

*“To name oneself is the first act
of both the poet and the
revolutionary.”*
Erica Jong

YOUR NAME:

WRITE NOW!

*The novelist begins by saying:
“This world I give you is real.”
... then must proceed to prove it.*

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Beginning Enthusiast

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INTRODUCTION

You know in your heart you have a book in you. All that is stopping you writing your opus is that you might not have the craft at your fingertips for writing fiction. That's where I think the notes that I've compiled will assist you to kick-start your life as a writer of commercial fiction. If you have a **BIG IDEA** and follow the essential elements of creative writing, you're on your way. All that's left is for you to find the time and the determination. And to call yourself a writer.

A zillion years ago I majored in English Literature at Macquarie University and since then I've also graduated from umpteen creative writing seminars, devoured a gazillion books and blogs on the art and craft of writing, and along the way a couple of my books were traditionally published (HarperCollins) and sold well. These were my memoir, "*Sheer Madness; sex, lies and politics*" and the novel *Goodbye Lullaby*. I have since completed the first in my children's Glencairn Island mystery series, "*No Bridge, No Way!*". All three books are available on Amazon, Booktopia, etc. I have a new novel, "*Bright Echoes*", plus a screenplay of the children's novel in the works to keep me busy.

And, believe me, I wouldn't have done any of the above had it not been fun.

That's my message here; let your writing be a joy. By all means push through the inevitable writer's blocks with shoulder to the grindstone and strong coffee by your side but then bliss to the thrill once the dam bursts and the ideas—and the words to express them—start gushing like a burst main from your cranium and you know you've found heaven in a sentence, a paragraph, or a chapter.

You are on your way to becoming an author. Congratulations!

So, all I've done in presenting this booklet, **WRITE NOW!** is pull together the random jottings I've taken down during my reading and attendance at various seminars and writers' workshops. And to that point I would like to give a shout-out to the NSW Writers Centre; to Robert McKee's New York seminars; and to The Faber Writing Academy in Crows Nest. And let me plug E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*; Steven King's *On Writing*; and Robert McKee (yes, him, again!) *Story*; as well as writermag.com; writing.com; bbc.com/writersroom; writersdigest.com; jerichowriters.com; helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com; <https://www.thecreativepenn.com/> <https://tablo.io/write>

Feel free to pick and choose what I offer in the following pages or swallow whole.

Let the fun begin! *Pour wine for me men, we ride at dawn!*

~~WHAT IS A NOVEL?~~

"... new and not resembling something formerly known or used; original or striking especially in conception or style." Webster's Dictionary

"The author must see that the reader is cut off from his real horizon and imprisoned in a small hermetically sealed universe – the inner realm of the novel. He must make a "villager" of him, and interest him in the inhabitants of this realm. To turn the reader into this "villager" is the great secret of the novelist." Henry James

The first English novel:

The English novel began with John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), then *Moll Flanders* (1722) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1791)

What makes a novel:

- "*The transformation of the actual into an imagined reality.*" Katherine Lever in *The Novel and the Reader*
- "*The novel tells a story. That is the fundamental aspect without which it could not exist.*" E.M. Foster in *Aspects of the Novel*
- "[It is about] ... *catching the strange irregular rhythm of life.*" Henry James in *Notes on the Novel*
- "*A novel is not a picture of the author's life, it is a picture of his vision of life, his interpretation of experience.*" Lord David Cecil

"How to" tips from the experts:

- "*The artist, like the god of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his/her handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, pairing his/her nails.*" James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* advising authors to let their characters tell the story.
- "*With me, a story usually begins with a single idea or memory or mental picture. The writing of the story is simply a matter of working into that moment, to explain how it happened or what it caused to follow.*" William Faulkner, *Writers at Work*
- "*Things take place instantly but there's a long process to go through first.*" Henry Miller

~~CREATING THE GOOD STORY~~

"Imagination is more important than knowledge." Albert Einstein

"With knowledge comes doubt." Goethe

If the sages tell us that imagination is everything then why worry you with information about craft? Because creative writing is a right-brain/left-brain occupation. It's a matter of letting your right-brain (creative side) run riot across the page then when you've exhausted it, bring in your left-brain (logical side) to edit and structure your manuscript according to established literary principles.

Creative writing is about CONTENT and FORM, or as I prefer to tag it CREATIVITY and CRAFT. It's about the intertwining of the two to create the whole.

Intuition + Skill = The Novel

Scribble in the midnight hour – Edit in office hours. Put more dramatically; one great author advised that we should write in mania, and edit in depression, another, that best to write drunk, edit sober ... which could be going a little too far—but you get the idea. For me, for the first draft, I like to write like I'm on a fast-flowing river and know there are rapids up ahead. Pile on the complications. Dare to ask a few crazy "what if's?" Make the character's mission almost impossible. Make the contest fierce. Make the stakes high. And most importantly, make your characters feel REAL.

You must believe that nothing is too crazy, too dark, too sentimental, too comical, too surreal, too revealing, or just too ridiculous to commit to the page. So long as nothing goes out until you've knocked it in to writerly, readerly shape.

To sum up; I believe that no number of tutorials, writers festivals, workshops, books or blogs can give you anything other than a knowledge of the CRAFT, important of course, but craft is not the magic ingredient that will make your story take wings.

For that you will require a rampant, out-of-control life of the mind.
Otherwise known as a fertile imagination,
that which fuels your CREATIVITY

EXERCISE: Begin reading fiction with the eye of an author

~~ LOADING YOUR TOOLBOX~~

Essential Elements of the Novel:

These elements I've listed below are your most important writer's tools.

- **VOICE** (Author's attitude/Tone)
- **POV** (1st, 2nd, 3rd Person)
- **CONTROLLING IDEA** (Central organizing principle)
- **THEME** (The novel's question)
- **CHARACTERS** (Develop, Move, Reveal/Arc)
- **GOAL** (Motivation, Desire ... What the character WANTS!)
- **SETTING** (Place of major action, Implications for the story)
- **PLOT** (Goal, Conflict, Resolution – intention, complication, resolution)
- **INCITING INCIDENT**(The kick-off, Call to action moment, Game on!)
- **CRISIS** (Black moment ... as bad as it gets for protagonist)
- **“SHOW” DON’T “TELL”** (Devil is in the details)
- **DIALOGUE** (Moves plot/Defines characters)
- **EMOTION** (Atmosphere/Consistency)
- **LANGUAGE** (Metaphor, Simile/Grammar)
- **FINAL DRAFT** (Editing, Query letter)

Keeping a writer's journal:

I like to open a NOTES journal for each project. Your JOURNAL can be kept as a Word file of course but for me nothing beats pen and paper when it comes to jottings. In fact, starting up in a new note book is one of my secret pleasures...my writing starts out neat in the new Croxley binder book and finishes as so much scribble across the page. Lots of arrows and cross-outs and writing down the margin. But somewhere in the thick of the mess I manage to find writing prompts, important memories recalled, character names, dates, historical information, useful blogs, problems needing to be addressed, sometimes even solutions.

If you are keeping your notes in a Word file, then log on each day. If you're writing old-fashioned in a journal, then open at a new clean page. Add the date and time. Mention where you are and the weather. Then write about your state of mind, i.e., how you are feeling about the project. Talk about how it's going ... problems, ideas, daily stuff.

- Use your journal to record interesting dialogue you heard on the bus
- Jot down (before it evaporates) the great idea you had for a scene, etc.
- Record your dreams
- Write yourself a memo to read So-and-So's latest novel
- Record meaningful quotes that take your fancy
- Play with strange word combinations
- Figure out your time lines, birth dates, college attendance of your characters, etc.
- Record interviews and research material
- Paste cut-out pictures from magazines of people and places for prompts
- Stick in old photographs from family albums as memory jolts

An example from my journal:

10/6/16 ... at my desk upstairs ... a cold, wet day

Just sitting down here to try my hand at this weird stuff Sue Grafton is talking about. A lot of it sounds like Californian psychobabble but if it helps me to write my way out of the hole I'm in, who cares? In the novel, what worries me is how... I could let X ... but that might ... and what if ...

I was sitting in an outdoor cafe at Balmoral Beach one day, years ago, when I saw a middle-aged woman take a seat and proceed to drag out a commercial spray bottle and thoroughly clean her plastic table! I couldn't wait to write the idiosyncrasy up in my journal. I haven't used it yet, but you can bet I will. It's going to be a foible for a character. A small act, but it said so much to trigger my imagination about her backstory.

Putting it down rapidly:

Put your "material of the night" (the crazy midnight hour unedited commit-to-the-page intuitive stuff) down rapidly into your journal. Only you are going to see it so don't hold back, don't self-edit whatever you do. This material of the night (Shadows and right brain) is the raw material. From it, you might mine something valuable to get you over a dull stretch, land on a name for your protagonist, or resolve a plot point.

- Treat yourself in these pages to a game of "What if...?" or "Suppose ...?"
- Your journal is a playground for the mind, a haven of free-range ideas.
- Ignore Mr. Left-Brain.
- Dare to be stupid!

Interrogate your story:

I strongly advise that you address the questions below after you make notes in your journal. Refer to the answers from time to time. Only by interrogating your story can you clarify it. (Although, it is a fact that your story, in the process of writing it, will be fluid and some aspects of your plot – and the weight you give to the various characters – will change along the way. This is the joy of fiction writing).

- What VOICE should I use; 1st, 2nd or 3rd Person?
- What will be my novel's CONTROLLING IDEA?
- What's to be my protagonist's GOAL (i.e. MOTIVATION)?
- Where's the CONFLICT (i.e. OBSTACLES, COMPLICATIONS in her path)?
- What are the STAKES (What does my character have to risk / stand to lose)?
- How will I create SUSPENSE?
- Where did I place the INCITING INCIDENT?
- Is there a SECRET (BIG, SMALL, HINTED AT)?
- Is there a TICKING CLOCK (i.e a race against time)?
- Where's the TWIST (ACTION/REACTION)?
- What personal experiences (MEMORIES) can I use?
- Where can I START my story (PROLOGUE, JUMP IN, BACK STORY, DESCRIPTION)?
- How do I END my story (OUTCOME, NEAT TIE-OFF, IRONIC ENDING)?

EXERCISE: Write for three minutes about any subject without editing yourself

~~ CREATIVITY + CRAFT = "VOICE"~~

"Voice" is perhaps the most challenging concept to understand. I break it down into Creativity and Craft

1.) CREATIVITY – The writer's inimitable style used to tell her story

This is the unique way in which you express yourself. It's the natural tone of your writing, the way the words fall from your pen onto the page (pompous, flippant, sarcastic, melancholic, humorous, jarring, smooth, etc.). It's the attitude you take to your story. And the more unique and effective your "voice", the more enthusiastically an agent or publisher will rush you. It's what they're all looking for...that "new voice" in literature. Sign her up!

Dig Elmore Leonard and Jane Austen for extremes in "attitude/style". Neither could possibly have written in the other writer's "Voice".

2.) CRAFT – Point of View (POV)

This is a logical decision as to whether you will tell your story in 1st Person, 2nd Person, or 3rd Person.

You decide on this straight up and you would do well to stick to it throughout the telling. The professionals are an exception and it's useful to study their dexterity with a combination of 1st, 2nd, 3rd Person story-telling.

1.) THE CREATIVITY ELEMENT ... ATTITUDE/TONE (right-brain)

The Attitude/Style/Tone you employ in your writing

This is the intuitive aspect of creative writing. It's your way with words, your unique story-telling style. It's right-brain business. It's the tone of voice that comes naturally to you as a result of the way you view the material in your novel. And it's my personal belief that no one can teach you this aspect of "Voice". It's in your DNA. It's the way you automatically relate to the world. And letting it flow out of you, unedited, is the best way to discover it. Try reading your work (and that of the great authors) out loud, it helps you get it.

