

*Inspiration for  
Writers*



Tips and  
Techniques  
Workbook



*Third Edition*

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# Section One

## Getting Ready to Write



Advice for Beginners  
Inspirations  
A Special Place, A Special Time  
A Special Person  
Doing it



## Getting Ready to Write: Advice for Beginners

So you wanna be a writer when you grow up, huh? My first word of advice is don't. Don't become a writer. Not for money. Not for glory. Not for any reason other than that you have a passion in your gut that is so strong that nothing can prevent you from writing. Unless you have stories in you that you must tell, and writing them is as important to you as eating and sleeping and breathing. And sometimes more important.

With that out of the way, I assume you have passion. So, what do you do with this life of yours to pave your way to the writing world? **Read. Observe. Write. Live.** Those are the four main ingredients to preparing yourself to write.

**Read** everything you can get your hands on. Read classic literature, read literary fiction, read commercial fiction. Read books on the craft of writing. Read books on writers. Read dictionaries. Read cereal boxes. Just read.

**Observe.** If there is one attribute a writer must have (other than his passion to write), it is the ability to notice details. What is it about the way she walks that captures your attention? Is it her clothes? Her figure? Her wiggle? What words could you use to describe the preacher's snorts between shouts? What do his eyes look like when he says "Hell"? What keeps his hair from falling into his eyes (or onto the floor)?

Look at your surroundings as though you're showing them to someone who's never been to your area. Notice the sounds you would hear if you listened. Notice the smells, the colors, the textures, everything you normally take for granted. Think of new ways to describe old things.

**Write** every day. It doesn't matter if it's a dozen words or a dozen pages, write. And don't limit your writing to your passion—try writing poetry, fiction, journal entries, essays. Keep a journal or notebook with you at all times and jot your thoughts as you think them.

**Live.** Can you write about New York City if you've never been there? Probably—if you've seen enough movies and read enough descriptions, you could write with integrity about a city you've never seen. However, you would not be able to add new insight. For me, a small town girl, it was the vastness of the big city that took my breath away. And that most of the thousands of people all scurrying to some place would gladly pause a moment to give directions or advice.

Visit as many places as you possibly can, but also consider actually living in as many different types of places as you can. Yes, you can get superficial impressions of cultures during a seven-day vacation, but to truly understand a culture, you need to experience it more deeply. I've lived in small towns, large cities, suburbs, villages and deep in the country. I've lived in apartments, houses, complexes, dormitories, alone, with friends, with family. I've lived in Appalachia, the Midwest and the Deep South. And each of these has left an imprint (as well as an accent!).

Experience as many aspects of life as you can. Can you really understand the pain of heartbreak if you've never been loved and left? Can you understand the intensity of a mother's (or father's) love if you've never experienced it? Can you understand the thrill of surviving the bunny slope on down hill skis if you've never put your life at stake?

This isn't to say you must become an alcoholic to understand alcoholism (although it does help ☺) or a bank robber to understand a thief. What it does mean is that writers need





to take more chances than the average Joe, need to experience more of life in order to write more knowledgeably. It also means that writers must have empathy to understand people and situations beyond their personal experience.

What kind of job should you hold while waiting to publish? Well, many successful writers have had successful careers in business, law, medicine, education or any area you can think of before becoming published. So it doesn't matter a lot what your "day" job is, just don't go into debt. Live humbly and within your means, because once you sign that car loan, you are obligated to your 8-5 job.

Of course, some jobs will give you more "material" to incorporate into your writing than others. If you are just passing time, here are some suggestions:

- Work with people from diverse backgrounds, such as you can meet in airports, resorts, hotels and restaurants. These give you plenty of characters to draw from.
- Work physically. Manual work doesn't occupy your mind. I do some of my best creative thinking while washing dishes by hand and mopping floors.
- Work where you have free time to write, such as night desk clerk, night guard at a business, bowling alley clerk (on the slow shift), car lot attendant, and so on.

I am fond of saying that there are two aspects to writing—the craft and the art. The craft is that which can be learned—grammar, using active voice, the basics of dialogue and so forth. The art is the God-given talent that a writer is either blessed with or isn't. It is the ability to "see" the details in a setting and relay that in interesting, unique words to make the reader feel the location. It is the ability to understand human nature and empathize with even the most dastardly villain. If you have that talent, and if you have that passion to write no matter what the odds, you are a writer. And nobody can take that away from you.





## Getting Ready to Write: Inspirations

Well, if I didn't scare you off in the last section, I guess you've made up your mind. In that case, you're going to need some inspiration. I've printed some of my favorite inspirations on the back cover and at the end of this book. Whenever you see a profound statement (or one that seems profound to you), cut it out or copy it, and hang it where you can see it frequently. Constantly.

Writing a novel is a lonely job that has few rewards until it is finished. Therefore, it is imperative to stay focused and to stay positive. Surrounding yourself with reminders is one of the easiest ways to do this. (The other way—paying people to constantly tell you you're doing great and so forth—becomes costly).

When I first started submitting material to agents and received my first rejection letters, I was enthused. Now, some people would think that a rejection letter is a depressing thing, but not to me (not then, anyway). It made me feel like a "real" writer, made me feel like I had made contact with the "real" writing world. So, I taped every rejection letter on the wall. On top of each rejection, I taped an inspirational quote. I called it my "Wall of Shame." As I received awards for my writing, I added these to my wall. I also copied any checks I received for readings or competitions, any thank-you notes, anything that had to do with writing. Pretty soon, I had half of one dining room wall "papered." Eventually, my handy husband decided to remodel and my wall came down, but it had served its purpose when I needed it: it kept me focused on writing and connected to the writing world.

Don't be embarrassed to do whatever you need to do to bolster your morale. And quit referring to yourself as "wanting to be a writer" or a "writer wannabe." Once you actually put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard), you are a writer. Say that out loud: "I am a writer." Say it again: "I am a writer." One more time: "I am a writer." Make that your new mantra and repeat it several times a day. You *are* a writer. Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this book.





## Getting Ready to Write: A Special Place, A Special Time

Many successful writers advise that it is important to have a special place set aside in which to write. A room, a desk, a closet—somewhere that is reserved only for the act of writing. I think this is wonderful. If you can do this, and if this helps you get into the “writing mood,” do it.

Many writers also suggest setting aside a special time to write. To sit in your special place for thirty minutes or four hours or however long you’ve set aside, and discipline yourself to write. Again, I think this is great. Some writers are very disciplined and get up at 4 a.m. to have three hours to write before starting their workday. This impresses the heck out of me, but I know the snooze button on my alarm would be worn out if I tried it.

In fact, none of this has ever worked for me. I write any where, any time. I keep a pad of paper by my bedside, so when I awaken at 3 a.m. with the solution to my writing dilemma, I am ready to write. I keep paper in my car, so when I’m waiting to pick up my kids or stuck in traffic, I can write. I keep paper in my oversized handbag, so while I’m at the doctor’s office or the PTA meeting, I can write. And I keep a laptop computer in my living room, in the same room as the television set and the energetic teenagers and the dog and the husband and the birds, and while I’m enjoying family time, I write.

For me, finding the time to write or the place to write has never been the problem. For me, forcing myself to finish my chores before I write, making myself accept my other responsibilities before I write, is the problem.

Writer’s Block? Uh-uh. I believe that writer’s block is what happens when we don’t know what comes next in our story. So start another story. I always have several projects open at a time—two or three novels, two or three short stories, and usually a few nonfiction or workshop projects. Anytime my brain gets tired or stuck on one story, I’ve got another to go to. Of course, the danger in this is that it is easy never to actually finish any one project, but that, again, is where discipline comes in. I try to assign “priorities” to my work. I usually have one fiction and one non-fiction project that is my current priority, and I don’t switch to one of the other projects unless I am truly stuck and need a break.

It is also easy to be overtaken by distractions. During the day, when I am home alone, I never turn on the television set. And those wonderful computer games that are so compelling? I have to admit, I love them. I compete against myself constantly in trying to do better all the time. But I only allow myself to indulge in the late evenings, when my house is usually so active that I would have difficulty concentrating on writing anyway.

I wrote my first novel while working full-time with three small children at home. I wrote during lunch breaks, while stirring spaghetti sauce, while pumping gas. I wrote at every possible snippet of time, and when I wasn’t physically writing, my mind was busy working out plot and such so that when I could grab a pen and paper, I’d be ready to go.

The moral of the story: if you want to write, you will find the time and you will find the space. If you are the type of person who needs structure, then give that to yourself. Set aside a desk and a special time. However, if you have such a burning desire to write that nothing will stop you from doing it, then don’t limit yourself to a special place or a special time. Just do it.





## Getting Ready to Write: A Special Person

Much of becoming a proficient writer is based upon experience (actually doing the writing) and on learning the craft of writing. However, it is difficult to see our own writing with the same clarity that an outsider can see it. So, there comes a time when we need to seek advice from others.

Many writers turn to their spouse, lover or best friend. While this person may have our best interests at heart, he or she (unless also a writer) will rarely have the insight we need to make our writing better. So what is a writer to do?

- Join a writer's group. Check your local library, check the listings in the Arts and Humanities section of your newspaper, or check the Internet to see if a writer's group exists in your area. A good writer's group will consist of at least one or two people who are knowledgeable in the art of writing and who are interested in sharing that knowledge with others. The members of a good writer's group will be constructive in all criticism, and never sarcastic, egotistical or jealous.
- Create your own writer's group. Join up with a couple of your writer friends and meet regularly to review one another's work. Use the same precautions in creating this group as listed above.
- Take a Creative Writing class at your local college.
- Attend as many writer conferences and workshops as possible. Again, pay attention to notices at libraries, art centers and schools for information about upcoming events. Also watch for advertisements in writing magazines or scan the Internet.
- Submit your writing for a professional edit and critique. Find these services in the classified section of writer magazines or by scanning the Internet for "manuscript critique." These services most often charge, and the rates can vary greatly. Some things to look for: does the fee include both line-by-line editing and an overview critique? Are follow-up conferences provided? Are references available? What are the qualifications of the provider? Do you feel comfortable with the person?

In the best of all worlds, every new writer would have a special mentor—someone who is knowledgeable in the art and the craft of writing, someone who has already gone through the growing stages, someone who has a special interest in the new writer, and someone who is willing to encourage, challenge and teach that new writer. Keep your eyes open, and don't be embarrassed to ask.





## Getting Ready to Write: Doing It

Okay, all the preparation in the world, all the good intentions in the world, all the *thinking* in the world, doesn't write a book. The only way to write a book is to put pen to paper or finger to keyboard and *write*. Do it. And do it regularly.

End of sermon.





