

# BOOK *Craft*



## PRACTICAL STUDY GUIDE

*Cut the Fluff. Keep the Magic.*

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# Welcome!

When I first started writing *Book Craft*, I'd already developed a lot of the basic material, but I wanted to provide more than just a summary of blog posts and YouTube videos. I intentionally had fun with the writing and included more of my own personal experiences and research to make the book unique in the field of writing guides.

And while some authors appreciated the effort, others found it distracting or even frustrating. I knew the book wouldn't resonate with everyone, but I'd hate to have readers miss the best, most useful strategies just because they were buried beneath all the extra content. So I put together this quick study guide, which you can print out and use as a handy cheatsheet. Keep in mind, these are just rough notes, out of context. If you haven't read the book, some of these concepts may be new or unfamiliar, but they'll give you a strong indication of where to start. You can also watch the video series, which works through most of the core writing strategies, without all the extra narrative.

- [Get the book](#)
- [Watch the videos](#)

# PART ONE: PLANNING

## 1: Fiction basics

Chapter One is about “filling your cauldron” or gathering resources in order to build a satisfying story: good stories have basic, universal features.

*A good book should include:*

1. **Story:** a unifying narrative  
(things that happen and are tied together)
2. **Purpose:** a goal worth pursuing and necessary  
(by someone we care about)
3. **Drama:** conflict, suspense and intrigue  
(the outcome is unclear)
4. **Structure:** a comfortable reading experience with clear signposts (what’s happening & why it matters)
5. **Resolution:** a concluding event with positive emotion (goal achieved)
6. **Credibility:** mastery, smooth reading experience, trust

### **A very simple story framework:**

1. Beginning: *knocked off course.*
2. Middle: *forced to fight.*
3. End: *sacrifice to win.*

### **Main character attributes:**

- quirky habits
- self-consciousness
- getting bullied
- being brave or clever
- standing up for someone weaker
- saving pets, children or elderly
- burdened with problems & responsibilities
- unique hobby, style or totem
- fatal flaw, fear or lack (shard of glass)
- oppressed or repressed

### *Ensemble Cast*

- the main character (MC)

- best friend (supporter, optimist)
- best platonic friend (these three form a non-romantic trio, though sometimes the platonic friend actually wants more or vice versa)
- skeptic (a non-supportive friend who doubts and questions: pessimist/rationalist)
- comedian or jokester (provides comic relief)
- teacher (in a literal sense)
- mentor (wise role model who introduces them to the new world)
- boss
- parents
- siblings
- nosy neighbor
- nemesis
- cute sidekick
- main antagonist
- antagonist's henchmen
- cannon fodder (a faceless horde to slaughter)
- traitor (someone on their team who plots against them)
- natural catastrophes or monsters (can be character-like); a sudden storm, lion mauling, etc.

*Character Development:*

- where they live
- what they wear
- hair/eye color
- an object they treasure
- something they love
- something they hate
- something they'd never do
- a unique skill or ability
- a weird habit
- what they want (immediately, and permanently)

CHAPTER 1 NOTES

- A character worth caring about (avatar)
- Something they want, and an inability to get it
- An event or challenge they cannot overcome
- ...that forces them to change.
- A barrier or active antagonist
- A setting (description)
- Interesting characters (cast)
- Obstacles (challenges)
- Difficult decisions
- A beginning and an end
- Epic scenes

- Fulfills genre expectations
- Consistent tense / POV
- Linear timeline



## 2: Plotting Basics

Chapter Two is about structuring your main character’s story arc so it generates momentum and builds to a satisfying resolution: a great story forces the protagonist to change, through an “impossible” quest. Hit these 8 crucial plot points to make sure your story is balanced.

### PLOT-BASED STORY

Plot: things that happen in a restricted period of time.

Plot Dot: The 8-point guide to major plot events.

*Something big happens with a major impact on the protagonist.*

#### 1. Ordinary World (start with lack)

*Start on a “big day”*

- preparing for an important event
- already facing fears and challenges
- demonstrate the world and culture
- hook with sympathy & kindness
- oppressed or repressed

#### 2. Inciting Incident (call to adventure)

*Something weird or unexpected*

- doesn’t fit into “normalcy”
- unusual and hard to forget
- points towards an unknown world or conflict
- threatens status quo
- an invitation or offer
- possibly puts the character off balance
- might be responsible for bitter failure
- a path opens...