- Hemingway was a tough, egotistical, macho guy. Read him. There's not a moment of reflection, but lots of short tough and very muscular sentences. No sentimentality there, not while ever there's a bull fight to watch, a marlin to catch, or a woman to bed
- James Ellroy's mother was an L.A. prostitute viciously murdered when he was young. Read *Black Dahlia*, *L.A. Confidential* and *American Tabloid*
- Do yourself a favour and check Elmore Leonard's "voice" in *Get Shorty*.
- Barbara Cartland, bless her pink feather boa, views the world through rosy glasses
- If like Babs, you're a hopeless romantic, you'd be hard-put to write in a callous "voice"
- Are you a skeptic, with an acid tongue? Writing in an ironic tone will come naturally to you
- You love a good joke. You don't take life too seriously. How could you possibly tell your story in an earnest, solemn tone?
- You feel superior to the hoi polloi. Hard to be humble. Your sense of superiority will shine through
- You've been a dull little goody-two-shoes all your life. No way will you take risks in your writing style
- You're a show-off, a master of the universe. Your tone will be confident

In saying I believe the style/attitude/tone aspects of "Voice" is about your innate creativity and can't be taught, that's not to say you won't benefit from extensive reading and studying the text of great authors. You will, for sure. And something of their style is bound to rub off on you. But do not be a copy-cat. Don't be imitative. The "you" behind the "voice" is what matters most.

2.) THE CRAFT ELEMENT ... POV (left-brain)

The POV you choose is a fairly academic, left brain decision: Which Person will you write your story in? Will you choose 1st, 2nd or 3rd Person?

And yes, I know I ended a sentence with a preposition... but it's a creative writer's privilege to play around with words and syntax and mix them up to suit your palette. I know my grammar. However, I will often flaunt the rules. You can fudge on the grammar ... it's your creative licence because it's not you, the author, sitting at your desk, or under a palm tree tapping out words; it's your character's "voice" you are trying to commit to the page and who but Oxford dons are going to be speaking perfect grammar?

So, go ahead, end your sentence with a preposition, if to do otherwise would feel clumsy and out of character. Start your sentence with "And", "But" or "However". Who cares? Split an infinitive. Mix your tense, if needs be. Chop it up, spread it out, enjoy! (But go easy on the !!!!!. You are only allowed three in a 90,000-word novel...on my orders! Unless writing for children. Kids love an exclamation mark or ten!)

Punctuation is a different matter. As with spelling (at which I'm lousy), punctuation must be perfect if you wish to get your manuscript (MS) past an agent or publisher.

PERSON (POV) can be broken down into three main categories:

- First Person – doing the 'talking', e.g., *I went crazy last week and bought a ...*
- Second Person – spoken to, e.g., *You go crazy thinking about her. You know this but you still believe you can ...*
- Third Person – spoken about, e.g., *Barbara decided she would rent out the apartment if ...*

First Person POV will present you with a lot of "I did this," and "I did that," boring-as-bat-shit writing ... the benefit is that it's very direct, breaks down the barriers between author and your reader. It's a form favoured by first-time authors. But apart from the repetition of the "I", it also handicaps you in other ways. For instance; you can only describe what the "I" sees, does, knows and where she goes. And it's difficult to describe characteristics of your "I" character.

"I wore a black dress with sequins, and they said it suited my tall, athletic frame, blah, blah..." is ok, but it gets harder describing nuances of personality, mannerisms, or what others think about your "I" character.

Second Person POV ... forget about it! Too hard to sustain for a full novel ... (unless you're Jay McInerney, NY best seller author).

Third Person POV gives you the most flexibility. Within the 3rd Person POV we can break it down into sub-categories:

- Omniscient authorial POV ... God-like 3rd Person "view", can see inside all the characters' heads, move around the board at will, know everything. It's a voice favoured by the oldies. Henry James, George Elliot, et al. Very out of vogue these days. Leave it with the Victorians. Dear reader, it delivers too much authorial discourse and narrator opinion, doing it from a great height, and not down among the characters.
- Objective POV ... 3rd Person story-telling by a narrator (that's you, the author posing as a narrator). It's not particularly intimate. You're not directly inside the character's head. Instead, you are telling us what your character is thinking. No stream of consciousness going on, here. (It's favoured by crime writers ... perhaps your protagonist is a detective solving a crime ... it allows you to get around, jump to scenes not featuring your protagonist ... he doesn't know what you are telling the reader in his absence). You use the character's name in this POV, e.g., *Julia planned on catching the L90 from Wynyard ... The sound of thunder and rain on the roof was music to Broderick's ears, he loved the... Kate felt it was time to tell Jim about ...*
- Subjective POV... this is '3rd person intimate' or 'inner limited 3rd person' (you're right there inside your protagonist's head). And there is also 'multi-limited 3rd person' where you can show what's going on in two or more of your characters' heads. It can be used to portray different POVs on a subject, e.g. The divorce from *Carmel's* POV, and then from *Grant's*, and perhaps the kid's take on her parents' break-up, and how it will affect her. Here's *Carmel*; *"She knew the divorce would be messy, but how could she forgive Grant and just act as if..."*. And here's *Grant*; *"If only he hadn't fooled around with Kate from the Department, he figured he could have saved his marriage."* And here's 8-yr-old *Samantha*; *"It struck her all at once; what would she do about swimming lessons if Daddy wasn't ..."*. You don't use the characters' names when inside their heads in the intimate POV, but use personal pronouns instead ... he, she, us, we, they, etc.
- Combo POV ... This is the exception to the rule. You can choose to use a combination of POVs. You might use Omniscient or Objective narration for your detective and swap to intimate narration to get inside the head of your victim or perp ... or the sticky-beak neighbour watching the action and describing it to us, the reader, with her opinions thrown in. Likewise, you could use this combo to have one character commenting on the other. (I'm presently doing this in my new ms, *Bright Echoes*. *Cynthia*, the hothead, doesn't know the trouble she's heading into, but *Connie*, the wise, seems to. *Cyn* is my protagonist...I'm inside her head, feeling her pain and wanting her to triumph. But I want *Con* to be a little more distanced and narrate where her friend is going dreadfully wrong.)

Don't be alarmed. It's not that hard to comprehend. Grab a few well-written novels, particularly ones using 3rd Person, and see if you can identify the POV sub-category used. Note whether it feels as if the character is telling you his thoughts directly, *mano e mano*, or is it the narrator telling you what *Fred* is thinking.

EXERCISE: Write a paragraph about two people meeting on a train ... and do it from all three Persons, 1st, 2nd, 3rd. Or, do it from the different types of 3rd Person.

~~ THE CONTROLLING IDEA ~~

"In the midway of this, our mortal life, I found me in a gloomy wood, astray ..." Canto I, *The Divine Comedy*,

To write approximately 90,000 words to tell your story, you best have a CONTROLLING IDEA/A CENTRAL ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE in your box of tricks. It's this central idea, unique to your tale, that keeps your characters and plot adhering to the novel's SPINE.

It also works in conjunction with the novel's THEME.

Of course, the controlling idea isn't a straight-jacket. There'll be room to move. The direction your story takes, having decided on its central idea, is only limited by your imagination. Dante found himself in a "gloomy wood, astray" and therein lies his guiding principle, his controlling idea, the kicking-off point of the story: he's used a metaphor to show he is middle-aged and in a dark place ... maybe he's depressed ... he feels he's going nowhere. It's his controlling idea, the theme he will pursue in the telling of his story. But there are myriad ways he can proceed from this point onwards.

If, in your novel, you put your character in a "gloomy wood, astray". You can have her/him stumble upon a dead body, a pot of gold, or a beautiful dark-haired rider on a white charger. One controlling idea, three very different story options. So long as you keep in mind the central idea that got you started and organize your material so that your story stays reasonably within that idea.

In my novel, the controlling idea is that my protagonist realizes she has left it too late to have a child ... everything in the story flows from this idea, but it gives me plenty of scope for my imagination. The basic theme will be 'motherhood' and 'female biology as a life determinant'.

EXAMPLES OF A CONTROLLING IDEA/THEME:

- ... a C19th convict girl is sent to Australia ... alienation, survival
- ... four girlfriends' lives have gone in different directions ... friendship
- ... your character overcomes his character flaws ... redemption
- ... the woman is torn between career and having a child... motherhood
- ... your protagonist is wrongfully imprisoned because of his ethnicity ... social injustice
- ... comical characters and a whacky plot ... humour as therapy
- ... an accident that could have been avoided ... fate, serendipity, chance in our lives
- ... you show how scary are circus clowns to small kids ... childhood fears
- ... a lost love ... wasted opportunity
- ... a character's tireless, dangerous pursuit of another ... obsession

These concepts I've listed represent a few examples of a CONTROLLING IDEA that you, the author, will decide upon before you begin to write, and then try to keep in mind as you go along, asking yourself regularly if you're straying too far from the novel's central idea, its spine ... or are you keeping within the parameters of the CONTROLLING IDEA.

William Faulkner said, "*With me, a story usually begins with a single idea or memory or mental picture ...*". So, Faulkner understood the importance of the controlling idea.

~~ THEME/ THE QUESTION AT THE HEART OF YOUR NOVEL~~

It helps to use the INTERROGATION TECHNIQUE to arrive at the novel's controlling idea/theme. This is where your writer's journal comes in handy. A few simple questions can keep you on the money. WHAT'S THE NOVEL'S QUESTION? What THEME are you setting out to explore?

Example of interrogation creating the story's central organizing principle, its theme, its spine:

- The seemingly bad girl runs away from home ... why?
- The lonely farming widow woman takes her in ... why?
- There's a problem horse on the woman's outback property.
- Will the girl take to it, train it, eventually compete successfully in gymkhanas?
- Will this lead to the girl finding a loving home and redemption?
- Or will turn out to be the lonely woman's longed-for source of happiness?

This novel about the runaway girl, I'll call it *Saving Grace*, might have started out as a story about the runaway girl eventually finding a loving home. But, because you found the woman to be the more interesting character, you might follow her backstory and road to salvation, instead.

Or how about, for a children's novel, the happy ending goes to the orphaned, troubled pony ... thanks to chumming up with the lost girl? Write it from the pony's point of view.

You can have fun setting out to write a story about redemption (the controlling idea in *Saving Grace*), but finish up with a different tale. It's what makes creative writing so much fun, being fluid, going where the Muse takes you, surprising yourself. But you need a central idea In this case, it was REDEMPTION.

Begin with a controlling idea, then INTERROGATE your story. Your organizing principle is the way you will use your material so that your story, at the end of the day, doesn't lack cohesion, but has kept to its promise: to tell a good story, preferably with a beginning, middle and an end.

LIMERENCE: the state of being infatuated or obsessed with another person, typically experienced involuntarily. I throw this word in to demonstrate how easy it can be to come up with a controlling idea. OBSESSION could be a controlling idea. Your story could go in any number of different directions ... obsession with running a clean house, obsession with her best friend's husband, *Roger*, and his obsession with the girl across the hall. *Fiona's* obsession with her Karmann Ghia. How about old Humboldt's obsession with *LOLITA*?

Theme Prompts:

- *Dream as if you'll live forever. Live as if you'll die tomorrow.* Jimmy Dean
- *Poverty is the mother of crime.* Marcus Aurelius
- *Soldiers usually win the battles, and generals get the credit.* Napoleon
- *A man in a passion rides a wild horse.* Ben Franklin

These, I took from famous quotes, but with an ounce of imagination, each could be the controlling idea of a novel.

EXERCISE: List three themes for a novel

~~IT'S FUN TO CREATE CHARACTERS~~

The A B C of Developing the Protagonist's Character:

Agenda
Backstory
Conflict

Protagonist & Antagonist:

The PROTAGONIST is the character who WANTS SOMETHING and the one to whom TROUBLE happens first.

THE PROTAGONIST IS YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTER. Put lots of thought into the fact you are giving birth to this fictional human being; *Bill* or *Francesca*. You are bringing them into the world ... don't go off half-cocked. And don't wait too long to bring *Bill* or *Francesca* into your story. In scriptwriting terms, it's called "hanging a lantern" on your hero ... practically a drum-roll when you introduce him to the audience. Whatever, it's good to make it clear up front who the protagonist is going to be. And for that, he will require a name and definite characteristics

- Give him an important goal
- Give him a strong motivation to pursue it
- Show his strengths and weaknesses
- Keep raising the stakes
- Put him in jeopardy
- Have him help (rescue) himself
- Give him foibles (a claustrophobe, manic depressive, clown of the class, obsessive nature)

The ANTAGONIST is the one that causes change in the protagonist. You need a protagonist with a mission, and an antagonist who will constantly throw obstacles in the protagonist's way. The antagonist must be as strongly portrayed as your main character. He or she is not all evil. Antagonists are strongest when they are as committed to their mission as much as the protagonist, believing in it just as firmly.