# Section Two

## The Basics



Plot  
Characterization  
Setting  
Dialogue/Exercise  
Point of View/Exercise  
Voice/Tense/Intimacy



## The Basics: Plot

Before you can start writing, you must have at least a basic idea of the three major components of a story. **Plot** is what happens. **Character** is to whom it happens. And **setting** is where *and* when it happens. Most stories are either plot-driven or character-driven. A plot-driven novel is one in which **what** happens is more important than to **whom** it happens. An example of this is an action/adventure novel. A character-driven novel is one in which a character evolves during the story, and what happens isn't as important as how the character reacts to what happens. An example of this is a romance novel.

A successful plot must have a struggle of some sort—on one hand, something that a character (or characters) wants, and on the other hand, something that prevents the character from having it.

Plots are based upon three fundamental struggles:

- Man-against-man—this is when another character (the antagonist) is at odds with the protagonist (the main character) and tries to prevent the protagonist from accomplishing his goal. An example of this would be a cop chasing down a serial killer.
- Man-against-nature—this is when nature (or, possibly, machinery) causes problems for the protagonist. An example of this would be a man left behind in Antarctica, fighting for survival against the elements of nature.
- Man-against-himself—this is when some character flaw within the protagonist prevents him from achieving his greatest desire. An example of this would be a man who wants a happy home life, but who battles alcoholism.

Many novels have a main plot with several subplots spidering off of it. However, in order to keep a handle on things and to prevent random rambling, it is important to have a **focus statement** to give your story cohesiveness. A focus statement describes your story's basic plot in one sentence. Yes. One sentence. Forcing this focus gives you a home base to return to and reflect from, and ensures that you don't drift too much in other directions. Examples of a focus statement:

- An uneducated man from the slums climbs through the political world in his quest to become President.
- A teenager hones his acting skills in hopes of making it big on the Silver Screen.
- An alcoholic mother struggles to raise her children.

A plot must also have three distinct parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. The **beginning**, of course, is where the story starts. The setting must be firmly established (both place and time), the main character must be introduced, and the **story question** must be presented. The story question puts the focus statement into a "what if" format:

- Will the uneducated man from the slums be able to achieve his goal to become President?
- Can the teenager make it big on the Silver Screen?
- Will the alcoholic mother be able to successfully raise her children?





The **middle** of the story is where we build the action and further develop the characters. The middle of the story is the link between the beginning and the end, and that which makes the end possible.

The **end** of the story consists of two parts, the **climax** and the **resolution**. The climax is the turning point in the novel, where the tension is highest. The climax is where all seems lost, where decisions must be made, where life and death hangs on the balance. The climax should lead directly into the resolution, which should answer the story question and resolve the character statement of the main character (usually, these will be linked). In a character-driven novel, the main character should be changed in some way—wiser, more mature, kinder, perhaps even more cynical—but he/she must have undergone a change. If his character goal has not been achieved, then it must be resolved (perhaps the uneducated man from the slums decides that he can make a greater impact on society if he becomes a teacher than he could make as President or perhaps the teenager’s father is seriously injured in an accident and the youth realizes that nothing is more important than his family and he’d prefer to stay close to home).

Plot is accomplished through a series of **scenes**. A scene is the dramatization of one snapshot in time—what happens at one specific place at one specific time. Of course, the action may unwind over a period of several minutes or longer, but once the action is transferred to a different setting or to a different character, that scene ends and another scene begins. (However, the same scene continues if the viewpoint character himself is moving, say walking down the street from one house to another, or if the omniscient point of view is used). Every scene in a novel must further the plot or develop a character (preferably both at the same time); otherwise, it is an extraneous scene and should be cut. Every scene should also have a feeling of completeness about it. This is accomplished by ending the scene with an action, thought or dialogue by the viewpoint character, hopefully resolving or reviewing whatever “mini-crisis” the scene presented.

Most writers divide their novel into chapters. Some give a title to each chapter; others just use numbers. There are no rules for assigning chapters, although I’ve read advice that suggests that each chapter should consist of three scenes or each chapter should consist of twenty pages. I think this is up to the individual writer.

Plot is certainly one of the most important components in your novel. There are several ways to go about developing plot. Some people outline, putting every scene on an index card. Some people know the entire plot before they even write one word; others discover the plot as they write. **Section 8** contains a reproducible **Chapter Summary Worksheet**, should you like to outline your chapters. **Section 8** also contains a reproducible **Novel Summary Worksheet**, which helps identify each component of your novel. This summary can be used with the **Character Trait Charts** and the other material available to create a detailed reference of all the components of your story. If it works for you, use it. If it doesn’t, don’t.

In the meantime, happy plotting!





## The Basics: Characterization

A story wouldn't be a story unless it happened to somebody. And that somebody—and all the other somebodies in the novel—are the characters. A good novel—even an action-based, plot-driven novel—must have carefully conceived characters who are able to withstand the demands of the story and who are able to change in some way. I have devoted **Section 3** to developing characters, so I'll only touch on the basics here.

The **protagonist** is the main character in the story. He or she is the character the reader should identify with, or, at least, empathize with. The protagonist—and every other character who is integral to the plot—should have a **character statement**. This is one sentence that says what, more than anything else in the world, this character wants. Examples of character statements:

- Mike is determined to become President of the United States.
- Susan wants to marry Mike.
- Harmond wants to survive, to return to Kansas and marry his high school sweetheart.
- More than anything in the world, Kerry wants to be a movie star.
- Jenny wants to be a good mom, to be there for her kids, to give them the love and attention they need to grow into happy and successful adults.

Of course, in order for a story to be a story, there must be something that is preventing the protagonist from accomplishing his character statement—something he must overcome in order to achieve his greatest desire. This inter-relates with plot, where the three basic struggles are man-against-man, man-against-nature, and man-against-himself.

The **character conflict** identifies what it is that your character must overcome in order to accomplish his character statement. Examples of conflict statements are:

- Mike's second cousin also wants to be President, and will do anything to defeat Mike—including revealing a family secret that will ruin Mike's marriage.
- Mike is already engaged to Sally, who insists Susan is a tramp.
- Harmond is lodged in a crevice near Victoria Falls, alone.
- Kerry lives 3000 miles from Hollywood and his parents refuse to move.
- Jenny is an alcoholic.

Giving life to a character is one of the most rewarding parts of being a writer. It is also one of the most difficult. Too many times in fiction, we witness the “cardboard” or one-dimensional character. Real characters, those we can visualize and root for and love, aren't created with the snap of a finger. Instead, they develop over time, over many hours spent together. Surely, writing is a spiritual endeavor. The closest any of us will ever mimic God is by our desire to create another human. But when we do, we find out something that God discovered years ago: once you breathe life into a being, he takes on a life of his own.





## The Basics: Setting

Setting is the time and the place where a story exists. This seems simple enough. But the selection of setting interweaves with both the character and the plot. For example, Kerry lives in the rural south, far from the site of his dreams. This is what complicates his plot. Mike's story can take on different facades, depending on whether he lives in the District of Columbia, New York City, or Small Town, Idaho. And poor Harmond is stranded on a mountaintop, far from any civilization, perhaps surrounded by frightening snakes and spiders. The setting must add dimension to—and interact with—both the plot and the character.

We present setting through description. We must be able to visualize where we are. We should be able to smell it, hear it, feel it. If at all possible, visit the area you are describing in your story. If you are writing a scene that occurs in a forest, take a field trip to the nearest woods and hike into it a ways until you can hear the birds, smell the pine, feel the dampness. If you can't physically go there, close your eyes and imagine yourself there. Then, think beyond your first impressions and try to identify sounds, smells, sights, feelings, even tastes, that you didn't notice at first. These will give your description that fresh, unique feel. And always try to include as many of the five senses as you can in your descriptions.

If you are unable to visit the location of your setting, research it. Find photographs, watch videos, talk to someone who was there. Try again to get beyond the everyday description and discover something unique about the setting that can add zing to your prose.

The second part of setting is time. What year, what time of year, what day, what time of day, does the scene occur in? We can show each of these—and the passage of time—in creative ways. If you are writing a novel that occurs in the present day, keep your eyes and ears open for sights and phrases that may someday date your work. If you are writing a novel that occurs in the past, do your homework. Research the time period carefully. Check out the styles of clothing, the manner of speaking, the popular music, the way of life. I especially like to add music to my writing, as this gives the setting a special flavor and incorporates the sense of hearing. I keep a copy of *The Billboard Book of Number One Hits* on my desk, which lists (and gives details about) every song that made it to Number One on the Billboard Weekly List. That way, if I'm writing about being in a nightclub in 1956, I can expect to hear Elvis sing "Heartbreak Hotel." If I'm at the same place in 1965, I can expect to hear the Beatles sing "Eight Days a Week." In 1975, I'll hear the Eagles. In 1987, Bon Jovi. In 1995, Mariah Carey. And so on. By referring to particular songs by particular artists, the time period becomes more vivid.

Likewise, if you can accurately and completely describe the style of dress of your characters, the food they eat, the things they drink (who would have ever heard of bottled water in the 1800's?) and so forth, you bring integrity to your work. An added bonus of research is that often you will discover something that adds a dimension to your writing—something you hadn't thought of.

It is also wise to check out any events that occurred during the time period of your novel. Perhaps you don't remember exactly what years the Great Depression occurred, but if your character is living during those years, it must become a fabric of your work. Wars, natural disasters, assassinations, discoveries, diseases—all of these add realism to your setting and make the reader feel the full impact of the time.





Until I am finished with a novel, I put the date of the scene right in my manuscript, so I'll know what day of the week I'm in, what happened on that day, who was in the news and so forth. Later, when I'm finished, I remove these. They are there just to keep me honest, to keep me true to the history of the time period I am using. I also print out a yearly calendar of the year, so I'll know what day of week a certain date falls on, when Easter is, when Elvis died, and so forth.

Setting can also help us show passing time. Surely, the trees in the winter look differently than they do in the fall, summer or spring. And by showing the leaves budding, blooming, changing color and falling off, we can document the passing of the seasons. And the morning sun looks differently than the setting sun and the moon and stars change as well. We can also use weather, depending on where we are—snow, tornadoes and so forth—to add dimension and show the season.

One final word on setting: like character description, it should be fed to us in pieces. Not one long description, but a sentence here, a couple of words there, sprinkled throughout our prose so the reader is constantly aware of where and when they are, but are not overwhelmed (or bored) by lengthy passages.





## The Basics: Dialogue

Have you ever read a court transcript? It accurately gives a word-by-word report of exactly what is said. But is it interesting?

Uh-uh. If we wrote verbatim the way we talk, our readers would execute us at dawn (or maybe earlier). So what do we do to create “natural” dialogue?

First, we must listen to the way people talk —both the choice of words and the rhythm of those words. People rarely speak in long sentences or without pausing (except for my mother), so we must write dialogue in fragmented sentences and in short bursts.

Second, we must decide which of these spoken words are worthy of writing. For example, in real life, when we greet someone we generally say, “hello,” then ask how he is, maybe how his family is, and so forth. But this is boring stuff to a reader, who is smart enough to realize small talk occurs and impatient enough to want to get immediately to the meat of the conversation. Therefore, we need to eliminate the “niceties” and get on to what the reader wants to read.