### 3. 1st Plot Point (point of no return)

#### *Can't ignore the weirdness*

- steps into the unknown (often forced)
- the way back is lost
- doesn't know the rules or what's happening
- normalcy is broken; the new world takes over
- hesitation or refusal

### 4. 1st Pinch Point (first battle)

#### *The stakes are real*

- dangerous opposition
- the larger forces at play
- the antagonist makes a move
- they survive, maybe thwart the antagonist, which could make them a target
- deepens the mystery (what were they after?)
- show off courage or weakness
- forced to choose sides

## 5. Midpoint (victim to warrior)

*Shift from victim to warrior*

- deep self-reflection
- identity crisis / shift in perspective
- shocking reveal
- what have I become?
- antagonist's plans revealed
- committed to the cause (even knowing risks)
- takes an active role, even if not a true believer
- personal vengeance

## 6. 2nd Pinch Point (second battle)

*Heavy Losses*

- take (sneaky) action
- everything falls apart
- unexpected conflict with antagonist's forces
- critical failure, personal responsibility
- guilt and remorse
- new information that makes everything much worse

## 7. 2nd Plot Point (dark night of soul)

*All hope is lost*

- hero gives up; doesn't see a way forward
- their secret plan or weapon backfired
- loses a piece of their heart or self-identity
- antagonist has taken everything
- the hero is responsible for the villain's success
- serious losses or casualties
- escalating stakes have led to greater losses
- self-pity or self-destructive behavior
- fights or arguments
- an ally gives them a pep-talk

## 8. Final battle (triumph-knowledge)

*Sacrifice to win*

- risks all, despite likely doom
- slim chance at success
- the true antagonist or plan is revealed

- enemy's weakness discovered
- their one hope is taken, the plan fails
- hero at mercy of villain
- the protagonist alone must persevere
- saved by act of sacrifice, unlikely ally, new knowledge or power, or simply refusal to quit

## Epilogue (come home changed)

### *How far we've come...*

- the hero returns home changed
- contrast their earlier self
- reflect on what's been lost
- show the challenges ahead
- melancholic reflection
- fill in plot holes or open loops (mysteries)
- it could be a *new* home or status quo
- from alone to supported
- from afraid/weak to powerful
- (sometimes standing up to former bullies)

## CHAPTER 2 NOTES

- Readers must trust your story will satisfy them
- An impossible quest leaves a mark
- Key turning events that drive the momentum
- Plot events with escalating stakes
- Structure focuses creativity towards powerful effect
- Open spaces allow your story to burn brighter
- Stack the wood carefully, so your story burns evenly
- Resisting structure generates positive friction
- Magic beans may offer you a fresh start



## 3: Plotting Advanced

Chapter Three introduces my 24-step chapter outline, to flesh out the simple *Plot Dot* framework. These writing prompts will help you fill blank pages faster by generating some ideas.

### *The one-page fiction plot outline*



### **ACT I: Hero & Ordinary World**

- *1 Really Bad Day*  
Ordinary world, empathy, conflict. Show flaw and lack.
- *2 Something Peculiar*  
Something unique or strange happens, but they dismiss it.
- *3 Grasping at Straws*  
Trying to regain control of ordinary world as setbacks mount.

#### INCITING INCIDENT (call to adventure)

- *4 Call to Adventure*  
Something extraordinarily different happens, they can't ignore. Major setback.
- *5 Head in Sand*  
The new interrupts the old and causes conflict. Reveals dissatisfaction with ordinary.
- *6 Pull out Rug*  
Trying to fix ordinary world problems while resisting the lure of the supernatural world.

## 1ST PLOT POINT (no return)

### **ACT II (A): Exploring New World**

- *7 Enemies & Allies*  
Explore new world; meet characters, find their place and role. Introduce all main characters.
- *8 Games & Trials*  
Struggle to belong. Frustration and doubt. Trials and challenges.
- *9 Earning Respect*  
Small victory as lead proves capable. Fun and games. Begrudging acceptance.