The antagonist need not necessarily be another person who is set against the protagonist. The antagonist can be anything that obstructs the protagonist's goal. Depending on the novel's genre, the antagonist can be the environment, impending death, a disease, the protagonist's flawed nature, a meteor heading for earth, a political system, something within their own personality, a fatal flaw, or a scheming relative.

The antagonist is the primary negative, troublesome person/persons/thing/things that stands in the protagonist's path to goal achievement.

CREATE DRAMATIC ENERGY: Introduce your PROTAGONIST and ANTAGONIST early in your story and set them on their COLLISION COURSE!

Naming you characters:

The time has passed for the Charles Dickens of this world, with the corny names for characters. No room for *Scrooge*, *Honeythunder* or *Pecksniff*. Greater subtlety is required in the reality you are aiming to produce.

Choosing names for your characters is the fun part of being a person who creates new realities. It can take time to get it right. And, done well, it is a handy way to add nuance to your character. Some writers reach for the phone book, others the daily newspapers. The web has countless pages listing baby names with derivations.

My way of doing it is to amass as many character traits as I can for a character and then take a long walk. My *Miki* and *Jude* names in *Goodbye Lullaby* came to me on a long stretch of empty beach in Queensland. I wanted to write about the tragedy of young unmarried girls in the Fifties having their baby taken from them. *Miki* and *Jude* had obviously been lurking somewhere in the cosmos and were sent to me by my Muse. Those girls just started yapping to me and didn't stop till the book was published.

The novel I'm presently writing has *Cynthia Smart* and *Connie Labelle* as the two friends with very different life journeys. I felt that my brittle, career-driven protagonist should be a *Cynthia* (a hard-sounding name with a suggestion of cynicism that fits her well), and she should be Smart ... yes, it is a wee bit unsubtle... I'm working on it ... still not sure if it's too blatant, but while I write the story, it works to define her. Alternatively, *Connie* is a warm, motherly, loyal type and *Constance* seems to suit her.

Thankfully, with the help of the word processor, it's a matter of choosing the Change All option and altering the name if it's not working for me.

Most writers will tell you that securing a solid image of your chief characters is the first step to envisaging your story. Others opt for location or the germ of an idea. The perceived wisdom is that "Character is Plot". You get your character/s firmly established and then give them something to fight for and you have a story.

Establish a profile of your characters:

This is the way I prefer to do it; writing it out in a hurry by hand in your writer's journal. You will list many more character traits and descriptors than you will ever use ... but it's a necessary exercise.

JANE CARTER-SMITH When we meet green-eyed, auburn-haired Jane Carter-Smith, she's turning forty-three. Married to Roger Smith, an accountant, Jane has recently gone back into the workforce as a bookkeeper. She has three children; Alex -9, Rosie -6, and Jake -3 ... with the last finally in kindy.

She's tall at 5'9". Worries about her large boobs, wished she were flat-chested. She's lived with a weight problem since her teenage years but is clothes-savvy and conceals her rolls beneath soft, flowing fabrics and long scarves. And somehow, Jane always manages to balance her kilos on glam stilettos and sexy boots. Shoes are a fetish with Jane, who's proud of her pretty feet...and her always immaculately manicured hands. Her hair radiates good health, always clean, shiny and smelling of green apples, it's shoulder-length, and with a grey streak leading back from her high forehead.

She has good straight teeth and is fanatical about dental hygiene, having been a dental nurse for a few years after leaving school. Jane's a vegetarian who loves to cook. She'll throw a dinner party at the drop of a hat. Talking of which, she loves hats. Jane is a big-hearted Pollyanna of a woman who laughs easily and who always has a kind word for her fellow man. Classical music bores her stupid, she's mad about ABBA and the Rolling Stones. Hates the Beatles, swoons to Rod Stewart and Joe Cocker.

In her spare time, Jane's been writing kids' plays for the school and once a month helps out at tuck-shop. Jane loves the cold weather ... melts in the sun. Doesn't tan. Proud of her pale, unblemished Irish skin (if not her Irish temper!). She has two sisters, Maeve and Isabelle, and a step-brother, Les ... loves train travel and ... blah, blah, blah ...

Here is a more specific check list for developing your characters:

(Taken from the internet)

- What is this character's name?
- What is her age and birth date?
- What does she look like?
- What is her astrological sign? Does it matter to her?
- What are her parents like?
- Does she have brothers and sisters?
- How important are her family relationships?
- Where does she live? (Urban? Small town? Rural?)
- Why did she choose to live there?
- Does she live in an apartment? House? What type or style?
- Does she live by herself? With others?
- What are her important material possessions?
- What are her hobbies?
- What is her education?
- What is her job? How does she feel about her work?
- Is this a long-term career or just a job?
- What does she want to be doing in 20 years?
- If she has unexpected free time, what does she do?
- How does she feel about the opposite sex?
- What is her relationship status? Single? Divorced?
- Does she have children?
- Who is her best friend? Why?
- Who is her worst enemy? Why?
- How would a former date describe her?
- What one event has made her who she is today?
- How does that turning point in the character's life relate to the other main character in the story?
- What trait does she have that she wants to keep secret from the world?
- What does she like most about her life?
- What does she dislike most about her life?
- What would this character die to defend?
- What are her most likeable and unlikable traits?
- As the story begins, what is her main problem?
- What does she do that makes this problem worse?
- Who is this person's love interest?
- What qualities in the other main character are most attractive to this person?
- What is her ideal happy ending?
- What reaction do you want readers to have to her?
- Why should the reader care about her?

EXERCISE #1: Come up with a short scenario in which the antagonist is not human.

EXERCISE #2: Think up a character who is about to lose her job

~~ THE GOAL~~

ACHIEVING IT IS WHAT DRIVES YOUR PROTAGONIST

GOAL, DESIRE, MISSION and MOTIVATION are interchangeable.

Whatever, it must show its head early in your story. The reader needs to know why he's bought your book, why she's sneaked off to bed early to read your novel. They want to learn what it is your main character desires so desperately that she is willing to risk much to achieve it ... it's the STRIVING TOWARDS THE END GOAL that matters. Following young, self-assured *Edgar Numbskull* as he determinedly sets out to win the federal seat of Manic, and suffers knock-backs along the way, is the crux of the story. You will be defining his character by showing how he deals with the obstacles to his goal.

Each action toward his mission will propel the story and develop his character ... let him come up against brick walls, face-to-face with his political accusers, trapped in a burning house, discover his wife is unfaithful, etc., and see how he performs. It's a truth; adversity is character-building, and only if the reader thinks he's earned his goal, will the novel feel satisfying.

The PROTAGONIST has two goals:

- 1) EXTERNAL goal; e.g. *Dianne* wishes to top her class in Economics this year.
- 2) INTERIOR goal e.g. *Dianne* wants to escape her life's poverty and make something of herself.

The INTERIOR GOAL is about the protagonist's inner life, what matters to her in a deeper way than the many EXTERNAL GOALS she may wish to achieve. e.g. *Kurt* is desperate to bonk *Celia*, and possibly *Rebecca* and *Rachel* as well, but at heart, all poor old *Kurt* really wants is to know what love is. The protagonist in my novel want to make partner in the agency so as to bring more women into the advertising profession, and she also wants to fund her screenplay, and she wouldn't mind getting laid occasionally (external goals), but deep down, what troubles *Cynthia* in the wee morning hours is that she feels empty. There is a yearning to have a child and this is her INNER GOAL. This is where the novelist needs to dig deepest. Go to the dark side, the shadowlands in exploring the inner goals.

CARL JUNG DEFINED EGO and SHADOW:

EGO is our public face, our carefully constructed persona, our mask, the way we want to be seen.

SHADOW is our Unconscious, the Dark Side, the dangerous and largely unacknowledged cauldron of "unacceptable" feelings and reactions. As writers, it's our task to dig down in the Shadowlands of ourselves. This gives us access to our repressed rage, the antisocial behaviour and murderous impulses – whether or not we're inclined to act on them.

SHADOW contains enormous literary energy if we can tap into it. And I believe it's the WRITER'S JOURNAL that is the way down into the shadows of our nature, and the literary gold we can find there. In your journal (for your eyes only) you can get down and dirty with your characters, go where angels would fear to tread. Write those dark thoughts you would never want another to know you've harboured. Bet your life, your reader has been there, too.

~~ SETTING~~

DON'T LET YOUR CHARACTERS FLOAT IN THE ETHER

Your 'people' need to be grounded in reality

Setting the scene:

- The family lives in the big old weatherboard house halfway down Drake Streets, where it intersects with Robert Road
- *Bailey* shops at the Nobsville Mall in Glumtown for all his hardware supplies
- She purchased most of her bridal lingerie from Elsie Mayne's boutique on Sunset Street
- *Miranda* drove along the Amalfi coast, past the restaurant with the purple vines on the patio
- He hit the city's peak-hour congestion on the Bridge, stuck behind a white SUV that looked as if ...
- Glenview Park at this hour of the morning was carpeted in purple jacaranda petals
- He found *Kurt* waiting for him in the car park adjacent to Centrelink

Create a strong sense of exterior place:

You do this by paying attention to the minutia ... picking out the small, unusual details. Writers are uber-observant souls. So, don't waste your talent for observation.

- Get it down on the page in as much detail as suits the flow of the narrative.
- Let *Hugo* comment on his location, question his bearings as he travels the Pacific Highway near XTown.
- Let *Celia* be surprised by what she's just discovered about the holiday house she's been renting for years ... and remember to show surroundings from your character's eyes, not you, the author's eyes.
- It's useful to use the character's observation and comments about their outdoor locations when you need to move time around. e.g. The trees have shot up (since she was here last Christmas). The highway *Harold* is traveling was no more than a bumpy two-lane job last time he came this way.
- Your character can feel at one with his environment ... relaxed, happy to be there ... organic to his nature.
- Or she can be a fish-out-of-water ... awkward, clumsy, uncomfortable, hostile towards her surroundings. Show it!

Be particular about interior spaces:

Without becoming boring, describe your character's abode. But remember; description (as with research) should be like molars; down there at the back, with deep roots.

You can add great depth to your character by detailing some significant item/s in her interior space.

It's what it is because she chose it ... so it helps define her character. e.g. *Matilda* has African masks, Nepalese temple bells, etc. in her room ... we imagine her as a traveler. *Ron* has a picture of a yacht at sea in pride of place on his desk. He's a sailor. This kind of particularity is not as possible with exteriors because exteriors are not so personal. Interiors are subjective, while exterior spaces are mainly objective ... unless it's a garden, or a building designed by the character, etc. etc.

EXERCISE: In a few sentences express something special about your office, local park, doctor's surgery or busy airport.

~~ CREATING A 'KICK-ASS' PLOT~~

"... *Iron in my backbone – Sulphur in my blood ... You have to be wiped out as a human being to be born again as an individual.* Henry Miller

PLOT is the progress towards the resolution of a PREDICAMENT that transforms the character.

BRAINSTORM ... IMAGINE WILD THINGS! RAISE THE STAKES ... MAKE IT VITAL YOUR CHARACTER PUSHES THROUGH ... Don't be inhibited. You might strike gold.

GIVE YOUR PROTAGONIST A STRONG COMPULSION AND THEN TURN HER LOOSE!

Joseph Campbell's the Hero's Journey as a plot template ... Suggestion only, but a useful one:
<https://mythcreants.com/blog/the-eight-character-archetypes-of-the-heros-journey/>

Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey* (1992), in applying Joseph Campbell's archetypes and myths, provided a valuable template for story-telling. The protagonist/hero, discovering something is wrong in his universe, decides it's up to him to set out from his tribe to right the wrong. He encounters many conflicts and obstructions along the way, risking much in attempting to reach his goal. Having won the prize, he returns to the tribe a better person for the experience and so, enriches the tribe.

It's the template for the *Holy Grail Arthurian legend*, the Jesus bible story, Homer's *Ulysses*, the original *StarWars* movie, *Harry Potter*, and countless other Hollywood successes.

It's worth considering it for your own story's template. e.g. *Mandy* is a school teacher who has discovered the Principle is a pedophile. She will risk her career, and maybe her life, but she's determined to set out to purge him from their midst. Eventually, she does this and the school is a safe place once again. Courageous *Mandy* has risked much, but ultimately, she has righted the universe.