And third, we need to add body language and action to dialogue to convey its true meaning. For example, a character says, “*You jerk.*” Without body language, we don’t know what the emotional value of this statement is. Consider the following statements:

- “You jerk,” he said, his eyebrow cocked just enough so I’d know he was challenging me, that he was checking to see if I would back down or not.
- “You jerk,” he said, and the twinkle in his eye told me that I’d finally earned his respect.
- “You jerk!” Carl slapped his knee and laughed from his belly until I feared he’d fall down.

As you can see, it is the action and body language that allows us to interpret the meaning of the words. Since the reader cannot see the character talking, it is our job to describe all the information the reader needs.

Adding action and body language to our prose also accomplishes another task: it slows the pacing. Now, there are times when rapid-fire dialogue is necessary, such as at high drama points when things are moving quickly, or after a long descriptive section to pick up the pace. Monologues usually do NOT need interrupted by tags or action, as the story being told is the story holding (we hope!) the reader’s attention and to suspend it would be distracting.

There are no precise rules for writing dialogue that I am aware of, but an ear for it is developed by reading aloud. Do you start drifting? You need action. Do you forget who’s talking? You need a tag. Is the conversation moving too quickly? You need a break —narrative or action —to even out the pacing.

Here are some quick tips for writing dialogue:

- Don’t sound out sound effects (this is called “onomatopoeia”). This is annoying. Simply state, “The gun shot echoed through the chapel,” instead of “Bang! Bang! Bang!”
- Take it easy on dialect. Sounding out words becomes distracting and time-consuming, and most readers tire of it quickly. Instead, use the grammar and rhythm of the character to insinuate the dialect or tag it with an explanation. Examples: Instead of writing: “I vill dough zit meself,” write: “*I will do it myself,*” she said, her Polish accent thick, the way it





was when she was tired or sick. Likewise, instead of writing, “*It doune make no differen’ ta me, I’m goin’ eenyway,*” write: “*It don’t make no difference to me, I’m going anyway.*”

- Don’t include “well,” “uh,” and other such nonsense unless it serves a very good purpose. (Such as a character whose only word is “uh,” or a character whose main distinction is prefacing every statement with “well.”)
- Keep your tags invisible (more on this below).
- Keep your tags either interspersed with action and description or at the end of the quote. A tag at the beginning (although occasionally okay) tends to make the writing more passive. Consider which of the following carries the most power:

He said, “Help me. I need help.”  
 “Help me. I need help,” he said.  
 “Help me,” he said. “I need help.”

While we are talking about dialogue, we should also discuss how to tag it. A dialogue tag identifies who the speaker is and, sometimes, the manner in which he has spoken. “John said” is a dialogue tag. Let’s look at an example of how NOT to tag dialogue:

*“Just be like that,” she pouted.*  
*“Oh, come on,” he groaned. “Not this again.”*  
*“You don’t love me,” she replied.*  
*“Right,” he snarled. “That’s why I bought you an eight hundred dollar diamond.”*  
*“Here,” she sobbed. “Just take it back. Take it.”*

Okay, what’s wrong with our sample above (other than being melodramatic)? It’s an ailment I like to call “Creative Dialogue Tag Syndrome” —the writer relies on creative tags (pouted, groaned, replied, snarled, sobbed) so the reader will know how to interpret the dialogue. What’s wrong with this? Let me count the things:

- The reader must interpret the tag and evaluate if the dialogue agrees with the tag. At best, it disrupts the flow. At worst, the reader decides the two are contradictory and the writer loses credibility.
- It is *telling* the reader how the words are said instead of *showing*.
- If the dialogue is well written and the accompanying action is well chosen, it is redundant.
- It is annoying.

Consider, instead:

*Shelly’s lower lip quivered. “Just be like that.”*  
*Mike rolled his eyes. “Oh, come on,” he said. “Not this again.”*  
*“You don’t love me.”*  
*“Right,” he said. “That’s why I bought you an eight hundred dollar diamond.”*  
*“Here.” She pulled off the ring and shoved it under his nose. “Just take it back,” she said, her voice breaking. “Take it.”*





Okay, so nothing's going to help our melodrama too much, but let's still examine the techniques used. We scrapped every creative dialogue tag. Every one. We replaced each with one of four techniques:

- No tag at all. This allows the power of the words to stand alone. As long as we know who's speaking, no law says we must use a tag.
- Action. "Shelly's lower lip quivered" replaces "she pouted." It's more specific, it allows us to visualize Shelly, and it's showing, not telling. This is preferable to using a tag.
- The prosaic "said." Yes, "said" is boring. It's overused. In fact, it is so boring and overused that it's invisible. Just like "the" and "a" and "his" and other parts of speech that are used several times on each page, "said" slides right past the reader and allows him to concentrate on what's important: the action and the dialogue.
- A combination of "said" and action. This is particularly effective when interrupting dialogue, as in the last sentence of the "after" example above.

While we are on the topic of dialogue tags, let's also talk about correct punctuation. If a tag is used (preferably "said," but an occasional "asked" or "repeated" is permitted), a comma separates the dialogue from the tag (see examples in sentences 2 and 4 above). If action only (no tag at all, as in the first sentence in the example) is used, it is considered a separate and complete sentence and should be punctuated as such. If it is necessary to interrupt a dialogue sentence, as in the last sentence in the above example, use the tag and action, thus allowing a comma instead of a period.

Note: "*I love you,*" *she smiled,* is never correct. "Smiled" cannot be a tag; it is an action. Therefore, it can be written in one of two ways: "*I love you,*" *she said and smiled.* - or - "*I love you.*" *She smiled.*

If your dialogue contains a question, such as: "*Who are you?*" *he asked,* it is not necessary to punctuate with a question mark *and* use "asked" as a tag. This is personal choice and personally, I usually use the tag.

Dialogue is one of the most important tools a writer has to convey character and to build plot. Using it effectively means tagging it effectively. Read the before and after examples given here aloud. Hear the difference. Hear the redundancy. Hear the invisibility of the hardworking "said."

It will be the best friend you ever had.





## EXERCISES-Dialogue

(See **Section 6** for possible solutions)

1. Cut the extraneous dialogue:

*“Hi,” Jan said.*

*“Hi,” Amber answered. “How have you been?”*

*“Just fine. How’s your Mom?”*

*“Good. Have you seen Justin Powers lately?”*

*Jan’s heart beat faster. “Why?”*

*“Just wondered. Uh, I’m thinking about asking him to the dance.”*

*“He’s already got a date,” Jan said, trying to keep the venom out of her voice.*

*“Oh?”*

*“Yeah. You’re looking at her.”*

*Amber took a step back. “Well, what do you know.”*

*Jan looked at her watch. “My mom is waiting for me.”*

*“Okay, I’ll see you later.”*

*“Bye.” She turned and walked away.*

2. Give life to the following dialogue:

*“Sit down here, honey, and let Mommy see,” Jane cooed. She patted the kitchen chair.*

*Mikey whined, “It hurts.”*

*“I know,” Jane comforted. “Let me see it,” she soothed.*

*Mikey removed his hand from his skinned knee. “Ow!” he howled. Then he saw the blood and screamed, “Ouch!” He cried, “Waaahhhh.”*

*Jane calmed, “There, there. Mwoi!” She threw a kiss at his knee.*

*“WAAAHHHHHHH!!” Mikey sobbed.*

*Jane went to the freezer and took out a Popsicle. She handed it to Mikey, saying, “Here you go.”*

*Mikey wiped his eyes. “Orange?” he whimpered, taking the treat.*

*Jane smiled, “Of course.”*

*“Mmphf,” he mumbled, shoving it into his mouth.*

*Jane grabbed the first aid kit and went to work.*





## The Basics: Point of View

One of the most important decisions you will make in writing your story is choosing which point of view to use. The **point of view** is the “head” or “camera angle” from which the action will be filtered. When we choose a point of view, we contract with our readers to follow a set of rules in how we will present our story. The **viewpoint** is the particular character’s eyes we will see through. (In some cases, the narrator serves as the viewpoint character.) This may change from scene to scene, or, with restraint, even within a scene.

Depending on which source you study, there are a variable number of points of view to choose from. However, I have selected the five I think are most often used.

- **First Person Point of View** - The narrator is “I” or “we.” Only things that are heard, seen, thought or known by the narrator (who is the viewpoint character) can be revealed: *I knew I shouldn’t have let Grandma go down there. She isn’t too steady on her feet to start with, and then she gets those dizzy spells. But she insisted, and the next thing I know, she’s tumbling down those stairs like a gymnast . . .*
- **Second Person Point of View** - The narrator addresses the reader or some other assumed “you”: *You know how it is. You think you shouldn’t intervene, you think she’ll get mad at you if you don’t let her do what she’s always done . . .* “You,” in this case, is the viewpoint character.
- **Third Person Point of View, Panoramic** - The narrator sees all the action, but doesn’t read minds. This can best be understood as being like a movie camera—anything that can be seen or heard can be described, but we are not privileged to see into any character’s thoughts. In this point of view, the narrator always acts as the viewpoint character. *Mrs. Smith stood at the top of the stairs, her son John next to her. Clinging to the handrail, she planted her trembling foot on the first step. But the other foot caught on the carpet and . . .*
- **Third Person Point of View, Controlled Consciousness** - This is probably the easiest point of view for a beginning writer to use. Like first person, we see all the action through the eyes of a single character, and we can only see what that character—our viewpoint character—sees. The difference is we use “he” or “she” instead of “I” or “we”: *John knew he shouldn’t have allowed his grandmother to go down the stairs alone. She wasn’t steady on her feet and sometimes she grabbed onto the nearest object when dizziness overwhelmed her.*
- **Third Person Omniscient** - God-like; the narrator knows and sees everything, and can move from one mind to another. *John stood next to his grandmother. He wanted to help her down the stairs. Mrs. Smith looked at her grandson, her blue eyes sharp, and moved a strand of hair from her face. She was determined to do this on her own, to prove she wasn’t a helpless old lady . . .* In this example, John is the viewpoint character in the first two sentences, then Mrs. Smith becomes the viewpoint character. Note that although the viewpoint character changes, the Point of View (omniscient) remains the same. One word of caution: although third person omniscient allows the most flexibility, it is difficult to manage. Besides visiting the heads of different characters, we can also see into the future or see things that none of the characters can see.