## 1<sup>ST</sup> PINCH POINT (first battle)

- *10 Forces of Evil*  
Stakes are raised, antagonists revealed.
- *11 Problem Revealed*  
Surprise problem or situation.
- *12 Discovery/Ultimatum*  
New information, vulnerable share. In or out?

## MIDPOINT (victim to warrior)

### **ACT II (B): Bad Guys Close In**

- *13 Mirror Stage*  
Self-realization or a discovery, choosing to engage.
- *14 Plan of Attack*  
Plan of action to thwart antagonist's forces or overcome main problem.
- *15 Crucial Role*  
Trusted with an important task.

## 2<sup>ND</sup> PINCH POINT (second battle)

- *16 Second Battle*  
They execute the plan, and come in direct conflict with antagonist's forces.
- *17 Surprise Failure*  
The plan goes horribly wrong, faulty information or assumption.
- *18 Shocking Revelation*  
The antagonist's full plan/true identity is revealed. Stakes are raised. Guilt and anger.

## 2ND PLOT POINT (darkest night)

### **ACT III: Defeat & Victory**

- *19 Giving Up*  
Lead loses confidence; the forces are too great. What they want is unattainable.
- *20 Pep Talk*  
Encouragement from ally. Vulnerable share, inclusion. What's at stake; choice.
- *21 Seizing the Sword*  
Deliberate choice to continue, even if slim chance of success.

## FINAL BATTLE (triumph-knowledge)

- *22 Ultimate Defeat*  
Triumph of Villain. All hope is lost.
- *23 Unexpected Victory*  
Secret weapon or ability, deep resolve, new understanding, unlikely ally.
- *24 Bittersweet Reflection*  
Temporary victory. Innocents saved. How far they've come.

## REBIRTH (return to ordinary word)

- *25 Death of Self*  
From ambition to service. Death of former self. Acknowledgment ceremony.  
*Optional:* Hints of future challenges or antagonist lives.

## CHAPTER 4 NOTES

- A detailed outline will help you plan or revise
- Story prompts can fit any genre
- Most commercial fiction shares a common structure



## 4: Conflict and suspense

STORY: What Happens

DRAMA: Why It Matters

*Obstacles:*

- inability
- prohibition
- imminent threat

*Fake conflict:*

- This stuff happens (no big deal)

- This already happened (resolved conflict)
- This never really happened (false conflict)

### *3 kinds of conflict:*

- *Outer Conflict* (threats)  
Challenges or obstacles that prevent the character from achieving goals.
- *Inner Conflict* (doubts)  
Moral struggles, decisions, guilt or shame, anger
- *Friendly Fire* (betrayal)  
Strong disagreements between allies or supporting characters.

## THE TWO RULES OF CONFLICT

- 1. Dialogue is the enemy of tension
- 2. All conflict is unplanned

CONFLICT = what DOES happen.

TENSION = what COULD happen.

INTRIGUE = why is THIS happening?

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

*Intrigue:* If readers aren't asking questions, they aren't interested. You get them interested by showing characters they care about, and revealing the dangers.

*Tension:* Let the risk and danger of actual conflict grow quietly. Don't let it out. Hold it in. Let it build until it *cannot* be contained.

## CRUCIAL INFO REVEAL

- Show it happening.
- Scenes of biggest drama should be shown
- (not offstage or reported; real conflict, not fake conflict)

INTRIGUE: withhold info

SUSPENSE: show the danger

TIMING: readers learn when characters learn

## *When to reveal backstory:*

**Is this necessary to enjoy the story?**

- ✓ after a risky or dangerous scene (slow after fast)
- ✓ with some action or scene (discovery or conversation)
- ✓ deepen emotional attachment (right before danger)
- ✓ justify character motivations (explain choices)

### *When to remove backstory:*

#### **Who is giving this information right now, and why?**

- X just thinking out loud to themselves
- X telling someone who already knows
- X overt narration while characters stand still

### *Story Reveal Cheatsheet*

In the first 25% of the book, before you get to the point of no return, readers and characters should be asking **what** questions. What is even happening? What is this place? What is going to happen next?

