommend the [Emotion Thesaurus](#) to aid in conveying emotion to readers in different ways.

² Harleston, R. (2021, December 15). *Dismantling the white default*. Writing Diversely. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from <https://www.writingdiversely.com/post/dismantling-the-white-default>

GENERAL

I just loved this - Brandon Sanderson's video class on commercial writing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cf-qdZ7GbA&list=PLSH_xM-KC3Zv-79sVZTTj-YA6IAqh8qeQ

Chuck Wendig has a great overview on World Building

<http://terribleminds.com/ramble/2013/09/17/25-things-you-should-know-about-worldbuilding/>

My newest FAVORITE book for writers. 7 DRAFTS if a MUST READ

<https://www.amazon.com/Seven-Drafts-Self-Edit-Like-Blank-ebook/dp/B09V9GD8NM/>

Every book tells a story. Pixar has [22 rules for storytelling](#)

POV

<https://careerauthors.com/choosing-point-of-view/>

YOUR NONFICTION IS SHOWING

<https://careerauthors.com/your-nonfiction-is-showing-what-nonfiction-writers-should-learn-or-unlearn-to-write-good-fiction/>

HOW TO CUT YOUR NOVEL DOWN TO SIZE

<https://careerauthors.com/how-many-words-in-a-novel/>

BOOK PROPOSAL

<https://careerauthors.com/how-to-write-a-book-proposal/>

PAULA'S TAPESTRY EXERCISE

<https://careerauthors.com/polish-your-prose-write-a-tapestry/>

AM I READY FOR AN AGENT QUIZ

[The "Am I Ready for an Agent" Quiz • Career Authors](#)

PAULA'S WRITING BOOKS

<https://paulamunier.com/bookstag/skillful/>