Now, having said all that, and having seen every imaginable point of view (I think), I'll have to admit that my favorite point of view is a combination of the controlled third person and the omniscient, which I will call the controlled omniscient point of view. The omniscient point of view carries much power—too much power—and taking advantage of all the power it allows is extremely difficult to handle. Therefore, the trick is to keep the omniscience subtle and not flaunt it. Don't take advantage of every power it gives you—use only those you truly need. Select the NARRATOR as your major viewpoint character who has just a few special powers. Pretend that the narrator is an invisible character who sees and hears everything IN THE ROOM OF YOUR SETTING FROM WHERE HE IS STANDING. He doesn't bounce from one location to another and he doesn't bounce from one character to another. He has the same limitations as any human, except he has the power to go inside of other characters' heads—but only when "invited" or when he's already a "pseudo" resident.

A character can "invite" the narrator into his head by touching his face or head. This sends a subtle signal to the reader that the narrator is approaching the character's brain. Pretend that it takes great effort for him to enter another's mind, so he does so only when necessary, and he never makes a leap directly from one mind to another—he must always return to his narrator role first. This ensures a proper transition.

The narrator is a "pseudo" resident when he focuses on a particular character so that it is clear he is standing very close to that character, seeing and hearing and smelling what that character sees and hears and smells. Therefore, the transition into what the character is feeling or thinking appears natural and smooth.

Using a controlled omniscient point of view will allow you to see all the character's expressions and actions without accounting for how the viewpoint character knew it. It will allow you to describe any character without using cheesy tricks like looking into the mirror or having him examine himself. And finally, it will sharpen your prose and remove that last hint of amateurism, letting the world know that yes, you are a professional writer and you can tell your story unimpeded by the rules made for a novice.

Since point of view is one of the hardest things to understand, I'm going to give another, more detailed example of a scene using different viewpoints. First, I will present it in an uncontrolled omniscient point of view, and then I will present the same scene in third person controlled consciousness from two different viewpoints. I will use **green** print to show the lines that are from Gary's viewpoint and **blue** print to show the lines that are from Ray's viewpoint. Additionally, in the omniscient example, I will use **bold** print to show the word or words that prompts the viewpoint change. In most cases, either a verb or internal dialogue will move the viewpoint from one character to another. The trick is to recognize when we actually enter the character's head to see, hear, feel or think something from the character's perspective. Notice that once we enter a character's head, we stay in his viewpoint until something prompts us to move elsewhere.

The first paragraph can actually be from anyone's viewpoint (including an invisible narrator), but since the scene opens with Ray, the reader will assume it will be from Ray's perspective. Therefore, it is wise to always open a scene with the viewpoint character to keep from confusing the reader.



**OMNISCIENT POINT OF VIEW:**

**Ray walked** the mile from the hospital to Bob's Sunoco. He found Gary in the bay, changing the oil on a pale blue Cadillac. He kicked his brother's feet until Gary rolled from beneath the car. "We gotta talk."

Gary wiped sweat from his eyes. **It wasn't like Ray to interrupt him at work.** "I get off at three."

"Now."

Gary stood and wiped his hands on an oily rag. "What's up?"

"Let's walk." **Ray feared** his brain was going to explode. Too much was going on, too many things were changing. He'd read the front page of the newspaper over and over while waiting in the doctor's office. The Apollo 7 astronauts were heading home after eleven days in space. President Johnson was negotiating for the release of fourteen North Vietnamese POW's. And Jackie Kennedy, the dead President's wife, was marrying a Greek billionaire the very next day. He didn't even know if it was legal for the President's widow to marry a foreigner.

Gary followed Ray outside and toward town. **He didn't like it that Ray was so quiet.** "What did the doctor say about Mom?"

**Ray hated** to break the news. "He put her in the hospital."

**Gary watched** colorful leaves swirl around their ankles, the drier ones crunching under their heavy steps. He kicked them out of his way. "Why?"

"He got the tests back."

"And?"

A young mother, her sweater flapping in the wind, pushed a baby carriage over the uneven sidewalk with one hand and pulled a stubborn toddler with the other. **Ray** stepped into the street to let her pass, **wondering** if she realized that the world had changed that day.

"What did the doctor say?" Gary repeated.

"She's got cancer."

Gary stopped walking. "Cancer?"

Ray slowed down until Gary caught up. "Something about a mass in her brain."

Gary's hand automatically went to his own head. He looked at Ray, **waiting** for more, waiting for reassurance that it would be all right.

But Ray was silent.

"Does she need surgery? Does she have to take chemo? Or radiation?"

"He says there ain't nothing they can do. He says it's too late." **Ray remembered** that part very well. He'd argued with Dr. Brown, insisting there had to be something. She had three young boys who needed her.

"Too late? Too late for what?"

"Dr. Brown says . . ." Ray rubbed his head. "He says it's too late. He says she ain't coming home."

They walked slower, silently, past the library and into the park. Preschoolers played on the swings and slide, laughing and shouting.





Gary leaned against an oak tree, his dirty gray jumpsuit blending into the trunk. He had always **thought** of his mother as being like a tree, strong and immovable. “What’re we gonna do?” he said.

“About what?”

Gary took a new pack of Marlboros from his pocket and tapped it against his palm. “The boys.”

**Ray watched** the children play. “I guess we gotta pick them up from school and fix them something to eat.”

“I don’t mean now,” Gary said, opening the cigarettes. “Until they’re grown. Who’ll take care of them?”

“Mom will.”

Gary stared at his older brother. The dull, distant look in Ray’s copper eyes **worried** him. “You okay?”

Ray scratched the five-day-old stubble on his chin. “They made a mistake. We just gotta find Dad and get this all straightened out. Dad will know what to do.”

Gary lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled.

**Ray watched** the smoke disappear into the October-blue sky. A foreigner. Two hundred million people in the United States and the President’s widow was going to marry a foreigner. No wonder the world was so damned screwed up.

As you can see, hopping from one head to another allows us to see everything each character thinks. However, it also makes it hard to empathize with any of the characters, and, when overdone, leaves the reader feeling like he’s watching a ping-pong tournament at close range. This scene could be much more powerful if it concentrated on only one person’s viewpoint.

### **THIRD PERSON, CONTROLLED CONSCIOUSNESS, GARY’S VIEWPOINT:**

Gary scooted deeper under the Cadillac and loosened the drain plug. Heavy oil clumped out in globs, some splashing on his already-stained shirt. He scowled. Surely, people could take better care of their cars.

Something kicked at his foot. Probably the new kid again. He couldn’t do anything without asking questions. Gary set the plug aside and rolled from beneath the car.

His brother Ray waited. “We gotta talk.”

Gary swiped at the sweat on his forehead. It wasn’t like Ray to interrupt him at work. “I get off at three.”

“Now.”

Gary stood and wiped his hands on an oily rag. “What’s up?”

“Let’s walk.”

He followed Ray outside and toward town. “What did the doctor say about Mom?”

“He put her in the hospital.”

Colorful leaves swirled around their ankles, the drier ones crunching under their heavy steps. Gary kicked them out of his way. “Why?”





“He got the tests back.”

“And?”

A young mother, her sweater flapping in the wind, pushed a baby carriage over the uneven sidewalk with one hand and pulled a stubborn toddler with the other. Ray stepped into the street to let her pass.

“What did the doctor say?” Gary repeated.

“She’s got cancer.”

Gary stopped walking. “Cancer?”

Ray slowed down until Gary caught up. “Something about a mass in her brain.”

Gary’s hand automatically went to his own head. He looked at Ray, waiting for more, waiting for reassurance that it would be all right.

But Ray was silent.

“Does she need surgery? Does she have to take chemo? Or radiation?”

“He says there ain’t nothing they can do. He says it’s too late.”

“Too late? Too late for what?”

“Dr. Brown says . . .” Ray rubbed his head. “He says it’s too late. He says she ain’t coming home.”

They walked slower, silently, past the library and into the park. Preschoolers played on the swings and slide, laughing and shouting. Gary leaned against an oak tree, his dirty gray jumpsuit blending into the trunk. He had always thought of his mother as being like a tree, strong and immovable. “What’re we gonna do?” he said.

“About what?”

Gary took a new pack of Marlboros from his pocket and tapped it against his palm. “The boys.”

“I guess we gotta pick them up from school and fix them something to eat.”

“I don’t mean now,” Gary said, opening the cigarettes. “Until they’re grown. Who’ll take care of them?”

“Mom will.”

Gary stared at his older brother. The dull, distant look in Ray’s copper eyes worried him. “You okay?”

Ray scratched the five-day-old stubble on his chin. “They made a mistake. We just gotta find Dad and get this all straightened out. Dad will know what to do.”

Gary lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled. Their father wasn’t coming home. He knew it. Ray knew it. And now their mother. A cold wind blew from the north and he shivered. It would be a long winter.



**THIRD PERSON, CONTROLLED CONSCIOUSNESS, RAY'S VIEWPOINT:**

Ray walked the mile from the hospital to Bob's Sunoco. He found Gary in the bay, changing the oil on a pale blue Cadillac. He kicked his brother's feet until Gary rolled from beneath the car. "We gotta talk."

"I get off at three."

"Now."

Gary stood and wiped his hands on an oily rag. "What's up?"

"Let's walk." Ray feared his brain was going to explode. Too much was going on, too many things were changing. He'd read the front page of the newspaper over and over while waiting in the doctor's office. The Apollo 7 astronauts were heading home after eleven days in space. President Johnson was negotiating for the release of fourteen North Vietnamese POW's. And Jackie Kennedy, the dead President's wife, was marrying a Greek billionaire the very next day. He didn't even know if it was legal for the President's widow to marry a foreigner.

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"He got the tests back."

"And?"

A young mother, her sweater flapping in the wind, pushed a baby carriage over the uneven sidewalk with one hand and pulled a stubborn toddler with the other. Ray stepped into the street to let her pass.

"What did the doctor say?" Gary repeated.

"She's got cancer."

Gary stopped walking. "Cancer?"

Ray slowed down until Gary caught up. "Something about a mass in her brain."

Gary was quiet for a long time, then spoke softly. "Does she need surgery? Does she have to take chemo? Or radiation?"

"He says there ain't nothing they can do. He says it's too late." Ray remembered that part very well. He'd argued with Dr. Brown, insisting there had to be something. She had three young boys who needed her.

"Too late? Too late for what?"

"Dr. Brown says . . ." Ray rubbed his head. "He says it's too late. He says she ain't coming home."

They walked slower, silently, past the library and into the park. Preschoolers played on the swings and slide, laughing and shouting.

Gary leaned against an oak tree, his dirty gray jumpsuit blending into the trunk. "What're we gonna do?" he said.

"About what?"





Gary took a new pack of Marlboros from his pocket and tapped it against his palm. “The boys.”

“I guess we gotta pick them up from school and fix them something to eat.”

“I don’t mean now,” Gary said, opening the cigarettes. “Until they’re grown. Who’ll take care of them?”

“Mom will.”

“You okay?”

Ray scratched the five-day-old stubble on his chin. “They made a mistake. We just gotta find Dad and get this all straightened out. Dad will know what to do.”

Gary lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled.

Ray watched the smoke disappear into the October-blue sky. A foreigner. Two hundred million people in the United States and the President’s widow was going to marry a foreigner. No wonder the world was so damned screwed up.