YOUR "TO DOOZ" CHECK-LIST:

- Start off with a BANG, not a WHIMPER
- Make his mission (almost) impossible
- Make the contest fierce
- Raise the stakes higher and higher as the story goes forward
- Make the participants real
- Anchor story in time and place
- Bring sensuality to it
- Use ample, smart dialogue
- Give characters emotional baggage
- Give them insight, reflection ... action/reaction

Maybe don't get too hung up on thinking you need a fully-developed PLOT OUTLINE before you begin your novel. Think of your manuscript as a highway you travel down. While you can envision your destination, you can only see so far up ahead. The rest is yet to know.

The fun is to free-wheel down that literary highway, speeding up, and slowing down, perhaps deciding to take a short-cut, a detour, (but never losing sight of your CONTROLLING IDEA and the fact you are heading for the end of the highway within about 90,000 to 160,000 words).

Having said this, many authors do prefer to outline their story, to know every twist and turn and how it will end. If this is your shtick, then by all means write up an OUTLINE. James Ellroy does. He wrote an amazing 400 page 'brief' (sic) outline for his opus, *American Tabloid*.

A "PLOTTER" or a "PANTSER"?

Either you know where you're going from the get-go, or you let your character/s take you where they will and just fly by the seat of your pants. To be a Pantser is a crazy-scary, wild-ride way to write a novel, but the result can be a more literary novel where characters are richly painted and more memorable. If, however, it's sales you're after then be a Plotter. Genre novels are written by Plotters and genre novels walk off the shelves.

The mechanics of composing the story:

You have your toolbox, your essential elements of creative writing. You also have a great idea. Now you need to organize all those random creative jewels swirling around in your head. Some authors can write on the fly; no story outline, no index cards, nothing but a rage to write. If that's you ... good on you! For mere mortals, we like to build the story in a slightly more organized way; not locked-down but with a semblance of direction.

Writing software:

I use a writing program called SCRIVENER, which I can recommend. It allows you to use separate folders for each chapter, and files within those folders for your individual scenes. With this, you have the ability to easily switch around the order of your story. It also allows you a whole lot more tracking ability, note taking, image files, etc., but time is short... and it is expensive and takes time to learn. I also recommend TABLO for writers who wish to publish their work, create a writer's community, and see how your finished work will look.

Index Cards:

Why bother with writing programs to organize your material when good old-fashioned INDEX CARDS, COLOURED PENS and big sheets of PAPER are so handy and immediate? They are tactile and I find that even with my fancy Scrivener, I still like to get my ideas down on hard copy.

I write each idea on a separate card, I colour-code as well, using specific colour pens for the various characters, plus other colours to indicate an up-beat, or a down-beat story moment (ACTION or REFLECTION). This gives me an overall view of how I'm using the characters in the story and how I'm pacing the novel.

With a combination of coloured pens, you are also able to break the scene, chapter, novel down into a myriad of parts (interior setting, outdoor setting; fast paced, slower paced; flashback; etc. ... and arrange them by grouping the index cards and securing them in scenes or chapters with paper clips.

A Large sheet of paper:

I use large sheets of paper to draw up my time lines. Butchers paper rolls are much harder to find these days but if you can get hold of one, it is pure gold. I have been known to spread meters of it along my living room floor!

One straight line for the novel's 'spine' allows me to mark off where the story begins and ends, and where the plot points come in, e.g. the INCITING INCIDENT the CRISIS, the RESOLUTION, the WIND-DOWN.

Then I can draw arrows running up and down off that line, indicating sub-plots, backstories, etc. I find this visual tool of a time line allows me to carry more information in my head as I write.

It also allows me the flexibility to juggle different parts of my story and to ensure I'm moving the story along at the pace I want...inserting the character's history here, there, or wherever but making sure I'm not leaving the story highway for too long.

It also allows me to judiciously place my sub-plots and bring in my minor characters.

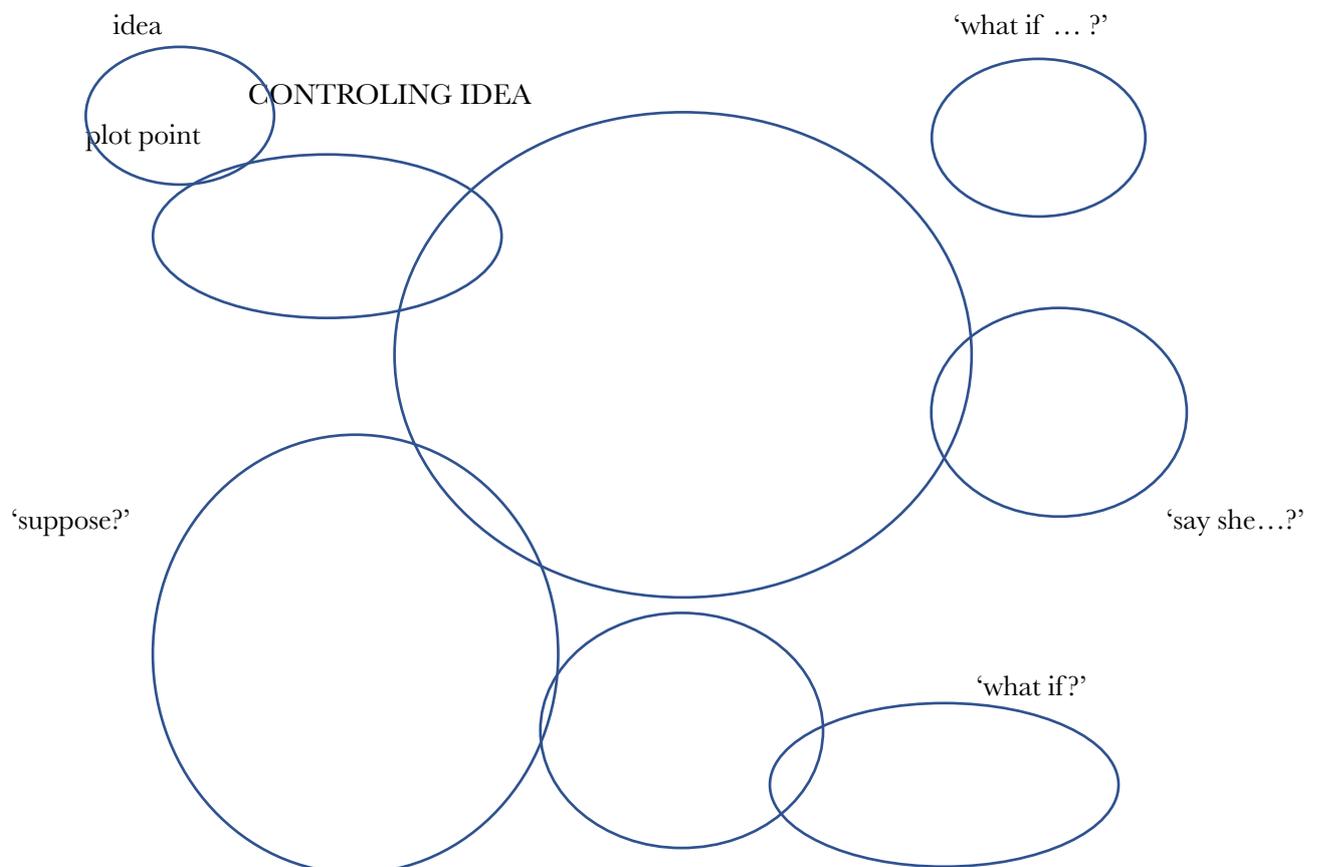
Write it in pencil and you're free to fiddle.

Mind Maps:

I also use the large sheets of paper to draw my mind maps ... starting with a big circle in the middle of the page for the controlling idea, and then smaller circles satelliting around it... my little thought bubbles (plot points, ideas, a new character, what if's, etc.).

Write it in pencil and you're free to add or subtract with ease.

A mind map lets you see at a glance what's in your story ... what you can eliminate what needs to stay in it. This then helps you to arrange the material onto the paper and/or index cards.



~~ PLACING THE INCITING INCIDENT~~

within the

THE CLASSIC THREE-ACT SCENARIO

Beginning ~ Middle ~ End

ACT ONE ... (THE SET-UP):

You can start your story anywhere, but the perceived wisdom is that it works best if you jump in at the deep end, no gentle lead-ins.

First lines are very important. Have an 'angle' to 'hook' your 'fish'. e.g. *"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is ..."* J.D. Salinger. *"It is a thing universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."* Jane Austen. *"Call me Ishmael."* Herman Melville. *"This is the saddest story I have ever heard."* Ford Maddox Ford. *"Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stair head bearing ..."* James Joyce. *"Mother died today."* Albert Camus. *"They shoot the white girl first."* Tony Morrison

Then you establish your SETTING and indicate who is your PROTAGONIST ... and maybe your ANTAGONIST.

The sooner you can get your protagonist on the move by indicating what the CONFLICT will be, the better. Straight up is good.

This gives Act One its impact ... you've engaged your reader on opening the book, and they know who they will be rooting for throughout the story. To this end, it can help to start the story with dialogue ... but that's up to you. Check out first pages of novels in book stores ... especially the best-sellers. I would definitely advise against lengthy, lyrical descriptions of settings, the protagonist's physical features or any backstory. Don't bring backstory or flashbacks in too early.

The universe in Act One might not yet have tilted. You could still be describing it, getting your reader confident this story has 'legs'. The protagonist's universe is probably still in kilter. It's what comes at the end of Act One that signals trouble, and your reader knows you're about to tip the world you're creating – if not completely on its head – at least a little askew.

The moment the protagonist is confronted with the story's major CONFLICT you have arrived at the INCITING INCIDENT, the beginning of the story's real action. This is now Game on! You've just kicked the story into ACT TWO.

End of Act One

ACT TWO... (THE CONFLICT & STORY'S PROGRESSION TOWARDS THE CRISIS):

This is where a story often stumbles, becomes boring or goes off the rails (its spine). Sometimes it pays to walk away for a week or two then come back and try again. Act Two requires a few twists and turns, some dramatic moments, and the upping of the stakes in your story.

These are called BEATS. Robert McKee suggests a POSITIVE BEAT then a NEGATIVE BEAT ... or the other way around. I call it ACTION ... REACTION. It is in Act Two where you must convince the reader to go the distance with you. Don't let your story LAG!

Pump up the creativity. Go to the dark side. Bring on the CRISIS!

The CRISIS, the BLACK MOMENT, is a point where the reader feels there's no way out for the hero. This is the "Will he, or won't he survive this event" moment.

MAKE THE CRISIS DRAMATIC

How to deepen your story so that the CRISIS moment, when it happens, cuts through:

- Insert FORESHADOWING for greater later event impact (read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*)
- Increase dialogue emotion, deeper thoughts, interior dialogue
- Add/strengthen sub-plots
- Intensify action/reaction, i.e. consequences
- Add plot twists
- Shorten flashback and include action in them
- Sharpen characters, more natural, more powerful

Your novel's BLACK MOMENT, the CRISIS, is the point at which the antagonist has done his/her/its worst to bring the protagonist face to face with danger, heartache, rejection, threat, etc.

It's when things look very, very bad for the character's chances of achieving his mission, his goal, his desire; that which has, till now, propelled him through the travails.

He has hit the proverbial brick wall.

This is the moment of truth.

Get out of this if you can, *Jason!*

End of Act Two

ACT THREE ... (THE RESOLUTION):

This is where you start to bring it all together, to end with a logical conclusion to all that has gone before. This is where you RESOLVE the CONFLICT.

Your sub-plots will best have been resolved prior to this seminal moment (i.e. in the previous Act). The focus is on giving the reader his big pay-off for having stuck with your protagonist. It can be an ironic ending or one tied off neatly with a bow. Whatever, so long as you have left no threads hanging.

And that you've shown that the END was always there in the BEGINNING.

There is great drama in Act Three if you are writing well. It's a point in your novel where the reader has reached peak exhilaration and your job now, after the CONFLICT RESOLUTION is to begin the winding down process, eventually returning the reader to the real world of the office grind, or the household chores, but grateful to have inhabited for a magic moment in time, the other reality you created by your brilliance.