At around 50%, this will change to **who** questions. Who is behind all this? Who can I trust? Who am I?

Finally, towards the end or around 75%, you'll have all the deep motivational reveals, either when the bad guy admits his evil plan and the reasons behind it; or after the major conflict when the danger has passed and you can finally let your characters sit down and fill each other in on the miscellaneous story details. These are the **why** questions.

	Ordinary World (start with lack)	
	Inciting Incident (call to adventure)	
<b>WHAT</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Plot Point (point of no return)</b>	25%
	1 <sup>st</sup> Pinch Point (first battle)	
<b>WHO</b>	<b>Midpoint (victim to warrior)</b>	50%
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Pinch Point (second battle)	
<b>WHY</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Plot Point (dark night of soul)</b>	75%
	Final Battle (triumph-knowledge)	
	Epilogue (come home changed)	

#### RED FLAGS:

- POV JUMPING: Sympathy / Timing. *Unresolved Conflict*
- BACKSTORY: If this already happened, it doesn't matter (no real stakes).
- BAIT & SWITCH: Hook them hard but then change topics and expect them to care.

## CHAPTER 4 NOTES

- Masterful writing is about keeping secrets
- The unfolding of unresolved conflict
- To make your story matter, increase the difficulty
- What hurts most goes last
- What do the characters need or want?
- What's stopping them? 3 hurdles/obstacles
- The most pressing thing replaces the big thing
- Reveal backstory after stakes are clear
- Real drama vs. accidental drama
- Show main conflict "on stage"
- Raise questions, before you give answers
- Solutions and answers must come at a cost
- Drama is the endurance of risk for the promise of result
- Push characters up the tree and throw rocks

“

The pen is a magic wand.  
Just as the slight flick  
of a conductor's baton  
commands symphonies,  
so too, with a curl  
of your finger,  
vanquish armies.

BOOK CRAFT

# PART TWO: WRITING

## 5: Hook attention

Chapter Five is about writing the first ¼ of your book, or “Act I” – up to the point of no return. The most important thing here is to grab readers’ attention, without giving them any backstory infodumps or getting distracted. Hook with action, suspense and intrigue, with love and fear (characters they care about, dealing with difficult challenges, in an interesting environment).

### *Writing scenes*

- regroup
- new plan
- thwart

Another way to phrase this would be:

- reaction
- decision
- dilemma

WHEN SOMETHING **HAPPENS... STOP**

Master the dramatic pause

### *Each scene must...*

- either be a reaction, decision or dilemma
- have unresolved conflict
- something needs to change
- present new information

### *Conflict reveals character:*

- doubt
- anger
- fear
- skepticism
- anger
- surprise
- prohibition

## *Other Ways to Add Conflict*

1. conflict between what *is* and what the protagonist *wants*
  2. conflict between what each of your characters want
  3. **conflict between your protagonist's inner wants and external duties (this works really well with romance; budding attraction which, if expressed, would ruin everything and prevent her from her ultimate goal).**
  4. foreboding or foreshadowing (something bad or evil is coming... give the readers a hint, even if **the protagonist doesn't see it, readers will feel it.**)
- **What's the most surprising thing that could happen?**
  - **What's the most visually stunning thing I can show?**
  - How could this hurt more? (physically, emotionally)

## MAPPING IT OUT (ACT ONE)

The First Act will have about 10 to 20 chapters, and take up 25% of the story. Here are some of the things that often happen in the first act.