Notice that by changing our viewpoint character, we get a different account of the action. Therefore, we need to carefully choose whose viewpoint to use so we can get the greatest power from each scene.

Even within third person omniscient, we should have only one viewpoint character at a time, only one character whose thoughts and mind we visit. We have the option to change viewpoint characters, but we must do it very carefully, preferably at a scene or chapter break. However, if we must switch “heads” within a scene, we should clue the reader to what we are doing and allow for a transition. I prefer to do this by ignoring the previous viewpoint character for a sentence or two, then have the new viewpoint character touch his face —rub his forehead, scratch his ear, any action as long as it involves his face or head —to clue the reader that this is our new “head.” Once the switch is made, stay with it. “Head-hopping” is confusing for the reader and should be done only when absolutely necessary.

Oftentimes when we get a vague feeling that something isn’t right but can’t quite put our finger on it, the problem is a breach in point of view. This means we have inadvertently changed viewpoints or switched from one type of point of view to another. So study point of view. If you’re not happy with the way your story is reading, try changing the point of view or try changing your viewpoint character. Just be consistent.





## EXERCISE: Point of View

(see **Section 6** for possible solutions)

Want to try your hand at identifying point of view? Get out your highlighting markers and mark this section, using **Blue** for Ray's point of view and **Pink** for Carol's point of view. When you are finished, check **Section 6** to see if you've marked the same things I have. For the purposes of this exercise, assume that all prose is in either Ray's or Carol's viewpoint (eliminating the narrator), and that viewpoint changes occur only when something causes us to go into a different character's head.

Ray was ten minutes early for his appointment the next day. He stood in the doorway and tugged at his beard, wondering if he should interrupt or come back later.

Carol looked up from her work. She smiled at the sight of the large man in the doorway. "Come on in," she said.

Ray hesitated. Talking to schoolteachers still intimidated him. But he forced himself forward and walked to the desk. "I'm Ray Gambel." He extended his hand. "David's brother."

Carol accepted his handshake. Although he looked nothing like David, there was something familiar about him. She motioned toward an empty chair and waited while he sat. "This is a creative writing class, generally for seniors, but David submitted writing samples last spring to qualify. He's the only junior in the class."

Ray nodded. He knew the kid was smart.

Carol shuffled through the folders on her desk. "I'm concerned about some of his poetry. I wondered if you would take a few minutes to read it."

"Sure."

She handed him a stack of papers. Some teachers would have graded the papers and forgotten the content, but Carol worried about her students.

Ray slowly read through the poems. The first was titled "If I'd Have Loved You More." Ray immediately knew it was about their mother. David and Joey had written songs during the summer with the same type of stark lyrics. Ray sighed and looked at the next title, "When Wishes Come True." He rubbed his forehead and handed the paper back to Carol. "Our mother died last November. David never got along with her too good."

"David seems to have a lot of anger and guilt he's trying to work through. I'd like to refer him to Mr. Meeks, the school counselor."

"We talked to Rev. Mitchell right after Mom died, but David wouldn't cooperate. Rev. Mitchell said not to bring him back unless David decided he wanted to talk about it."

Carol smiled. David had always been polite in class, but he had that air of arrogance that said he wasn't going to do anything he didn't want to.

"Him and Joey—that's another brother—they wrote some songs this summer about Mom."

Carol's eyes widened in sudden recognition. "You're a musician, aren't you?"

"I got a band."

"You played at Dino's Lounge on Labor Day Weekend." He was the one with the wonderful voice, the one who filled the air with ions of sensuality.





Ray's face reddened. Labor Day Weekend was Gary's last time with the band. They'd chugged two pitchers of beer and gotten rowdy—even did the *Lion Sleeps* thing. It wasn't the type of show he'd want a schoolteacher to attend. "You weren't there late, were you?"

Carol's blue eyes danced. "You were wonderful."

Ray wished his face would quit burning.

"Would you mind if I gave David's poetry to Mr. Meeks? And suggest he talk to him?"

"No."

"I'll ask David for his permission before I do." She rose to her feet. "I think David will be fine. Thank you for coming in."

Ray stood.

Carol offered her hand. "Anytime you need to talk to someone, give me a call. I'm in the phone book."

Ray shook her hand. "Thank you."

"It was wonderful meeting you, Mr. Gambel," Carol said, allowing her hand to linger in his. "I hope to see you again. Soon." And she was sure that one way or another, she would.

After you have marked your paper and checked to see if you agree with my answers, go ahead and take this to the next level: rewrite this scene, first from Ray's viewpoint, then from Carol's viewpoint. Although your scenes are sure to differ from mine, I've offered my rewrites in **Section 6**.





## The Basics: Voice/Tense/Intimacy

Besides point of view, voice, tense and intimacy also affect how close the reader feels to the story and the characters. **Intimacy** is how close we are to the action and to the character's thoughts and emotions. Like a video camera, we can zoom in and out, getting close (into a character's head) when we need to and then backing off when things get too hot or when we need a broader perspective. The trick is in knowing when to get close and when to back off. As a rule of thumb, the more emotional a situation is, the more distant we should become. This keeps us from getting "sappy" or melodramatic. However, when our character looks back on the incident, we need to get close—get inside his head—so we can experience the emotion with him.

**Voice** is the way in which the narrator talks—it can be proper and formal, conversational, or even illiterate. To be effective, it must be natural and unique, just like each person's voice. I've heard it said that an author's voice is one of the most difficult things to develop. And that may be true. When we first begin putting words on paper, we "try out" different voices, trying to find the one that suits us. Of course, each story can have a different voice and still be the author's. The more we write, the more comfortable we become with our voice and the different inflections that it can create.

Likewise, the **tense** used affects the power of the story. We most often see past tense (he was) used in fiction, although present (he is) can be effectively used. Past perfect (he had been) and future perfect (he will be) should be saved for flashbacks and special effects. It is extremely important to maintain tense. Like viewpoint changes, tense changes jar the reader and mark the writer as an amateur. Unless you are an accomplished writer, do not even consider changing tenses within your novel. If you are uncertain which tense to choose, go with past tense. It is the easiest to handle and the most invisible to the reader.

Take full advantage of these tools. The same exact plot, setting and character can become totally different stories by experimenting with intimacy, voice and tense. Combined with point of view, voice, intimacy and tense are the spices in your main dish of plot, character and setting. As such, they must exist, but they should be invisible to the reader, allowing for a smooth, full-bodied flavor without any jarring inconsistencies. My best advice: keep it simple, keep it consistent.





## Section Three

# Lifecycle of a Character



Conception  
Birth  
Adolescence  
Maturity  
Death



## Lifecycle of a Character: Conception

Where do characters come from? Some writers base them on someone they know. Some writers use “stereotypes” or cardboard characters that have been used over and over again. And some writers create them from scratch. Regardless, every character must start somewhere. In a plot-driven novel, the plot is usually outlined first, and then the characters are created to fill the available roles. Regardless, conception is the initial spark, the idea that causes us to want to create this character. As mentioned, sometimes it is generated by plot. Sometimes we see a setting—a country porch with a dilapidated swing or an isolated island—which makes us wonder what kind of person would live there. Sometimes we run across a photograph that sparks our imagination and we create a personality to go with the physical features. Or sometimes we see a possession—an antique spinning wheel or an outrageously expensive emerald ring—and wonder the type of person who would own such a thing. Whatever the cause, a character is conceived by an idea.

During the conception phase, we assign basic physical and emotional characteristics to our character. Later, as our character begins to interact with his environment, he may (and should) take on a life of his own and he may adjust our perception of him. A reproducible **Character Trait Chart** is located in **Section 8**. This gives us fundamental facts about our character: name, age, sex, marital status, occupation/social class, physical description, how he feels about himself, who his friends are, how intelligent or educated he is, what he sounds like, what he smells like, and on and on.

**Section 8** discusses how to fill out such a chart. Remember that the importance of the different components depends on the type of story your character will live in. In a romance, for example, physical description is important and must be detailed. In a literary mainstream novel, it may not be necessary to have any physical description at all (although I still think the author needs to be able to visualize the character, even if he doesn’t reveal all the details to the reader). Also, in an action/adventure or plot-driven story, character motivations and backgrounds are far less important. However, the more the writer knows about his character, the better he can understand and portray his character, so try to fill out the character trait chart as completely as possible for every major character in your story. (How much you reveal to your reader can be decided later.) Even if you don’t use these charts, it may be worth your time to look at the instructions for them, as hints are given for naming your character and other considerations in assigning characteristics.

By now, you should have a pretty solid feel for the character you are conceiving. Are you ready to give birth to him?





## Lifecycle of a Character: Birth

Birth is when we pick up that limp character that we assigned physical attributes to, hold him in our arms, and breathe the breath of life into him from our very own souls. It is also the turning point—his actual birth—and we cease having absolute control over him.

The first breath of life is when our character has a goal or “**character statement**.” This is what our character “wants,” and before our character has a want, he is nothing more than a description. The process of “wanting” is what gives life. So, what, more than anything else in the world, does your character want?

Some examples from my characters are:

- To become wealthy so the love of my life will return my love.
- To have fun.
- To be the best teacher I can possibly be and to give my students the desire to continue their education.
- To keep my family together.
- To break into the Rock ‘n Roll charts and become a rock star.
- To know and do God’s will.

As you can see, a character’s goal can be as deep or as vapid as the individual. Note that for some characters, this statement may be a life goal, but for others it may change as the character matures. Regardless, this is what motivates our character and we must understand this motivation if we are to continue to add depth to his personality. Every major character should have a character statement.

Now, if our characters achieved their goals immediately and without effort, we wouldn’t have much of a story. So, we must throw obstacles at them. Someone or something must be at work trying to prevent our character from his dream. This is called the **character conflict**, and it can be external (another character, an act or condition of nature, an act or condition of circumstance, or a physical problem or condition) or it can be internal (an emotional or psychological problem or condition). Many times, our character must resolve an internal conflict in order to defeat his external conflict.

For example, Joe wants to marry Janet, his life-long love. His external conflict is that Janet doesn’t respect him. His internal conflict is that he has an explosive temper. In order to earn Janet’s respect, he must learn to control his temper.

Not every character must have a conflict. However, our protagonist (our main character) must have a conflict in order to have a plot.

Which brings us to the **resolution**. Will our protagonist achieve his goal? If not, why not? While it is generally assumed that the achievement of the goal translates into a successful resolution, it is not the only successful resolution. Perhaps in the process of achieving his goal, our character grows beyond it. Perhaps as he learns more about what he must give up, he realizes it isn’t worth it. Or he realizes that he doesn’t want what he thought he did. In a





character-driven novel (and, preferably in a plot-driven novel as well), it is imperative that the protagonist changes or grows in some way. All of this should be made clear in the resolution.