End of Act Three

EXERCISE: Draw a straight line on a sheet of paper then show these points along the line where you think they would come in your story: (Act 1, set-up) INCITING INCIDENT ... (Act 2) ... CRISIS (Act 3) ... RESOLUTION

~~ "SHOW"/DON'T "TELL"~~

"Don't tell me the moon is shining. Show me the glint of light on broken glass." Anton Chekhov

AVOID THE BLAND, THE VAGUE ... CREATE A REALITY WITH SPECIFICS

Go in for the killer-Diller details

- A housewife has dark, knotted varicose veins running down the backs of her pale thighs
- A hooker has chipped violent crimson nail polish
- A mechanic has puss-oozing boils on the back of his pock-marked neck
- Giraffe's have purple tongues
- Put slang into your dialogue where appropriate to character ... his true "Voice"
- Highlight a character's foibles for individuality
- Employ similes and metaphors to emphasize details by comparison. This involves the reader's imagination. e.g. The phlegm old *Charlie* brought up reminded *Sue* of the green snotty goo they used to throw up against the wall when they were kids
- Whether you're writing about vampires, tiny tot, lovers or serial killers, go in for the detail when mentioning objects and environment
- Don't tell me they are flowers in that vase over there. They're the red roses plucked from *Hattie's* garden this morning, and still have beads of dew on the petals
- *Clyde* isn't stepping out for his meeting in any old suit. *Clyde's* gone for a Zegna double-breasted grey pin-stripe in the hope he'll impress the board members

It's the "Show" don't "Tell" tool in your toolbox:

Take for example, the cocktail shaker in one of John Carver's short stories ... he doesn't say that it's expensive, or that it's silver. He "shows" it sitting there, sweating in the lazy mid-morning sun. This has the reader building up a thirst. Rendering passive details active makes the reader an insider, rather than a literary tourist.

- Dust covered the 1969 blue Mustang four-to-the-floor. *Mavis*, lost in the long-ago, drew one word on the bonnet. Only one name. But it was enough.
- *Carl* would have taken his 1996 Mercedes 450 SL out of the garage, given the old girl a run, only the noise from the exhaust these days was a problem
- *Barbara* has donned her silk sundress for the occasion, the stunning yellow and white striped strapless one she purchased in Cairns last summer, the one whose flared skirt tended to get caught up between the cracks of her arse when she walked
- *Gretchen's* handbag is pigskin, elegant, large expensive; it suits her lifestyle
- *Frieda's* office is minimalist. She chose an Eames chair of black leather and blonde wood for ...
- Finally, she lifts her Mont Blanc fountain pen and signs the parchment
- It was the fine bone china coffee cup, possibly the Royal Dalton with the rose pattern. *Lisa's* grandmother gave it to the girl for her tenth birthday
- *Gayle* left the boardroom deflated, promising to buy herself a great big beautiful bunch of gerberas on the way home tonight, orange and pink for preference. On long stalks.

BE UBER OBSERVANT!

Use one sense to describe another:

In other words; come at it from a different angle ... e.g. *Rubin* was a "*wine poet*" ... meaning he could express himself poetically after he'd sunk a couple of glasses or two of red.

Don't feel inhibited by logic.

Dare to be daring in your word associations, even to employing a kind of synesthesia, i.e. a crossover between the senses. Using one sense to describe another, you could describe baby powder by using a phrase such as "*...it smelled pastel*", "*...it smells so tender*".

Nabokov experienced colour as sounds, Kandinsky heard music with each splash of paint he applied to his canvas.

In life, it's a rare neurological condition called synesthesia that causes the senses to intertwine. But, hey? It can work on the page to stimulate the reader's imagination and reaction. Try it.

Engage the reader's memory via their senses:

Take the baby powder example:

You could describe it as "sweet", "cloying", "dusty". "sneezy" ... the word creates an image, a memory. You're back in the nursery with all its connotations. The talcum powder is much more than the sum of its parts, it's a vehicle that carries the reader back to another time. You're in the realm of memory; of mother's hugs, bedtime stories, soft towels, warm baths, a new mum's problems, exhaustion, sibling rivalry, etc.

Triggering memories to create backstory:

By specifying an object, you can trigger the character's memory, which will be the segue into the back story. Proust famously and brilliantly did it with his madeleines. I was fortunate to attend a lecture by Scottish author, Andrew O'Hagan. In his novel, *The Illuminations*, the author uses integrated interior dialogue, streams of consciousness, to plumb the depths of his character's memory.

Modestly, I note that in the manuscript I'm presently writing, my 42-year-old character rolls a joint, having cleverly got it past U.S. Customs... and it triggers memory of a time when she and a youth, backpacking through Europe, pulled a similar trick on a German train inspector. It gives me the means to profile her character as a 20-year-old, rather than simply tell my reader she was a bit of a rebel, even back then.

EXERCISE # 1: In one sentence, try to use synesthesia.

EXERCISE # 2 It was a dark and stormy night ... okay but fill in the details so that your reader shivers, is afraid of slipping on the ice, is terrified of the dark. Try doing this as a fast piece of writing in your journal, with no self-editing.

~~ DIALOGUE~~

Great dialogue is one of the most essential of the essential elements of creative writing, one of the big-ticket items in your writer's toolbox. It takes insight, intelligence and practice to get it sharp enough to cut through.

You might think it's simply about recording what people say. It is not. It is a whole lot more. Dialogue will define your character. It will move your story forward. It will provide information. And it is the most winning way to engage your reader with your characters.

Make a point of sneaking around corners, hiding under tables, sneaking up on people who are exchanging words with each other. It pays to snoop! An author should have "a good ear". Having noted the verbal exchanges between the two guys on the bus to Wynyard, by all means record it in your journal for future use, but never believe you are simply writing down a transcript. This is where your skills come into play. Your dialogue writing has to perform hire-wire tricks. It's not just chatty talk. It's a vehicle that carries a load.

Aim for Effective Dialogue

Here are some Do and Don't suggestions:

- Use dialogue to give insight to speaker
- Dialogue is the best pointer to character's nature
- Think of words like "stubborn", "brave", "excitable", "melancholy", etc. and work dialogue to carry the sense of the word
- Don't use dialogue for exposition... no awkward info dumps in character's direct dialogue
- Dialogue can be used to show relationships of characters
- Be consistent in Voice
- Whittle the dialogue, savagely ... nothing extraneous
- Dialogue moves the story, it's not to be just "chatty"
- Use body language, tone of voice, slang, etc.
- Give each speaker a unique way of speaking
- Don't key each piece of dialogue (e.g. he said ... said she ... if doing it right, not necessary to identify speaker each time)
- Use no other key but "said". Maybe "asked" but no florid keying of speaker, e.g. "Get up!" exclaimed *Muriel* ... "Ok, you're finished," proclaimed the boss. "No, never!" she ejaculated.

Post script:

- Appreciate that there is direct and indirect dialogue. The direct is when the words are coming straight from the character's mouth, e.g. "For Chrissakes, not right now, *Marion*," said *Marty*. Indirect is when it is relayed conversation, e.g. "*Marion* remembered when *Marty* yelled at her that day, saying he wasn't about to do it straight away." This is dialogue that is reported, not spoken.
- There is also interior dialogue. This is when the 1st Person, or Intimate 3rd Person character engages in thought. Use it well. All dialogue should be gutsy, confessional and honest, not vacuous and a waste of words. And not used to dump information. Brevity and poignancy are what you are after.

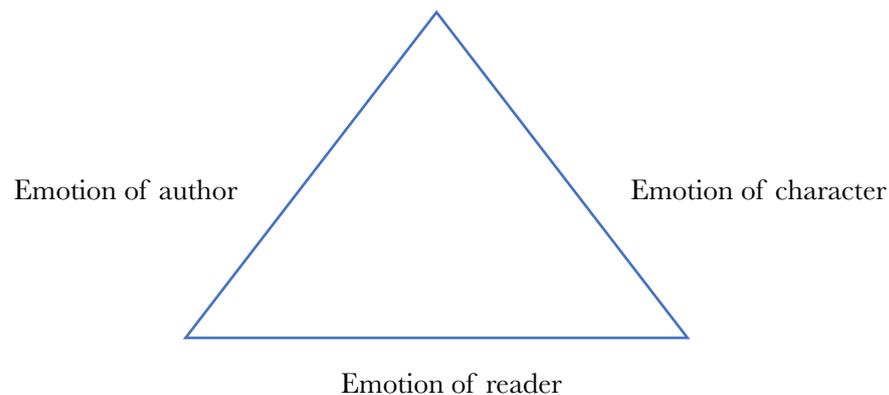
EXERCISE: Read Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* for excellent dialogue

~~ EMOTION~~

"...make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em pay!" Samuel Goldwyn to his writers

The old Hollywood geezer was certainly on the mark. Nothing binds your readers to you more solidly or will have them buying your next novel faster than if you are able to evoke strong emotional reactions from them. Let your own feelings surface, travel the badlands, the shadowlands of your darker nature. Give yourself permission to attribute unacceptable behaviour to your goody-two-shoes self. Only then, are you able to write in these emotions for your characters.

Show a character's irrational response, repressed rage, jealousy, disrespect, resentment and you will be sure to engage your reader. It's your **READER** who needs to feel the **EMOTION** your character is feeling. Here is how it needs to work:



Make the **READER laugh or cry, not the **CHARACTER**.**

(Don't "tell" how he's feeling. "Show" it!)

Author's Emotion:

Don't be afraid of your own emotions. Be it love, hate, joy, sadness, anger, success, disappointment, fulfilment or heartache ... **EMOTE**. Don't hold back. Let your midnight soul have its head as you scribble away.

Character's Emotion:

Stories portray **WHY** characters act in a particular way, and the **WHY** always arises out of their emotion/s. Unless portraying an erratic or manic character, (in which case their emotions might be all over the page) you need to keep emotional consistency. This means that your character's behaviour towards an event or situation must be consistent with the emotion previously shown. e.g., if he's squeamish about blood, he's probably not going to be the one who rushes to the First Aid cabinet...he will look to the other person in the room. If he does, in fact, rush to stem the flow of blood, you have shown a new (formerly submerged) character trait... and that can be useful. But it needs to be shown it is not his normal modus operandi, but some kind of character arc.

Reader's Emotion:

Readers like to be engrossed, rather than simply sitting back critiquing the plot. So, hit them with reason to leave the couch and go with you into the unknown.

You do this by engaging their emotions.

But you must give them something they can relate to ... a "bridge" to carry them over into the unknown. Emotion will always create that bridge because both writer and reader are human, and as such, share universal values. The emotional bridge you need to build is between character and reader, not author and reader.

To do this, be sure to see things from your character's perspective and use language from within the character's emotional force. e.g. A room could be dingy, smelly, sterile, romantic, kitsch or intimidating, depending on who's viewing it.

Emotional consistency:

Try to find one EMOTION, one adjective, which best fits their emotional state, then identify how that emotion defines their character. Does *Shirley* tremble with anger, fidget with boredom, look down her nose at subordinates in the office, rush to hug fluffy puppies? If *Darren* holds his anger in, he will seethe, fume and not lash out. If *Kate* wears her heart on her sleeve, she'll weep for the victims. It defines her actions. If *Fred* is a miserable, pessimistic bastard he will automatically suspect the worst of *Charlie* and act in accordance with his emotional bias.

These reactions to an event can develop powerful scenes. So long as you've taken your reader over the "bridge" by being EMOTIONALLY CONSISTENT.

Being "emotionally consistent", however, doesn't mean you need to shout the character's trait with a megaphone. The primary emotion can be withheld and only surface in a crisis, but we as the writer, need to have hinted at it at some point. e.g., If *Liz* would normally shy from an argument, what CONFLICT would make her stand and fight, take them on? What inner strength comes to the surface, what motivates her, ultimately, to act heroically? What is it that will have the readers on their feet and cheering for good ol' *Lizzy*? Go, girl. You rock. Like watching the smallest girl in the team score the all-important goal. She always had it in her. We somehow got that, because we'd seen her reaction, as a kid, to another kid being bullied on the school bus, and now we've seen her true grit in action, seen it writ large when she faced her BLACK MOMENT, her CRISIS. That is emotional stuff, and it sells books.

Remember; your characters' primary driving emotion becomes a cornerstone. Give them other lesser traits by all means, but never lose sight of the primary driving force of their nature.

It's important NOT TO GO EASY on good old *Bill* or *Beryl*:

Don't be soft on your guys ... don't dish them up a lame, weak event and/or CONFLICT. Give it to them in spades in order to test their mettle.