- ✓ Ordinary world, building empathy
- ✓ Inciting event
- ✓ An event that creates desire or longing
- ✓ Another character asks a question that becomes a theme
- ✓ A moral dilemma
- ✓ Something embarrassing
- ✓ Takes action towards goal
- ✓ **They can't get what they want, so they change their plan**
- ✓ Attempts to fulfill their longing or need
- ✓ What goal does character take action to reach?
- ✓ Call to adventure/refuses quest
- ✓ Display of flaw
- ✓ A problem grows out of character weakness
- ✓ Meets with mentor
- ✓ Point of no return, accepts quest and commits to goal

## CHAPTER 5 NOTES

- Catch attention and interest
- Nothing matters if they **don't care**
- What happens, then stop (scene break)
- Change or reveal (action or new info)
- Reaction, new plan, event

- Irresolvable opposites that create friction
- Tension (pull the string)
- Snapshot (picture it)
- Urgency: why does this have to happen now?
- Relevancy: does this matter to the main story?
- Fulfilling the promise of the premise



## **6: Beginning of Act II**

In Chapter Six, now that they're paying attention, we can reveal more backstory to create sympathy for our characters; we'll also be sharing their interaction with the new world or environment or experience. Challenging events will prompt introspection and force commitment at the midpoint.

- ✓ The first act was to hook interest, *what's happening*.
- ✓ The next part is... why is this happening *to me*?

Their peers might be asking rational, plot-forwarding questions, like:

- Who is doing this, how do we stop it?
- What will they do next?

*But the protagonist, still resistant, might be asking:*

- How do I get out of this?
- How can I get back to normal?
- Am I enough?

## **Understanding leads to conviction**

Some things that might happen include:

- Finding answers / learning the rules
- New rivals and frenemies
- Feeling inadequate / getting bullied
- Fighting for stability / acceptance

- Struggling autonomy or understanding
- Revealing the dangers and challenges
- Small trials and quests (motivations)
- **Discovery goals (what's happening and why)**
- *New secrets to discover*

Promise: what readers expect from this story.

Progress: **signposts that let readers know we're still on track.**

Payoff: providing the experience readers signed up for.

In order to get readers to fall in love with your characters, try adding these to your cauldron:

- A secret
- A secret kindness
- What they do when they think nobody is watching
- An embarrassing mistake
- Something they find repulsive or hate (that they do anyway for someone else).
- **Something they've never told anyone**
- A memento or nostalgic keepsake
- An insecurity they hide
- Just being there (concern they try not to show)

## CHAPTER 6 NOTES

- Struggle to prove themselves
- Lovable characters through vulnerable backstory
- Get lost in the swamp (breathing room)
- Kiss and slap (contrast increases emotional peaks)
- The treasure and the bear are in the same cave
- Laughter and levity (world worth saving)
- The montage (incidental events that motivate)



## **7: End of Act II**

Chapter 7 focuses on the second half of Act II, where things start heating up. Sidequests and incidental moments take the backseat to increasing difficulties, but now the protagonist is taking action to resolve their situation (it makes things worse, creating guilt and resolve).

## ✓ Escalating Conflict with Personal Responsibility

- Hook: action, conflict, suspense
- Line: world-building, lovable characters
- Sinker: emotional depth and backstory

Here's a handy list or flowchart of what it takes to create "peak drama." These are the things we'll be focused on during this section.

1. Enough information to make an informed decision
2. Enough at stake to make a calculated risk
3. Enough responsibility to feel tragic guilt or loss
4. Vulnerable enough to be destroyed

### *Some things to include:*

- ✓ executing the plan
- ✓ battle scenes
- ✓ ticking clock (arbitrary countdown for reasons)
- ✓ big surprise (plot twists)
- ✓ non-literal battles
- ✓ deep near-admissions of feelings
- ✓ discovery quests revealing crucial information
- ✓ growing confidence and ability
- ✓ greater stakes increase anxiety and doubt
- ✓ flashbacks that show *why* this challenge is difficult

### *Three quick things:*

1. the action will always need to get bigger, so if you start off with motorcycle shootouts and ninja stars, you'll need to get creative towards the end.
2. In action scenes, use shorter sentences and focus on the small details, not the observations or thoughts.
3. If your protagonist suddenly jumps into a flawless roundhouse, you need to explain *way earlier* that they took karate for three years and somehow it became muscle memory.

Here are two easy tricks to remember:

- One reveal per scene
- Scene or chapter break

With plot twists or reveals, you'll probably have one of two situations.

- Reveals: why something happens (backstory dump)
- Twists: **what's really going on** (new knowledge)

## MAPPING IT OUT (ACT TWO)

The Second Act will have about 20 to 40 chapters, and should take up about 50% of your story. Often the Second Act goes too slowly, because authors are “stalling” until they can get to the exciting final scenes. You'll probably need to fill some chapters with subplots (stories that involve secondary characters).