A reproducible **Character Growth Chart** is provided in **Section 8**. It covers the character statement, the character conflict, the resolution, and the character growth. Space is also provided for comments.

So, let your characters have dreams. Let them want, let them strive, let them achieve. But most of all, let them grow.





## Lifecycle of a Character: Adolescence

Adolescence is when our character begins to show his psychological profile. And we want him to be multi-dimensional. He will have certain personality components that he will show most of the time and others that he will show only in the presence of certain people or in specific situations. In other words, the personality his brother sees may not be the same personality his boss sees—or the one his girlfriend sees. For characters to feel real, they must be inconsistent—in a consistent way.

First, make sure you understand fully your character's main personality—the personality he has when he is alone or when he is with the people he is most comfortable with. Use the **Personality Component Worksheet** in **Section 8** to highlight in yellow the three to six adjectives that most strongly describe your character on a normal basis. Then highlight in blue those adjectives that also describe him on a normal basis, but that are not as predominant. Then try your character out in different situations and in the presence of different people. When does he behave differently? When he is tired? When his mother is present? When he wants to impress a girl? After a few belts of whiskey? When he is angry? Assign a highlighter color to these situations and highlight the adjectives that best describe your character in these special situations.

Sometimes it is hard to “flesh” out a character in this manner. If you are having difficulty, it is time to cheat. I use a good book of the Zodiac that includes both sun and moon signs as a “cheap” way to add dimension to a character. Following are the supposed characteristics of people born between certain dates. Notice that I only chose the three or four adjectives that were the strongest for the sign. Within a book of the Zodiac, you will find many more characteristics, including a breakdown of how he behaves in romance, in the office, and at play.





## ASTROLOGICAL SIGNS

**ARIES (March 21-April 20)** – Straightforward, energetic, impulsive, positive

**TAURUS (April 21-May 21)** – Tenacious, stubborn, moody, patient

**GEMINI (May 22-June 21)** – Inquisitive, kind, adventurous, considerate

**CANCER (June 22-July 22)** – Sensitive, emotional, warm, empathetic

**LEO (July 23-August 23)** – Proud, generous, sweet, positive

**VIRGO (August 24-September 23)** – Insightful, sensible, sociable, patient

**LIBRA (September 24-October 23)** – Indecisive, charming, just, logical

**SCORPIO (October 24-November 22)** – Honest, sensual, revengeful, jealous

**SAGITTARIUS (November 23-December 21)** – Spiritual, sensitive, happy, outspoken

**CAPRICORN (December 22-January 20)** – Responsible, composed, strong, emotionally repressed

**AQUARIUS (January 21-February 19)** – Pompous, generous, knowledgeable, helpful

**PISCES (February 20-March 20)** – Sympathetic, imaginative, creative, sensitive





## BIRTH ORDER

Another element of personality that seems to have scientific merit is birth order. Many psychologists believe that a person's position in his birth family affects his personality. The oldest child typically receives the most parental attention, the youngest is usually coddled more, and the middle child can get lost in the shuffle. Here are the traits that psychologists assign to birth order:

**FIRST BORN** – Responsible, high achiever, disciplined, likes to be in charge, protective

**MIDDLE CHILD** – Social, popular, mediative, avoids conflict, generous, competitive

**YOUNGEST CHILD** – Lighthearted, charming, dependent, creative, manipulative

**ONLY CHILD** – High self-esteem, perfectionist, imaginative, selfish, high achiever

**TWINS** – Dependent (especially on each other), competitive, secretive

**NOTE:** There can be more than one “first born” per family. The oldest child of each sex often inherits the characteristics of a first born; also, a child born five or more years after the previous child will behave more like an oldest or only child, and birth order begins again. For example, if a family consists of children ages 1, 3, 11, 12, 14 and 22, the 3 and 14-year-olds will both exhibit characteristics of a first born, and the 1 and 11-year-olds will exhibit characteristics of the youngest child. The 12-year-old will behave like a middle child, and the 22-year-old will act as an only child. It is also possible to have three (or more) only children in the same family.

We can use these tools—and our overly-active imagination—to conjure up a character who is multi-dimensional and who will walk off the pages of our novel and into the hearts of our reader.





## Lifecycle of a Character: Maturity

Maturity is when our character learns how to handle his emotions. And that means we, as his creator, must learn to control his emotions as well, if we are to get our reader's empathy. Writers must have an innate understanding of the human psyche. We must understand what motivates people, what destroys them, and how any given person will react in any given situation. Unfortunately, not all of us have this natural ability, so we must find ways to help us increase our knowledge. How?

- Study Human Psychology at your local college.
- Observe people, especially in emotional situations.
- Empathize. How would you react?
- Study books written on character emotions. Two I strongly suggest:  
*Creating Character Emotions* by Ann Hood (Story Press, Cincinnati, Ohio) and *The Writer's Guide to Character Traits* by Linda N. Edelstein, Ph.D. (Writer's Digest Books, Cincinnati, Ohio).
- Study books written on body language for subtle ways to insinuate emotion through character posture, expression and mannerism.
- Read emotional scenes in novels. Which ones move you? Why?

In one of my early attempts at writing, I wrote what I thought was an incredibly emotional scene in which a driver hits a pedestrian. It was full of "God, no! It couldn't be! Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God! Dear Lord, don't let her be dead! Oh, God!"

Well—I was told to look up the word "melodrama" in the dictionary. And now I can see where this over-dramatizing tends to make the reader turn off. The advice I received was: "The more intense the emotion, the more distant the perspective." While I sometimes agree with this, I also believe it is possible to get into a character's head during a moment of intense emotion. The trick is to do it in a unique way (which isn't easy). Although there are many, many masters of emotion out there such as Toni Morrison (*Beloved*) and Tim O'Brien (*The Things They Carried*), one of my favorite emotional passages is from Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (pp 366-367, Hardback). Taken from the viewpoint of the oldest sister immediately after witnessing her youngest sister's death by snakebite, we are given an excellent example of the power of restrained emotion:

*There's a strange moment in time, after something horrible happens, when you know it's true but you haven't told anyone yet. Of all things, that is what I remember most. It was so quiet. And I thought: Now we have to go in and tell Mother. That Ruth May is, oh, sweet Jesus. Ruth May is gone. We had to tell our parents, and they were still in bed, asleep.*

*I didn't cry at first, and then, I don't know why, but I fell apart when I thought of Mother in bed sleeping. Mother's dark hair would be all askew on the pillow and her face sweet and quiet. Her whole body just not knowing yet. Her body that had carried and given birth to Ruth May last of all. Mother asleep in her nightgown, still believing she had four living daughters. Now we were going*





*to put one foot in front of the other, walk to the back door, go in the house, stand beside our parents' bed, wake up Mother, say to her the words, Ruth May, say the word dead. Tell her, Mother, wake up!*

*The whole world would change then, and nothing would ever be all right again. Not for our family. All the other people in the whole wide world might go on about their business, but for us it would never be normal again.*

*I couldn't move. None of us could. We looked at each other because we knew someone should go but I think we all had the same strange idea that if we stood there without moving forever and ever, we could keep our family the way it was. We would not wake up from this nightmare to find it was someone's real life, and for once that someone wasn't just a poor unlucky nobody in a shack you could forget about. It was our life, the only one we were going to have. The only Ruth May.*

*Until that moment I'd always believed I could still go home and pretend the Congo never happened. The misery, the hunt, the ants, the embarrassments of all we saw and endured—those were just stories I would tell someday with a laugh and a toss of my hair, when Africa was faraway and make-believe like the people in history books. The tragedies that happened to Africans were not mine. We were different, not just because we were white and had our vaccinations, but because we were simply a much, much luckier kind of person. I would get back home to Bethlehem, Georgia, and be exactly the same Rachel as before. I'd grow up to be a carefree American wife, with nice things and a sensible way of life and three grown sisters to share my ideals and talk to on the phone from time to time. This is what I believed. I'd never planned on being someone different. Never imagined I would be a girl they'd duck their eyes from and whisper about as tragic, for having suffered such a loss.*

*I think Leah and Adah also believed these things, in their own different ways, and that is why none of us moved. We thought we could freeze time for just one more minute, and one more after that. That if none of us confessed it, we could hold back the curse that was going to be our history.*

What more can I say?





## Lifecycle of a Character: Death

Great characters never die. Never. They live in our imaginations forever, touching our lives and our hearts. This is not to say that they cannot cease to breathe within our pages. In fact, it is sometimes physical death that inspires immortality. Once you have given life, nothing, not even death, can erase a great character's impact upon the lives of its reader.

So—giving life to a character is much like being a parent. We do the best we can for our characters, give them years of our lives, our love and understanding, but the day comes when they rebel and say, “Enough. Let me be me,” and we must then allow them to live their own lives. And that is when we've truly given life.





# Section Four

# Advanced Techniques



Pacing  
Flashbacks  
Foreshadowing  
Quick Tips  
Active Voice  
Show, Don't Tell  
Say it Once, Say it Right  
Grammar/Punctuation



## Advanced Techniques: Pacing

Pacing is a tool writers have to control the speed in which a story reads. Lush, descriptive segments slow the pace, giving readers a breather. Rapid-fire dialogue speeds the pace, leaving the reader breathless. It is up to the writer to decide when the pace needs quickened and when it should be put in slow gear.

Perhaps the easiest way to judge is to ask questions as you read. Do you start drifting? You need action. Is the conversation or action moving too quickly? You need narrative to even out the pacing. Beware, though, not to use repetition to slow your pace. Instead, find new things to say or new things to focus on. For example, during a highly emotional scene that is moving too quickly, allow the character to study a picture on the wall or watch children playing nearby. Or allow him to remember a conversation from the past. Or focus on one of his other senses, such as the smells or sounds in the background. This can add depth and an emotional layer, as well as slowing the pace.

We can also slow the pace of a chapter or even the entire manuscript by adding more description, more exposition (background information) and more internal dialogue (character thoughts).

Let's look at the example we used earlier for point of view:

Ray walked the mile from the hospital to Bob's Sunoco. He found Gary in the bay, changing the oil on a pale blue Cadillac. He kicked his brother's feet until Gary rolled from beneath the car. "We gotta talk."

"I get off at three."

"Now."

"What's up?"

"Let's walk."

Gary followed Ray outside and toward town. "What did the doctor say about Mom?"

"He put her in the hospital."

"Why?"

"He got the tests back."

"And?"

"What did the doctor say?" Gary repeated.

"She's got cancer."

Gary stopped walking. "Cancer?"

"Something about a mass in her brain."

"Does she need surgery? Does she have to take chemo? Or radiation?"

"He says there ain't nothing they can do. He says it's too late." "Too late? Too late for what?"

"Dr. Brown says . . ." Ray rubbed his head. "He says it's too late. He says she ain't coming home."

"What're we gonna do?" he said.

"About what?"





Gary took a new pack of Marlboros from his pocket and tapped it against his palm. “The boys.”