Ramp it up. The harder the struggle, the more emotional turmoil you can build.

Bill's flaw will propel him into the crisis. But what inner emotional resources does he possess – that sets him apart – that he will call on to conquer the crisis? Just as you give your character a fault to propel him into the story's BLACK MOMENT, give him a positive trait – maybe a well-hidden till now one – that will give him the power to overcome both his opponent and his own weakness. It becomes his teaching moment, his arc, his way to the better angels of his nature.

Give *Beryl* an urgent GOAL, one your reader can relate to; anything she wants badly enough that will drive her, even against her better judgement, to fight complications, adversity, danger. Don't skimp on the tough stuff. Make goals important. Keep tension high. Have her racing against time. This creates EMOTIONAL FORCE. Present your character with a TOUGH CHOICE.

TOUGH CHOICES, however, are never simply between Good Choice V Bad Choice. That's way too easy. CHOICE, if it is to create tension and demonstrate a character's mettle, needs to be a hard choice, not a piece of cake. And whatever choice is made, it needs to come at a price...tough choice.

Examples of Tough Choices:

- *Darren* needs to marry nagging, cruel *Gayle*, whom he despises, because *Gayle* will settle his dangerous gambling debts and get the Mafia off his back. Problem is; *Darren* loves his childhood sweetheart *Maria*. If he opts for nasty *Gayle* (Bad), he loses the lovely but impoverished *Maria* (Bad) but wipes his gambling debts (good). Everything comes at a price. If he puts the ring on *Maria* (Good) he will be with the love of his life (Good) but have dangerous debts (bad). He must weigh it between Financial Security (A Loveless Marriage) or Eternal Love (impoverished *Maria*) and expect Death by Mafia.
- Little *Sweet Tooth Molly* has to make a choice between the cream puff (yum) or the Iced VoVo biscuit (yum) that *Aunt Grace* is holding out to her. She yearns for both, of course, but must make her decision. It would have been too easy if *Aunt Grace* were holding out a cream puff (yum) and a Brussel sprout (yuck) for *Molly*. That would be a no-brainer. The three-year-old must agonize, learn to suffer deprivation. CHOICE is a valuable tool in your writer's toolbox.

Explore your life, mine it for emotional content:

Drag up those memories of your Nan's home-bakes, the anticipation of waiting for her cookies to come out of the oven ... the smell of them and the taste of them once they did. And you, pinching two more and running off.

Remember how you winced at the sound of that awful teacher's voice. How did it feel when her paddle hit your backside? Did it make your eyes smart? And did that embarrass you in front of your classmates?

You have an inexhaustible mine of opportunity. Your Dad's love of his old jalopy; the chill in your soul when your toddler went missing; that emergency dash to hospital with the teenager from next door; holding your first-born. Allow these memories in, and then grow them, exaggerate them. Use the raw emotion to enhance other instances than those from which they arose.

Change perspective

- A hotel in Texas has EXIT signs above doors but also at floor level. Why? In case of fire.
- He gives her black roses on Valentine's Day. Why? He has ambivalent feelings towards her.
- *Casablanca's* writers had to change the perspective of the story in the final scene in order to give the rising film's star, Humphrey Bogart, the kind of hero's moment his star rating deserved by then. The immortal line, "*Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.*", was a different perspective from the ending originally planned, and look how it succeeded.

Think outside the square:

- Put your character in an unfamiliar environment and watch her struggle to cope
- Push boundaries by rating a baddie as not so bad, just misunderstood
- Employ mischief and humour on a mournful occasion
- Above all, embrace strangeness

Look for connections:

Creativity occurs at the intersection of ideas ... two disparate thoughts colliding gives your writing a BANG. Randomly choose any two objects and combine them. e.g. Carpet and lights become "carpight", a soft, cushioning, glowing floor covering that turns on when you step on it. Weird, but wonderful. Thinking of these crazy examples stimulates creativity, even if you don't use the results.

Think metaphorically. e.g. An idea is like a flame It curls and leaps and has a mind of its own, it's unpredictable and uncontrollable ... just like your uncle's fiancé.

Have the reader relate to what your character is going through:

Try involving your reader's emotional response by having your protagonist go against the norm. If you can show how *Rhonda* is reacting against her nature (her emotional norm) you pull your reader in to the story, make them sit up and take notice. If you're successful, no matter how odd, the reader will believe you. It's the CONFLICT which will illicit the reader's response to *Rhonda's* emotional struggle.

You won't be able to pull this trick off too often, being mostly obliged to have *Rhonda* act in character. But although having her acting against her emotional norm in a BIG MOMENT will be harder to pull off, it undoubtedly creates more drama and suspense. Worth trying.

Another trick is to involve the five senses for richness. Use "taste" words, "smell" words, "touch" words, "sound" words, "seeing" words. This brings the reader into the picture in a visceral way ... body and mind. You will also bring strength to your character, and hence, greater emotional empathy, by giving them opinions, have them make observations, judgements, etc. Even the bad guys.

"Show", don't "tell" if you want strong emotional empathy:

Don't DESCRIBE emotion - EVOKE IT!

Showing your reader the emotion the character is feeling is much stronger writing than simply telling your reader about it. Some verbs always "tell" rather than "show." e.g., (the verb 'to be') ... "*Mark was* bitter ...", (and the verb 'to feel') "*Mark felt* bitter ..." are weak verbs, weak ways of describing emotion, because you're "telling" your reader how *Mark* feels about an event. Try this instead: "*Mark crumpled the letter and tossed it to the trash, vowing to disown his brother if he didn't get with the program and start ...*"

Use verbs that denote emotion rather than simply describe action. e.g. "strode", "stomped", "ambled" are much more powerful in evoking emotion in your reader than 'walked' ... (the verb 'to walk')

If you wish to evoke reader empathy for *Mark*, he needs to be a stronger narrator than you, the author ... yes, I know it's hard to distance yourself because you're creating the whole thing but like James Joyce says the writer should stay ... *invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, pairing his/her nails.*

At the risk of being down-right repetitive here; this means that you don't depend on DESCRIBING the action, but that you let *Mark* EXPERIENCE it ... and show us how he copes.

Omniscient: to describe, to tell. Subjective: to experience, to show. There's greater dramatic impact where characters are left to interpret things emotionally, without the author filtering it through her own narrating.

EXERCISE #1: Write three sentences about a character you think would evoke a strong emotion in your reader

EXERCISE#2: Write a short scene using a twist on normal perspective ... or devise a fun combo word

~~ TWO EXCERPTS FROM MY NOVEL, *GOODBYE LULLABY*~~

Evoking emotion in the reader by “showing”:

Excerpt #1.

The set-up:

It is the 1950s. The unmarried and impoverished 17-yr-old *Miki*, for the sake of her adored child, is surrendering him to the Mother Superior who runs the Catholic orphanage. She has finally signed the papers. She is about to leave the office but stands in the doorway. The moment has come to say goodbye to her child:

“... Dominic realized she was leaving. He dropped his wooden toy and toddled towards her, tumbling and crawling in his haste to reach his mother, calling out to her in his baby words. He grabbed her leg.

She felt his head nestled against her calf as he clung to her, but she would not bend down and comfort him. Touching him would be fatal to her resolve. Any moment now, he would start crying. And then the sobs. And when she doesn't scoop him into her arms and whisper to him that Mummy is here, his heart will break. So many nights spent alone in the dark had made Dominic an anxious little boy. She trusted they would be kind to him. No darkness.

‘His music,’ she said, halting in the open doorway. ‘I play my guitar for him. We sing.’ She faced Sister Mary-Xavier. ‘He's frightened of the dark. Tell them to sing to him when he gets frightened. It's called *Abba Dabba*. Someone will know it. It's on the Hit Parade.’

Dominic began to whimper, hitting her leg, a thing he always did to get her to pick him up. She saw Sister Angela give the novice a signal to gather him up.

The novice scooped Dominic into her arms, bouncing and shushing him. He scratched at the young novice's face and threw his arms out in distress to his mother.

Her hand was still on the door knob, her eyes closed against the pain. And against the terror she had just seen in her son's eyes. Softly, she began to sing their song, *Abba dabba dabba...*

Still singing, she stepped outside, pulling the door shut behind her.

She leant her head against the oak and tried to stay upright, to ignore her baby's screams hemorrhaging through the fabric of the door.

A wound had just opened up somewhere in the universe, one that would never heal. She wrapped her arms tight around her body and swayed backwards and forwards, keening, shaking her head to obliterate the image of her child in there with strangers. And there would be other strangers by nightfall.

Her parting prayer as she walked away was that her son would soon forget her.”

Excerpt #2.

The set-up:

This scene near the end, has a young 19-yr-old *Nicholas (Dominic)*, adopted as a baby by *Laurel*, on the eve of his departure for the Vietnam war. Laurel realizes her job is done.

Both these departure scenes could have oozed cloying, over-ripe clichés; however, I think I've avoided sentimentality and cliché by “showing”, not “telling” how torn *Miki* and *Laurel* feel as they walk away:

“...At fourteen, he had come to her for answers, but she had been unable to provide the only answer he wanted. It went away, the urge to know. Or at least, he had not raised the issue again. But yesterday, she advised him to seek the answer she believed he was owed. From Angela, or from his father. She understood that the brother and sister had always known the girl's identity...

He would always be welcome to come to Sydney and live with her when he came home, she had explained, but as she'd watched him go off in uniform, she wondered what choices he would ultimately make. ...

She closed the door softly and finally on the most blessed and rewarding episode in her life.

And as she had done every day since the day she first held him in her arms, she closed her eyes and said a tiny prayer, letting the girl know through Mother Mary that her son was beautiful and that he was loved.

The taxi was downstairs. She took the treads one at a time, reciting memories like rosaries, one for each tread, until she was standing at the phone table in the hall. There was, as ever, a clean white notepad resting there. She'd been nothing if not a methodical housewife. Running Keith's life so efficiently all these years, there had been times, many of them, when she believed he was unaware of her presence in his life. The barracks had been everything to Keith O'Neill.

Taking up the ballpoint pen, she began the last words that would ever pass between them, written or otherwise.

Your sister called. Please phone. She says it is urgent.

She picked up her suitcase and walked to the front door. He would know from the emptied closets that she was gone. If not, the bags packed and waiting in the front room for the St Vincent de Paul van would soon convince him.

‘The airport, please driver,’ she said, taking one last look out the taxi's back window at the years she was leaving behind.”

~~ LANGUAGE OF THE NOVEL~~

When you catch an adjective, kill it! Mark Twain

The adverb is not your friend. Stephen King

The man who wrote, what is considered, the final word on writing in the English language, E.B. White, *Elements of Style*, noted the reason he set out to compile his guide was that he understood the writer was “... *a man floundering in a swamp, and that it was the duty of anyone trying to write English to drain this swamp quickly and get his man up on dry ground, or at least throw him a rope.*”

Stephen King notes, when quoting the above piece in his *On Writing*, “... *And remember: The writer **threw the rope**, not: The rope **was thrown** by the writer.*” [emphasis King’s]. King was referencing the preference for the ACTIVE voice over the PASSIVE voice, just one of the ‘rules’ of the language a writer needs to follow. There are others. Read on...

Check list of language usage:

- Favour ACTIVE over PASSIVE verbs, e.g. ... *the others in the room read the paper* (ACTIVE)
- ... *the paper was read by the others in the room* (PASSIVE)
- Check your sentence lengths and play around with different ways to say the same thing
- Cut out extraneous words and phrases
- Avoid florid language ... no purple prose
- If you think its wonderfully literate, it’s probably over-written ... try reading Hemingway for brevity and clarity
- Avoid the verb 'to be' (was, is, etc.), e.g. *Jude is going to the beach, Fred was anxious*
- Avoid the pluperfect tense 'had' ... *Roxanne had slept with a lot of men in her short life*
- The conditional tense kills. e.g. *Freddie would often sit on the steps and ...*
- CONCRETE trumps ABSTRACT ... Tell it straight
- *All good writing is war against cliché* ... Martin Amis
- A SCENE is a unit of action with a beginning, middle and end (intention, complication, resolution)
- A CHAPTER is made up of one scene or several, but should make a point

Favour strong language:

Henry Miller wrote savage prose. I’m not suggesting you go in for the type of racist, sexist, aggressive writing of a Henry Miller, James Ellroy or a Hunter S. Thompson but read them...they get the blood flowing. Miller, as author, has control of the argument. You might hate what he says but he says it with conviction.