## CHAPTER 7 NOTES

- Picking up steam/train wreck
- Broadening discomfort
- Investment/attachment
- Never guess the truth (defer knowledge)
- Show the opposite (surprise is the unexpected)
- External conflict reveals character flaws
- Profound realization leads to victory



## 8: Ending

In Chapter Eight, we'll be writing the last 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the book, or “Act III.” At this point the protagonist is fully aware of the devastating conflict they face and their own inadequacy; but they also realize they have no choice but to confront their fears.

## VIOLENT TRANSFORMATION

*The conclusion of your novel should feature:*

- Unlikely triumph through impossible action
- nothing left to lose/conviction

*All of the building conflicts or tensions, which have been sublimated, can creep out and wreak havoc in the third act. Use all your gunpowder. This is your last stand.*

- A small fight that becomes a big fight. Little nuisances and sniping escalate into big fighting.
- Tempers build until people start saying how they really feel; the real truth slips out, or a cutting remark that can't be taken back.
- Anger leads to backstabbing; publicly revealing or sharing a devastating secret that blows up someone's life.
- This reveal sparks a slow-burn subplot story that erupts. (oh, are we all sharing everything now? Well then...)
- Arguments escalate to a real emergency, accident or crisis. You've got to shut down the fight somehow, keeping tensions high without anyone backing down.
- That extra little push towards action.
- A cautionary tale reveal that makes the protagonist reconsider life choices and recognize fatal flaw.
- The slight win that shows what's possible; allowing a side character to get what they want.
- A meaningful memento of happy times, reflection on where they come from, what they're letting go, what they want.
- A reminder of what's important.
- An almost-action that fails. It's disappointing, and they learn they are still blocked by fear and resistance.
- Wise words of encouragement from an unexpected source.

### *Final battle notes:*

- Must be extremely challenging
- Villain has unexpected power or weapon
- Focus on the small detail
- Break up with banter, threats, gloating
- Triple the stakes after the hero has failed
- Real personal risk and external risk (selflessness)
- Death realization (and overcome)
- Epic Arena
- Flashback reveals crucial insight
- Inner and outer transformation

### WHEN IS IT OVER?

- Main story goal has been reached
- Conflict avoided or resolved
- Avoidance is no longer an option
- Change through confrontation.
- Worst fears realized
- Stop when enemy/threat is defeated
- Cliffhanger vs. epilogue resolution (afterglow)
- Return to the ordinary
- How do they feel? How are they treated?

# The Magic Words

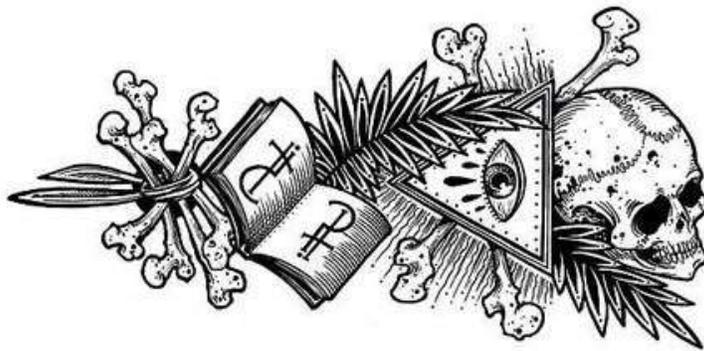
## *The formula for powerful story*

- ✓ Razzle Dazzle (distract with action) 25% - WHAT
- ✓ Hocus Pocus (engage with fun weirdness) 50% - WHO
- ✓ Shazam (charge with energy) 75% - WHY
- ✓ Abracadabra (reveal the unexpected) 100% - WOW

*Attention, distraction, expectation, fulfillment.*

## CHAPTER 8 NOTES

- Tie the knot until it can't be cut
- Bind the character with impossible choices
- Move past expectation of reward
- Stretch the critical moment before the big reveal
- Terror and horror (surface danger vs. personal unmaking)
- Deeper depths lead to a satisfying resolution



## PART THREE: EDITING

### *The Editing Process:*

We'll be focused on fixing specific issues, in an order that I think makes the most sense, from the happenings, to the motivations and descriptions, before finally moving on to the actual typos and mistakes. In the first draft, we just try to put down *what* happens, in the most impactful way. In the second draft we focus on *why* it happens (character motivation). In the third draft we focus on *how* it happens (what it looks like, and stoking the emotional angst). All of that needs to happen before we even begin to worry about the actual words.