“I guess we gotta pick them up from school and fix them something to eat.”

“I don’t mean now,” Gary said, opening the cigarettes. “Until they’re grown. Who’ll take care of them?”

“Mom will.”

“You okay?”

Ray scratched the five-day-old stubble on his chin. “They made a mistake. We just gotta find Dad and get this all straightened out. Dad will know what to do.”

Gary lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled.

This is an important scene, filled with kinetic emotion. Yet, it passes so quickly we don’t feel the full impact of it. This is where we need to slow the pacing down. To do this, we add two things: internal dialogue and description. In our rewrite, I will put the internal dialogue in red and the added descriptive passages in blue. See how slowing the pace adds power to the words:

Ray walked the mile from the hospital to Bob’s Sunoco. He found Gary in the bay, changing the oil on a pale blue Cadillac. He kicked his brother’s feet until Gary rolled from beneath the car. “We gotta talk.”

“I get off at three.”

“Now.”

Gary stood and wiped his hands on an oily rag. “What’s up?”

“Let’s walk.” Ray feared his brain was going to explode. Too much was going on, too many things were changing. He’d read the front page of the newspaper over and over while waiting in the doctor’s office. The Apollo 7 astronauts were heading home after eleven days in space. President Johnson was negotiating for the release of fourteen North Vietnamese POW’s. And Jackie Kennedy, the dead President’s wife, was marrying a Greek billionaire the very next day. He didn’t even know if it was legal for the President’s widow to marry a foreigner.

Gary followed Ray outside and toward town. “What did the doctor say about Mom?”

“He put her in the hospital.”

Colorful leaves swirled around their ankles, the drier ones crunching under their heavy steps. Gary kicked them out of his way. “Why?”

“He got the tests back.”

“And?”

A young mother, her sweater flapping in the wind, pushed a baby carriage over the uneven sidewalk with one hand and pulled a stubborn toddler with the other. Ray stepped into the street to let her pass.

“What did the doctor say?” Gary repeated.

“She’s got cancer.”

Gary stopped walking. “Cancer?”





Ray slowed down until Gary caught up. “Something about a mass in her brain.”

Gary was quiet for a long time, then spoke softly. “Does she need surgery? Does she have to take chemo? Or radiation?”

“He says there ain’t nothing they can do. He says it’s too late.” Ray remembered that part very well. He’d argued with Dr. Brown, insisting there had to be something. She had three young boys who needed her.

“Too late? Too late for what?”

“Dr. Brown says . . .” Ray rubbed his head. “He says it’s too late. He says she ain’t coming home.”

They walked slower, silently, past the library and into the park. Preschoolers played on the swings and slide, laughing and shouting.

Gary leaned against an oak tree, his dirty gray jumpsuit blending into the trunk. “What’re we gonna do?” he said.

“About what?”

Gary took a new pack of Marlboros from his pocket and tapped it against his palm. “The boys.”

“I guess we gotta pick them up from school and fix them something to eat.”

“I don’t mean now,” Gary said, opening the cigarettes. “Until they’re grown. Who’ll take care of them?”

“Mom will.”

“You okay?”

Ray scratched the five-day-old stubble on his chin. “They made a mistake. We just gotta find Dad and get this all straightened out. Dad will know what to do.”

Gary lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled.

Ray watched the smoke disappear into the October-blue sky. A foreigner. Two hundred million people in the United States and the President’s widow was going to marry a foreigner. No wonder the world was so damned screwed up.

Likewise, to speed the pace, omit everything except for the direct action or dialogue. Ignore descriptions, ignore reactions, ignore anything other than the bare necessities. This is necessary when the action is more important than character reflection. Let’s look at the following example, in which Gary and Ray are trying to repair a barn roof destroyed in a storm when the storm comes around again. Gary slips on the wet roof and is now on the steep slope of the roof, his weight partially held by a fragile drainpipe below. Ray is able to extend one hand, which Gary has grabbed onto. David is trying to reposition the ladder so Gary can climb down. Here’s how NOT to do it:

“Can you reach the ladder with your foot?” Ray asked. He wondered how long it would be until the drainpipe gave way.

“If I move it,” Gary said, “I won’t have anything to hold onto.”

“Just me.” Ray’s arm ached from holding Gary’s weight. He hoped David had seen what was going on and would try to move the ladder. Someone had to do something. Otherwise, Gary would fall.





“I don’t trust you that much,” Gary said.

“Looks like you ain’t got much choice.” The rain still fell. Ray looked at the sky. Dark clouds hovered even lower. The rain was there to stay.

The ladder vibrated again.

“Shit,” Ray whispered. “I wish they’d stop shaking that thing.” It made him nervous. Surely David knew that shaking the ladder also shook the gutter. And any little movement added pressure to it. It could snap at any time.

“I wish they’d stack up some hay underneath me.”

“Hell, as much rain as we’ve got today, you’d just land in the mud. Ain’t gonna get much softer than that.” The mud had to be deep. But still, he knew it was a long fall and Gary would most likely break some bones or worse. He remembered when he’d broken his leg in tenth grade. It was so difficult trying to get around the school on crutches and it seemed that his leg itched all the time. He stuck an unbent clothes hanger under the cast to scratch his leg.

“You trying to tell me to jump?”

“Nah. You’d probably pull me down with you.” Ray knew Gary wouldn’t really do that. But he also knew Gary was still angry with him for spending the money on the drum set.

“I’d damn sure try.”

“Let me have your foot,” David’s voice said.

“No,” Gary answered.

The roof shimmered in the rain. If the situation had been different, it would even have been beautiful.

“I’m right underneath you,” David said. “If you lift your left foot, I’ll put it on the rung.”

“Shit,” Gary said. “I’m trusting Ray to hold me and you to guide me. I might as well jump.”

“Or apologize for being such an ass all the time.”

Ray smiled. David had a point. All the boys had taken Ray’s side of the argument. Except maybe for Joey, who hadn’t said anything. But then, Joey never did talk much.

“I’ll jump first.”

It’s difficult to be too worried about Gary with all the internal dialogue muddying the situation. Let’s look at how cutting all the internal dialogue and description adds immediacy and excitement to this scene:

“Can you reach the ladder with your foot?”

“If I move it,” Gary said, “I won’t have anything to hold onto.”

“Just me.” Ray’s arm ached from holding Gary’s weight.

“I don’t trust you that much,” Gary said.

“Looks like you ain’t got much choice.”

The ladder vibrated again.

“Shit,” Ray whispered. “I wish they’d stop shaking that thing.”

“I wish they’d stack some hay underneath me.”





“Hell, as much rain as we’ve got today, you’d just land in the mud. Ain’t gonna get much softer than that.”

“You telling me to jump?”

“Nah. You’d probably pull me down with you.”

“I’d damn sure try.”

“Let me have your foot,” David’s voice said.

“No,” Gary answered.

“I’m right underneath you,” David said. “If you lift your left foot, I’ll put it on the rung.”

“Shit,” Gary said. “I’m trusting Ray to hold me and you to guide me. I might as well jump.”

“Or apologize for being such an ass all the time.”

“I’ll jump first.”

Reading our prose aloud is perhaps the best way to judge the pace. Listen as you read and consider if the action is happening too fast or not fast enough. And remember, there is never one right answer. The pace of your story is just one more element that contributes to your unique writing style. Experiment, study, write. But in the end, use your own judgment.





## Advanced Techniques: Flashbacks

Flashbacks interrupt the current action of the story to show a scene from the past. As such, we must always weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. Are the benefits we receive (a glimpse into a character's past) worth leaving our characters dangling in time while we go into the past? If so, don't hesitate to use a flashback. If not, continue with your story line and find other ways, such as exposition, discussion, etc. to entwine the past with the present.

If you choose to use a flashback, you must tip the reader that you are leaving the present. This can be done with a transition statement such as, "John remembered the day his father died." Then, use past perfect ("had") two or three times to complete the clue that you are entering real time in the past. And you are in the past. Act out your scene with action and dialogue, and when you are finished, clue the reader that you are returning to the present by using past perfect once or twice, and, if necessary, another transition sentence ("But that was then and this was now, and John had to let the past stay in the past."). Here is an example:

*Danny remembered more about his mother's death than he'd ever told anyone. The day she **had** died, she **had** called each of her sons to her bedside individually.*

*"Pour me a cup of fresh water, please," she said, her voice thick with the Polish accent that decorated her words when she was tired or sick.*

*Danny filled the cup, careful not to splash it on the bedside table.*

*"Now, hand me my lipstick."*

/

/

/

*"Be good," she finally whispered, her voice raspy.*

*He went to the door, started out, then stopped and turned around. His mother tapped several tiny white pills from the lipstick case and shoved them into her mouth. She **had** gulped water, then dumped more pills into her palm and swallowed them. Three more times, she **had** repeated the process.*

*Even now, Danny felt responsible for her death. He looked at his father and swallowed hard . . .*

Note that once we entered the flashback, we stopped using past perfect ("had") and just acted out the story. Otherwise, the "hads" weigh down the prose and suck the action out of the words.





## Advanced Techniques: Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing drops hints of what may happen in the future. The main purpose of foreshadowing is to keep the reader interested by adding suspense. It is very easy to use. It usually consists of only one or two sentences, and is especially effective when ending a scene or chapter.

Examples of foreshadowing:

- *Sam wished he could rid himself of the sick feeling in his gut that told him something terrible was going to happen, and happen soon.*
- *Jackie didn't know it at the time, but this would be the last time he would see his mother alive.*
- *Thunder rumbled in the distance. The air was thick with tension and would soon explode.*

Note that examples two and three above require either an omniscient point of view or a “look back from the future” type piece. Wanting to use foreshadowing is not an excuse to breach viewpoint.

Study what works in fiction you admire. Notice the tools the author uses to enter the past or foretell the future. Unless you are a writer, these techniques should appear invisible and smooth. But as a writer, you must learn to use these techniques to add punch to your own work.