WRITE WITH CONVICTION!

Excerpts from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*:

- "... I took them on – niggers, Jews, paralytics, cripples, ex-cons, whores, maniacs, perverts, idiots, any fucking bastard who could stand on two legs and hold a telegram in his hand."
- "You have to be wiped out as a human being to be born again as an individual. You have to be carbonized and mineralized in order to work upwards from the last common denomination of the self."
- "Nothing is right or wrong but thinking makes it so."

Find alternative strong words to carry the thought, action, reflection.

Try to eliminate the adverbs and instead, use strong verbs. Helps if you avoid the verb 'to be' ... e.g. "*I went angrily across the street to confront them.*" Ho, hum ...zzzz. Better to write; "*I stormed across that street as though I were ...*" Examples of other strong verbs that could have been used; "*I darted through the on-coming traffic, flying across in a rage.*"

Also, kill off those lame and lazy adjectives. Avoid abstracts, e.g. Instead of writing about the children coming upon a beautiful, big old house ... write that the kids thought it was a castle up there on the hill. This way, you are using language to create word pictures, strong images that evoke a reaction in your reader, rather than simply imparting knowledge of the action.

Pacing your prose:

- You add pace to the telling by varying sentence lengths. Use short, sharp sentences, counterpointed with longer, more lyrical sentences
- Use strong verbs
- Head straight into the telling
- Omit conjunctions, prepositions. Who needs prepositions and conjunctions? Chop your sentences up

Here is an example of the above:

It's from a memoir I read but regrettably failed to record title or author. She begins the memoir:

"Fifty to sixty miles an hour through the empty streets of London. No lights. Slamming in the gears, accelerating on every turn, winding up the big engine, my brain finally clean and white, washed out by the danger and the roar of the wind, I barreled into the countryside."

Wow. Beat that for impact, Narelle!

Metaphor trumps simile:

A METAPHOR, according to Aristotle: *The act of giving a thing a name that belongs to something else.* The METAPHOR is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, a language tool that allows the reader to understand one thing in terms of another, e.g. *Mona Vale is white bread territory* (meaning it's devoid of an

interesting ethnic mix). *"You can never dip your toe in the same river twice."* (the metaphor of the river stands for Life ... Indian proverb).

A metaphor can be a phrase or simply one word, e.g. *It was arctic in that room* (a one-word metaphor). Of course, it wasn't "arctic" at all, but it was extremely cold, and you get the point. *It was her dark night of the soul* (a metaphoric phrase meaning she wrestled with her troubled conscience).

The judicious use of metaphors throughout your novel will enhance the visuals, create empathy and deepen the interest. The thing to avoid, however, is the over-used metaphor. No one wants to read about *"her broken heart"* or that *"it's raining men"* or *"the bloom is off the rose"* or *"sunny personality"*.

A guiding metaphor is one that is identified with your protagonist throughout the story and will help to enrich the character. In *Goodbye Lullaby*, the metaphor I chose for *Miki*, my tragic unmarried young mother, is in the novel's opening lines.

It's subtle, but it is there. The fragility of the moment, the inability to hold on to the precious thing. *Miki* is poised with her Leica to capture a photo of a magnificent rainforest butterfly when the moment is shattered by the discordant sound of a helicopter, overhead. The creature flies away, will never be seen again, the chance to 'hold' it, gone forever.

The image of the butterfly was fleeting, as will be her moment with her precious child. The army chopper that robbed her of her shot of the butterfly stands for the state. It is the state's policies that will rob her of her baby. The metaphor is reflected in *Miki's* story throughout the novel.

"The Daintree, Far North Queensland, September 1971

She had been aiming for a shot of the enormous Ulysses butterfly, not daring to breathe for fear of scaring it off. Suddenly, from somewhere up above the rainforest's canopy, she heard them. Choppers!"

Go easy on your similes:

A SIMILE is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid. It's a comparison using "like" or "as". Similes are useful ... but can be overdone or fall into clichés. (e.g. *as brave as a lion, as dull as an ox, as mad as Hell, as light as a feather, like two peas in a pod*). Less clichéd would be, e.g. *she was like a star, beautiful but distant, and just as unattainable to him...*

Punctuation:

I am leaving you to sort this out for yourself. Your proficiency with punctuation will depend on the level of grammar you were or were not taught in school. There are any number of books and blogs that will help you get your punctuation right ... and you must!

[He]...eats, roots, and leaves ... the cad! Or more politely put; [He]...eats roots and leaves.

EXERCISE: Think up some metaphors and similes that don't sound too clichéd.

~~ ENDING YOUR NOVEL~~

ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE YOUR STORY NEEDS

EQUILIBRIUM — DISORDER — NEW EQUILIBRIUM

Q: What is your novel's equilibrium (its present status)?

A:

Q: What happens to change it? (The Chaos moment?)

A:

Q: What is the novel's new equilibrium (its new status)?

A:

Aristotle, in his *Poetics* (384-322BC), calls for 'unity of plot'. No matter what transpires in the story, if you are doing it correctly the end will always be there in your beginning.

THE ENDING SHOULD BE ORGANIC

This is another way of saying your ending needs to be satisfying, i.e., arise naturally and logically from the character's inner life, her experience....it must come from within (not imposed by a plot point or from someone else's action).

The RESOLUTION of your story has to come from character's action or thought processes. But it doesn't have to be neatly tied off. It can be an ironic ending where your reader is left to consider the protagonist's future. Here is the thing to consider; the best endings are paradoxical:

UNEXPECTED / yet INEVITABLE ... SURPRISING / yet ultimately PREDICTABLE

Stick this on your screen and breathe a sigh of relief if, at the end of your final draft, you have achieved this truth:

SET-UP~~~~~PAY-OFF

FINAL DRAFT QUESTION TO ASK YOUR NOVEL

- Is my story focused?
- Is there a point I'm trying to make, but haven't quite achieved?
- Is there something I can do to sharpen it?
- Am I explaining too much?
- Or not enough?
- Does the character arc?
- Does the plot proceed logically, ie, internal logic?
- Is there unexpected/inevitability?
- Does the beginning tie with the ending?
- HAVE I ANSWERED THE STORY'S BIG QUESTION LOGIALLY?

EXERCISE In just a few sentences, see if you can finish this prompt to show an unexpected, yet inevitable ending ... both surprising and yet predictable: "*Freddy, the office clown, misses his train. Late for work. Big problem because he's due to submit his proposal to the client.*"

EXERCISE # 2: The Transition Game. To be played in a writers' group. Take small index cards or pieces of paper and write one transition word or phrase (see below) on each card. First player draws a card and starts telling a story based on the word. The next player draws his card and carries on with the story. Play continues until all cards used.

Transitions are phrases or words used to connect one idea to the next

in the first place	not to mention	like
not only ... but	to say nothing	as
also	of	too
as a matter of fact	equally	moreover
in like manner	important	as well as
in addition	by the same	together with
coupled with	token	of course
in the same fashion / way	again	likewise
first, second, third	to, and, also	similarly
in the light of	then	furthermore
	equally	additionally
	identically	
	uniquely	

~~ HALLELUJA!~~

BUT WAIT; IT'S NOT OVER YET

You've written THE END ... This is your final draft.

Are you sure?

Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid went through twenty-three drafts before the writers got to write a shooting script ... that's the final draft with all the business bits written in, which the director uses to shoot the movie. (ECU - extreme close up, CAMERA PANS ... etc.). Twenty-three drafts by the writers to ensure it was perfect before the director got a shot at it.

No one's suggesting you will do that many drafts, but you better be prepared to do several before you call FINAL DRAFT on your MS and fire up the printer ... or press Send on that email you're sending off to that publisher who's been asking for submissions.

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression (cliché). An agent or a publisher will consign your MS to the bin quick smart, no matter how engaging your story, if they think the MS will require too much red-penciling to knock it into shape for publishing.

Now for the editing process of the final draft:

Your work will first require a STRUCTURAL EDIT or sometimes called a LINE EDIT. It's the macro edit, it looks at the MS as a whole and asks the question: "Is there a book here?"

It's about making certain the story flows, that you have a certain logic to the telling, that all your dates correspond, eye colours are consistent, the basic elements of fiction writing have been employed, no slip-ups in the chronology and that major plot, and sub-plots have come together as a whole and no part of your story slipped off the map. Believe me, it can happen. As the author, you've been so close to the work, you've possibly read over it a gazillion times, but that's not to say that each time, there was a certain structural part of the novel you missed.

That's why it's best to have an outsider read your work before you send it off. Writers' groups are useful for this purpose, as are literate 'reloes' and mates. And so are professional editors if you can afford to hire one to read and give you a comprehensive report on what you thought was going to be your final draft.

A line editor will look for such elements as creativity of content, clarity of images, the writing style, the voice, appropriate use of language to form paragraphs and sentences. (Refer to the BASICS I outlined at the beginning.)

Line editing is about the following:

- * Correcting mistakes
- * Improving content
- * Enhancing the story

Even the most didactic and controlling of editors is on your side. The aim is to tell the best story, in the most convincing way possible so that you will sell as many copies of your book as possible. Check your ego in at the door. Be told. But know when to stand your ground.

Your recipe for success:

At the risk of boring you, I want to emphasize once more, that I believe there are inescapable, essential elements necessary to creating a manuscript that will get you a deal, get your name on a book cover. And is that not what all this yearning and learning has been about?

A commercial novel can be anywhere from 90,000 to 275,000 words in length, or more ... but I wouldn't recommend it. Call it 125,000 words.

Every one of those words ought to have been sculptured to fit your story. It pays dividends to self-edit your final draft before sending off to a higher order. I think of my early drafts as a marble statue, half formed. It only comes to life when I've chipped away at it until there is nothing extraneous on its form, and its form seems perfect.

Here's what you need:

- A great title
- A focused topic
- Theme, theme, theme
- An irresistible beginning
- Opening lines foreshadow what's to follow
- You have just your first five sentences to cut through
- Put your characters into motion
- Find a strong hook
- Show, don't Tell
- Scenes, not summaries
- Bring on the conflict
- A protagonist with a strong goal/mission/compulsion
- Empathy and emotion
- A public and a private goal
- A credible and tough antagonist
- Consistent motivation
- The end should be in the beginning
- Keep to the spine of the story
- Obstacles in the character's way
- A crisis moment
- The protagonist's character revealed
- Build a Zero Hour into story
- A guiding metaphor to enrich character
- Two or three big scenes
- Sound dialogue
- Show, don't tell
- Kill the modifiers
- Keep to the POV

An editor and/or publisher/and/or literary agent looks for:

ACTION, REFLECTION, DIALOGUE. It will be on these elements your MS will be judged. Check that you have used **ACTION SCENES** and **REFLECTION SCENES** (which usually come after the action scene), and **DIALOGUE** that moves the plot or profiles the character or does both.

But dialogue that is not **EXPOSITORY**, i.e. tries to impart character's history, or other information in an awkward, stiff way ... an info dump. Also, she will be looking for; character development, authenticity, consistency; emotional tension; use of alternative phrases or words for a clearer interpretation; redundancies and repetitions; over use of modifiers; option to tighten sentences, dialogue, paragraphs; narrative digression, i.e. taking story too far from 'spine'; unwanted shifts in tone; confusions in plot, chronology, etc.

Here is a way to interrogate your MS in its final draft:

- What does the reader now know?
- What does the reader think she knows?
- What's changed, what has the reader learned?
- What are the core secrets?
- Where's the OMG moment?
- Have I done 3 shifts/turns/readjustments?
- Have I piled on the **COMPLICATIONS**?
- Has my dialogue moved the story?
- Have I given the story momentum and varied pacing, i.e. Holding breath moments, followed by letting out breath and relaxing into story moments?
- Have I interpreted all details through the eyes of my character's rather than stopping story for a description by narrator?
- Where possible, have I written the piece as a scene rather than narrative summary?
- Is there immediacy, impact, empathy?
- Did I pace myself?
- Did I end chapters on emotional highs?
- Did I resolve the plot dilemma near the end?
- Did I tie off all sub-plots?
- Have I answered the story's question?