**WHAT.** After I finish a first rough draft, I'll go back and fill in any gaps or fix narrative problems, focusing on the events or incidents. Getting things in the right order so they make sense, so readers can read through the book without feeling confused or disoriented. The right stuff needs to happen, in the right order, or else more polishing is useless. I also want to make the "right stuff" interesting by adding as much conflict and tension as possible.

**WHY.** Once I'm pretty sure everything is in the right place, I'll pay attention to the motivations: why does this happen, why are characters doing these things? I'll need to create backstory, plant clues, establish facts. If they need a pair of scissors in the last chapter, I'll make sure to add one into the right scene earlier so it doesn't just appear. I'll make sure everything makes sense and is believable.

**HOW.** In the third stage, I'll look at how things actually look, and describe the setting, character movements, clothes and scenery. I want to make sure readers can picture it clearly. I want to avoid reference points ("small items") and change them to real descriptions ("a pot of tea, spools of thread and an orange crayons). I'll make sure I'm using expressions and postures, without overdoing or repeating any too often.

Through that process, I'm also fixing any typos or mistakes I find, but I'm not actively seeking them out and I won't worry too much about word choice or sentence structure. This is actually a 3-step *revision* process followed by a final, 4<sup>th</sup> step, which includes copy editing and proofreading.

1. **What:** what actually happens (happenings, *story*)
2. **Why:** why does it matter? (provocation, *motivations*)
3. **How:** how does it look? (elucidation, *description*)

4. **Now:** is it ready? (clarification, *erratum*)

## 9. What happens (story)

In Chapter Nine, we'll focus on going through our first rough draft and fixing the story, by looking at what actually happens: we'll fill in gaps and make sure the story is sound and arresting. We'll also be deleting or revising those massive infodumps of backstory and description, and making sure each scene has conflict and purpose.

- Is it interesting?
- Is it plausible?
- Does it make sense?
- Is it necessary?

### **SHOW DON'T TELL:**

1. Who is saying this?
2. What are your characters doing?
3. What does this look like?

- Force your characters into impossible situations, wrought with conflict
- Have them dig themselves deeper, refusing to give up or change their ideals or desires. Their resistance creates tension.
- Force them to finally have to sacrifice it all anyway, and in *that* revelation, the bow is released with a satisfying resonance, the arrow pierces the target.
- **Don't pause and explain (allow the mystery)**
- Unfolding action, without commentary
- What's actually there, how does this look?



## 10. Motivation (plot holes)

In Chapter Ten we'll focus on the second stage of revision, which is about character motivation. *This* is when you figure out where your backstory and reveals go for maximum impact.

**Find plot holes with these questions:**

1. Why are the characters doing this?
2. Why does any of it matter?

To fix plot holes and gaps in logic or continuity, you can add urgency, fix the mood of the scene (bigger stakes require bigger justifications), show characters in a weak mental state, or raise concerns but have them dismissed. You need show *why* they don't do something easier, or nothing at all, or *why* they face clear challenges and what they expect and prepare for.

- Why don't they just...?
- Raise and dismiss
- Limited window
- Emotional consistency
- Relevance

Your protagonist needs to have a strong, consistent internal compass, and it needs to be revealed through incidents that establish their character. This is *who they are*. Without it this reliable core identity, we won't be able to tell a story that forces them to change.

- ✓ Plot holes are unfixable story questions that tear readers out of their suspended disbelief, and make them question and doubt the entire enterprise. If they're big enough, they'll throw the book across the room in frustration.
- ✓ Plot holes can be skipped over by entertaining plausible motivations or justifications for the characters' actions, and showing your work: what do they need to do next, what's their plan, what do they hope to achieve?
- ✓ Making decisions are what creates our unique identities; stories are about character. Show the struggle to decide; that's who your character is, and what your story is about.
- ✓ Nobody is perfect, but their actions will be determined by their experiences, by who they are and what they've been through. They can be an irrational *mess*; but they will be consistent. Eventually you need to show how they got that way, and if it's your protagonist, find a way to improve.
- ✓ Conflict and stress can create turmoil that allows careful consideration to devolve into irrational, reckless behavior. *Provoke* them into making mistakes.

## CHAPTER 10 NOTES

- Why do things happen?
- Prod and poke
- Raise and dismiss
- Sticks and carrots

- The antagonist can't change; the protagonist does
- Spectacle and mystery
- Internal consistency
- Explanations of occurrences or appearances



## 11. Description

Chapter Eleven is about worldbuilding and scene description; we'll also improve dialogue and add character movement to fix pacing. We'll use descriptive details to support the story, without being distracting or irrelevant.

*How does this look?*

- Spotighting
- Description in action
- Get the basics early
- Location details
- Mood of scene
- Anchoring

### *Simple Dialogue Rules*

- Use contractions. People almost never speak without them, unless they are being especially careful to enunciate, like during a tense conversation.
- Don't say each other's names. After being introduced, unless it's necessary to direct their question towards one person, characters probably won't be constantly using each other's names.
- Almost always, you can get away with *he said, she said*, but that only refers back to the last character mentioned. If there are more than a couple characters, be careful here.
- Try to avoid a descriptive title: if a character hasn't been named yet so you're just calling him the *young boy* or *green-hat guy* or whatever, it can get old fast.
- Skip banal small talk. Don't let people talk about unimportant things. Everything should have tension or conflict, so if they are being nice on the surface, there should be deeper emotional undercurrents like distrust or anxiety.
- Don't allow a character to launch into an extended soliloquy or argument to illustrate their backgrounds or beliefs. If someone knows them, they've probably heard it before: so they'll just say *okay grandpa* and tune them out. If it's a stranger, why would a stranger sit and listen to this announcement unless it was absolutely relevant?
- Give them something to do, so they're not just sitting around talking; the task should be related to their next most pressing story goal.

## *The 5 big rules of description*

1. Readers will remember the pictures you put in their heads, not the words on the page.
2. Description should serve and be bound to the story, not distract from it.
3. It should be squeezed into and around the scene action, when the protagonist is using or exploring.
4. **Show what's *different*, not what's the same.**
5. **Leave space for readers to fill in the gaps, but get them started in the right direction so they aren't surprised later.**

## CHAPTER 11 NOTES

- *How* does this look?
- How do the pieces fit?
- How does it make sense (details)
- Transportation/movement/location
- Object permanence
- Flash of color/totem
- Break up dialogue with movement
- **What's she/he wearing?**
- Mood and ambiance
- Spotlight **what's important**
- Highlight pivotal scenes



## 12. Editing

Finally in Chapter Twelve I talk about editing and proofreading, including word choice, readability, common writing mistakes, punctuation, and cleaning up the manuscript to get it ready to share.

- Repetition, consistency, details
- First paragraphs, ending hooks, conclusion
- Typos, spelling errors, punctuation
- Repetition and word choice
- Intros and outros.
- Italics and bold for emphasis.
- Never resort to ALL CAPS or ?!
- Consistent punctuation
- Repetitive gestures.
- Anything other than “said”

- Repetition, consistency, details
  - First paragraphs, ending hooks, conclusion
  - Typos, spelling errors, punctuation
  - Preparing the book for consumption
  - Meeting the requirements
  - Surrendering the work to fulfill its purpose
- ✓ Read my big list of [25 First Chapter Mistakes](#).

## Thanks!

This is meant as a simple study or reference guide so you don't have to dig through the book to be reminded of the crucial guides and strategies. You can print it out, or just use it to make your own notes. Don't forget to watch the videos, and I hope you'll leave a review of *Book Craft* if you've found my resources useful.



- [Review \(or get\) the book](#)
- [Watch the videos](#)

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