In addition to the above questions, go back over the rest of these notes and see how well you've fared in using the **BASIC ELEMENTS** of fiction writing to compile your novel.

A Structural/Line edit. Specifically:

- **Plot:** Believable? Coherent? Does it satisfy beginning, middle, and end...Act One, Two, Three?
- **Controlling Idea:** Has it an overriding theme? Is there focus?
- **POV/Voice:** Too many, or too few POVs? An authentic attitude/tone/style? Sometimes confused?
- **Setting:** Does it fit the story? Specific enough?
- **Characterization:** Authentic, believable, interesting? No stereotypes. Behave in character?
- **Dialogue:** How real do the characters sound? Is it chunky, schmaltzy, embarrassingly over-worked? Does it serve the purpose of moving the plot forward?
- **Pace:** Have you moved the plot at a good pace? Does the action begin in the best place or should you let the tension build more slowly?
- **Rhythm and flow:** Does the narrative engage the reader without confusion? No dead-ends or tangents? Too much backstory, flashbacks, memory bits?
- **What's missing:** Are there missing plot points? If so, could connecting paragraphs, scenes, chapters benefit the flow, give the story greater integrity?

Now cometh the COPY EDIT:

This is the read-through that nabs the typos, the spelling errors, punctuation, as well as really unacceptable grammatical errors.

As noted elsewhere, some grammatical wriggle room is allowed in deference to your character/s "voice". Your spell-checker only works so far in correcting spelling errors. e.g. "Bear" or Bare"? It will allow both, but only one is correct.

A copy editor is concerned with consistency, facts and presentation. A publishing house's reputation is on the line if a book has been poorly copy edited.

However, those styles are not always consistent. Some publishers use American spelling, some might have differing ideas for punctuation, etc. You should study publisher's web pages and read books they have published recently. Then you can only do your best in following that House's style manual.

Specifically:

- Grammar
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Style
- Legibility

<https://nybookeditors.com/2015/01/copyediting-vs-line-editing/>

Now cometh the SYNOPSIS:

The synopsis is usually a one-pager, but, if you are going to get it right (and you must!), it is arguably harder to write than the 125,000 you've just completed. You are not reciting the story. You are selling the concept of your story to a person who has a vested interest in becoming excited about it. Give a brief account of the story's plot line, its arc and its satisfying ending. You are aiming to wow an agent or publisher. I suggest you check out online how to write a perfect synopsis because it is vital that it looks professional. I recommend <https://jerichowriters.com/synopsis/>

Meanwhile,

- Find dramatic words that carry truth and stir interest
- Don't write as though through a megaphone (no boasting, no shouting)
- Don't use bleak, miserable images of your novel
- Stir emotion with dramatic, impactful words

EXERCISE: Try compressing your story into:

- A one-sentence synopsis, i.e. a one-line pitch. (to a Hollywood producer you need to be able to tell your story in 25 words or less)
- A one-paragraph synopsis, i.e. approx. 3-4 lines
- A three-paragraph synopsis ...using 8 strong driving words

And finally, the QUERY LETTER:

So, joy, oh blessed joy, it's done.

You have spent a year or two locked in your own reality, using every spare moment writing your opus, you've completed all your editing and written your synopsis. You are ready to send three chapters plus synopsis off to the publisher and start thinking about what you'll wear to the book launch.

Hold on.

Not so fast!

What kind of a covering letter are you going to write to go with this package? Answer: A QUERY LETTER. And I'm here to tell you that this QUERY LETTER can be the clincher.

There are certain DO's and DON'Ts to a query letter. An enticing query letter is what will get you through the door, then have the editor saying, "Love it! Send me the rest."

Again, I strongly advise that you get online and study query letter writing.

A few DON'Ts:

- Don't waste a word, because every word is precious to a busy agent/publisher
- Don't be telling the agent/publisher you know how busy they are, and that you value their time ... gratuitous, embarrassing, etc.
- Don't boast, no arrogance ... telling the agent/publisher that this novel is going to be a best-seller
- Don't lie or exaggerate your writing credits, or detail anything inconsequential
- Don't mention your age. Not important

Some DO's:

- First, provide your contact information
- Clearly state the title
- The genre
- The word-count
- Your agent, if applicable

Then comes the Big Sell:

- Cut to the chase by explaining straight up, what you are offering
- Get your head into selling mode ... not always easy for the shy, reflective writer-type
- Provide a succinct and brilliant blurb on the story
- Mention its possible marketplace. Relate it to a novel in a similar vein published by this publishing house
- Mention the novel's genre and target audience, i.e. Women's fiction, coming-of-age, sci-fi, detective story, etc.
- Cite your writing credentials, and if you have it, your writer's platform
- Say you would be happy to answer any questions about the MS
- Close with a kicker, in which you give the editor one last reason not to turn down your manuscript

Now read over and over again, this query letter. An agent or publisher who cops a sloppily written covering letter is likely to trash your manuscript.

It's that important!

I recommend this article: <https://nybookeditors.com/2015/12/how-to-write-a-darn-good-query-letter/>

EXERCISE #1: Start making lists of publishing houses, agents, on-line publishing sites

EXERCISE #2: Begin researching the house styles of publishing firms and the genres they publish

EXERCISE #3: Write your query letter and show it to a friend who will critique it for you

~~ WRITER'S BLOCK~~

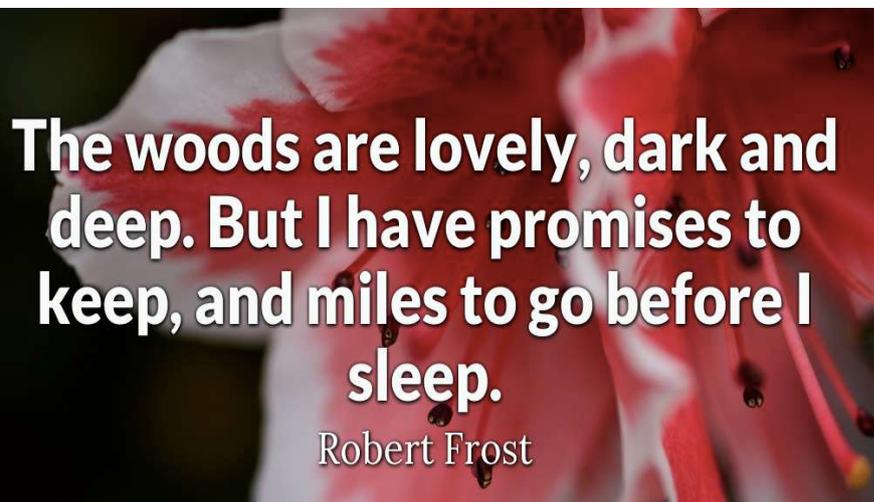
The cure is whatever gets you through the dark patches. As Frank Sinatra said when criticized for the amount of alcohol he consumed; *"It's whatever gets you through the night, pal"*. Here's what works for me. I recommend one, or all the following:

- ✚ Take a quiet walk along a lonely beach
- ✚ Take a hot bath with candles and someone to scrub your back
- ✚ Take a glass of shiraz, and go read a novel for pleasure under a leafy bower
- ✚ Grab a writing pad and write like fury about anything you feel strongly about
- ✚ Pick an argument with the tax office, Centerlink, RTA, et al, and come away the winner
- ✚ Pick out your favourite paragraph, scene or chapter in you MS and gloat about it (to yourself)

EXERCISE #1: Do any of the above ... or invent your own cure for the dreaded WRITER'S BLOCK!

EXERCISE #2: Choose a line from a poem or a song and, in your morning journal, using the line as a prompt, write furiously for ten minutes without stopping to think about what you are putting on the page...write like the Dickens ... no one will see it, and it might be good for a laugh... or a starting point for your work.

- *"I wondered lonely as a cloud..."*
- *"Woke up, got out of bed, dragged a comb across my head..."*
- *"This gun's for hire, even if"*



~~REJECTIONS~~

"I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention..."

*And now, the end is near (thank God!)
And so I face the final curtain (agent/publisher)*

*Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew (remember those midnight phone calls?)
When I bit off more than I could chew (boy, was there ever?)
But through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall,
And did it my way*

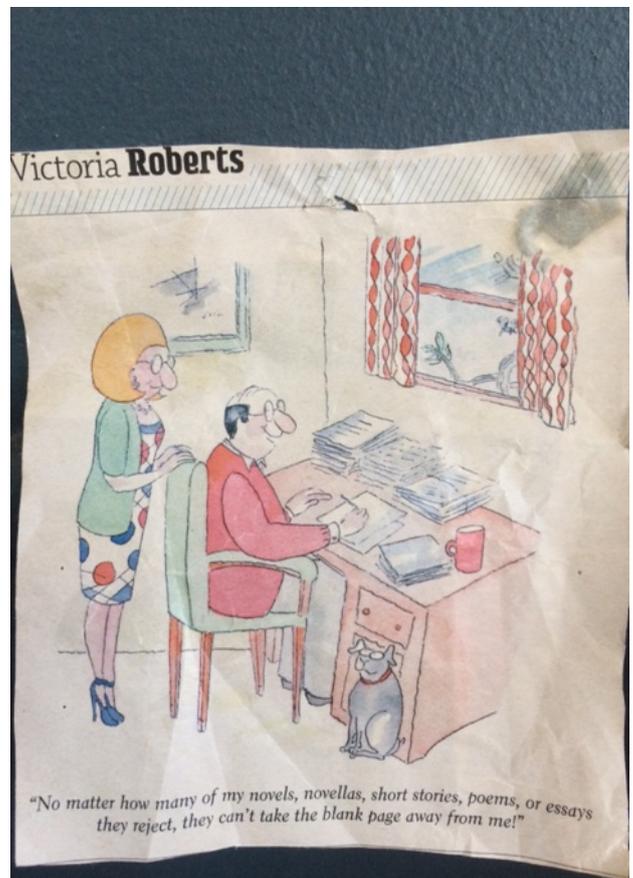
*Regrets, I've had a few (ignored friends, family suffered)
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do, and saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway (character? plot? You bet!)
And more, much more than this
I did it my way*

Be ready for the rejections. Here are a few famous ones:

- George Orwell's *Animal Farm* ... "It is impossible to sell animal stories in the USA."
- Proust's *Swans Way* ... "I may be dead from the neck up, but try as I might, I can't see how a chap needs thirty pages to describe how he turns over in bed before going to sleep."
- Nabokov's *Lolita* ... "overwhelmingly nauseating ... revolting ... I recommend it be buried under a stone for a thousand years."
- *The Diary of Anna Frank* ... "The girl has no personality."
- Flaubert's *Madam Bovary* ... "... too much detail."
- J. K. Rowling had received multiply knock-backs for *Harry Potter* until her fortunes changed when she found herself seated next to a Bloomsbury publisher at a luncheon. He gave the book to his 8-yr-old daughter who declared it great. Who's sorry now?

Don't give in, don't give up! There is a world of Indy publishing available to you. It's incredibly satisfying to be your own publisher. Listen to podcasts, browse the internet. It's all there waiting for you.

Try this on for size: <https://tablo.io>



SOME BOOKS FROM MY LIBRARY SHELF

Stephen King	<i>On Writing</i>
Garry Disher	<i>Writing Fiction</i>
Robyn Carr	<i>Practical Tips for Writing Popular Fiction</i>
Patti Miller	<i>The Memoir Book</i>
Mary Norris	<i>Between You & Me; Confessions of a Comma Queen</i>
Robert McKee	<i>Story</i>
Kate Grenville	<i>The Writing Book</i>
Raymond Obstfeld	<i>Crafting Scenes</i>
Julia Cameron	<i>The Artist's Way</i>
Christopher Booker	<i>The Seven Basic Plots</i>
Christopher Vogler	<i>The Writer's Journey; Mythic Structure for Writers</i>
Elmore Leonard	<i>Ten Rules of Writing</i>
Chuck Sambuchino	<i>Create Your Writer Platform</i>
William Goldman	<i>Adventures in the Screen Trade</i>
Carl Jung	<i>The Wisdom of the Dream</i>
Roy K. Gottfried	<i>The Art of Joyce's Syntax</i>

Writing this short list of my golden oldies has reminded me of how many of my books on writing I've lent out over the years ... and how few have been returned!

They were boomerangs!



THE END

Good writing, and may the Muse be with you!

~~YOUR NOTES~~