## Advanced Techniques: Quick Tips

- Research does more than add authenticity—it often opens the door to subplots and additional scenes.
- Check out news events during the time period of your manuscript. Maybe John Lennon’s death didn’t affect you dramatically, but if your character is a rock ‘n roll musician or a Beatle fanatic, it would be worthy of an emotional response.
- Don’t put thoughts (or internal dialogue) in quotes or Italics. Since you must be in the viewpoint of the character in order to be privy to his thoughts, it isn’t necessary to say, “he thought” or to set the thoughts off in any other way. Just maintain tense and point of view (such as third person, past tense). Example: “*I don’t want to go there,*” *John thought,* is better written: *John didn’t want to go there.*
- Use current music (titles and even lyrics) to not only add substance to your time setting, but also to make use of another sense (sound).
- Read everything you write aloud. Especially dialogue.
- Keep pen and paper with you at all times. You never know when inspiration will hit or when you’ll be stuck in traffic.
- Make a scene feel “complete” by ending it with dialogue (internal or external) or action from your viewpoint character.
- Keep paragraphs, sentences and parts of sentences in chronological order. For example, don’t say, “Jacob jumped when he heard the explosion.” He must hear the explosion before he jumps, so say, “An explosive sound vibrated the windows. Jacob jumped from his chair.” Doing this also forces active voice. ☺
- Write sentences in the positive form (avoid double negatives). For example, instead of saying, “John didn’t go without breakfast,” say, “John devoured breakfast.”
- Vary the length and structure of your sentences. Don’t start every sentence with a proper noun or pronoun. (*John watched the Arrivals screen for news. He hoped her flight wouldn’t be late. He wanted to see her. He had missed her way too much*). Instead, try to start each sentence in a paragraph with a different part of speech: *John watched the Arrivals screen for news. Surely, her flight wouldn’t be late. And she would be there soon. He had missed her. Way too much.* If you find yourself stuck in the “he/she” beginning for each sentence, decide to start each sentence with a different letter of the alphabet or a different part of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, etc.) It will take some creativity, but hey, that’s why you write, right?
- Focus is what gives your story cohesiveness. You must be able to describe your story in one sentence. Yes. One sentence. Forcing this focus gives you a home base to return to and reflect from, and ensures that you don’t drift too much in other directions.
- The purpose of fiction—whether short story, novel or children’s literature—is to take the reader away from his life and expose him to a new experience. Hopefully, the reader learns from the experience of the characters, and, at best, the reader views his own life in a new way.
- The only way to finish a novel is to put pen to paper (or fingers to keypad) and do it.





## Advanced Techniques: Active Voice

If the first rule of writing is *Show, Don't Tell*, the second should be *Keep It Active*. Active voice is what puts us in the middle of the action and allows us to feel. Passive voice is what gives us the feeling that someone is telling us a story that happened once upon a time.

Consider this example:

*Ray could suddenly feel the room widely circling around him before he started to wake up. He was feeling completely horrible. He hated feeling that way. Slowly rolling to his stomach and silently swinging one leg off the bed, he could use the floor as an anchor. The floor was solid and it would help to stop the dizziness. There was a good chance he would be very sick.*

Exciting, huh? Okay, let's examine why this leaves us breathless with boredom:

- **Unnecessary words.** Any word that doesn't add to your story detracts from it. Examine your prose for words like these: started to, began to, proceeded to, could, would, there was, there are, there is, there were, seemed to, tried to.
- **Inactive verbs.** Watch for passive verbs, such as was, is, were, are. Replace them with active verbs, the most active and descriptive words you can think of.
- **Present participles.** Verbs ending with "ing" are by nature more passive than those ending with "ed."
- **Adverbs.** Those -ly words that precede a verb weaken it, not strengthen it. If your verb isn't strong enough to make the statement you want it to make, find a stronger verb.
- **Intensifiers.** Very, really, totally, completely, truly and so on. Is completely empty any more empty?

Before we look at our example above, let's examine each of these concepts individually and see how they suck the power right out of our prose. Each of the following sentence pairs gives a poorly written sentence, followed by one that improves it:

- It *is* the governor's plan to visit tomorrow. The governor *plans* to visit tomorrow.
- John *proceeded to dump* sand on the castle. John *dumped* sand on the castle.
- *There were* eight tiny reindeer leading Santa's sleigh. Eight tiny reindeer *led* Santa's sleigh.
- Jack *could hear* laughter. Jack *heard* laughter.
- Erin *was sleeping*. Erin *slept*.
- Mike *was very tired*. Mike *was exhausted*. (Better yet: Exhaustion dripped through Mike's bones like slow pouring molasses. Okay, okay, so I get carried away. Sorry.)
- She *quickly and purposefully walked* to Jarod and *sharply hit* his arm. She *strode* to Jarod and *punched* his arm.

Now, before we apply these concepts to our example paragraph above, give it a try yourself. But be advised, more than one answer is possible, and I took it a step further and omitted complete sentences that added no value and redesigned others for a more effective flow.

Ready? This is what I came up with:





*The room circled around Ray. He rolled to his stomach and swung one leg off the bed, using the floor as an anchor. Even before he opened his eyes, he knew he would be sick.*

Half as many words, twice the power.

Also, construct sentences in an active way so that the subject of your sentence performs the action instead of your subject having an action performed upon him. This means the actor (subject) is mentioned before the action (verb), not after. Examples:

Passive: Sleeping was used by the writer to prevent exhaustion.

Active: The writer slept to prevent exhaustion.

Passive: A book is read by the student.

Active: The student reads a book.

Note that those tell-tale helping verbs (was, is, were, are) again clue us that we have succumbed to the depths of passivity.

Learning to change ineffective passive prose into active voice is one of the most important things you can do to increase the quality of your fiction.





## EXERCISE: Active Voice

Now try your hand at making these sentences more active. Possible solutions are printed in **Section 6**.

1. Sandy started to sit up.
2. Wilma was leisurely looking out the window when she started noticing the big bird.
3. There were fifteen new members at the prose workshop.
4. Joan was very good at reading her story.
5. It is my intention to thoroughly teach how very bad passive voice really is.
6. I could see that my constantly repetitive lessons were starting to get annoying.

And the challenge is:

Ray Gambel started to thinly slice potatoes, and he was constantly watching the clock. It was 3:45. There was a phone on the counter and he would look at it, as though that would really make it ring. The letter he'd gotten from his father was very precise: he would call on Friday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. Eastern time.

Ray quickly wiped his hands on his jeans. He reached into the pocket of his new plaid flannel shirt and there was the envelope. He took it out of his shirt pocket and looked at it. While he was looking at it, he noticed there wasn't a return address. But the postmark was there and it was clearly visible: "El Paso, Texas, March 10, 1969."





## Advanced Techniques: Show, Don't Tell

The First Rule of Writing is Show, Don't Tell. That sounds easy, but what, exactly, does *show* mean?

Let's look at an example:

*Carey ate breakfast, then he took a shower and went to the store. At the store he met a girl and they talked for a long time. Carey liked her but she blew him off. Then he went home.*

Tells you a lot about Carey, huh? Okay—so this example is really exaggerated, but it hits home the necessity of showing and not telling. What can we do to fix it? We need more detail, especially in dialogue and action. Consider:

*Carey studied the frozen dinners. He'd had turkey and dressing for the last four days, so Salisbury steak would be good for a change. But did he want the "Big Man" or the regular?*

*A scent teased his nose. Not the overwhelming smell of fish and frostbite, but a fresh smell, like the smell of skin just out of the shower. He glanced sideways and saw the most perfect arm he'd ever seen in his life. Long, slender, graceful, full of sinewy muscle and smooth skin. His eyes followed the arm to the shoulder and then the head. Her head. A head covered with long blond hair and containing a face that made his heart stop.*

*"Hi," she said, her voice rich and melodious.*

*Carey's mouth didn't work. He tried to return her greeting, but only a grunt came out. He tried to smile politely, but his face erupted with a grin as large and toothy and goofy as a cartoon character's . . .*

So now you have the idea. We need details. We need to know thoughts, feelings; we need to smell the perfume, taste the wine, feel the cashmere. Anything less cheats the reader from experiencing our imaginary world.

We also get into the "show, don't tell" problem in less apparent ways. For example, in description. *Mary was a pretty girl, with blue eyes and blond hair.* That is telling. Consider: *Mary's blue eyes glistened with joy, her blond hair bouncing with each step.* That is showing.

Instead of saying *Molly is a wonderful person*, say *Molly is always there when anyone needs her. She's the first to arrive with a casserole when someone is sick, the first to send a note of encouragement to those who are troubled, the first to offer a hug to anyone—man, woman or child—at anytime.*

Instead of saying *Sam is a talented musician*, let us hear the crowds cheer, let us feel his passion. Take us into his head as he strokes the piano keys:

*Consummation of the soul. That's what Sam called the gratification he received from music. When his passion became so intense it begged to be satisfied, pleaded to be released, and he was helpless to resist its urges. When his fingers assumed a life of their own, titillating the ivory keys with the complex music of Bach and Mozart and Beethoven, and he became one*





*with the cadence, breathing with the crescendos, his fingers caressing the melody, until everything else faded, everything else disappeared, and only the music existed.*

Instead of saying *Marci is a spoiled child*, let us hear that whine. Let us—never mind. I really don't want to hear it.

Dialogue is another area where we have the opportunity to show or to tell. *"I love you," she crooned. "I love you, too," he sputtered.* And I cringe. First, using creative dialogue tags (crooned, sputtered) is one of my pet peeves and is discussed in **Section 2**. Second, it is cheap. It is telling, not showing. Let the power of your dialogue and the accompanying action show your readers the tone of voice and the emotion, don't tell them. Consider:

*"I love you," she said, her voice smooth as her fingers massaged his Rolex.*

*"Love you, too," he said. His glassy eyes roved over her naked body, his mouth too wet and limp to form words properly.*

You can't tell us someone is a wonderful person, a talented musician or a spoiled child. We won't believe you. You must show us. Throughout your manuscript, look for any opportunity to show us in real time, to act out, to let us feel. The difference will amaze you.

But—does this mean we should act out absolutely everything? Uh-uh. Let's face it—if we showed everything, our novels would run tens of thousands of pages—and readers would die of exhaustion. So what do we do? We must decide what information the reader needs. Just because we know everything about our characters and just because we spent weeks researching, it isn't necessary to share everything we know with our reader. We must choose only the details we need to authenticate our story and omit everything else.

**NARRATIVE** is telling what happens. This is useful when the acting out of the story (by dialogue and action) does nothing to further our understanding of the characters or plot.

**EXPOSITION** is explaining why something happened or gives background information.

One of the most difficult and most crucial elements in story-telling is knowing when to give play-by-play action and when to back off and summarize. Play with this. If a scene doesn't hold your interest, maybe it is better to summarize it in a sentence or two and go on to something more important. However, if it is a pivotal scene in the plot or critical to our understanding how our character reacts in a given situation, go for it. Give us action, give us dialogue, and let us experience and savor every single moment of it.





## EXERCISE: Show, Don't Tell

Show the following (see **Section 6** for possible solutions):

1. Jessica was a pretty girl, although she was rather stupid at times.
2. Kathy told Martin that he was too old for her.
3. "I wouldn't go in there," the secretary snipped.
4. Jeremy wanted to win, but he was afraid he wouldn't.





## Advanced Techniques: Say It Once, Say It Right

Let's face it. We're writers because we love words. We love the way they sound and we love the way they roll off our tongues. We love to string them together and give meaning to our existence through them. Words are our babies. And one of the toughest things we must do as professional writers is to weed through these babies we've created and eliminate those that don't pull their own weight. Yes, we are talking infanticide here. Killing our babies.

Redundancy is one of the carnal sins of writers. We don't trust our words to do their job. We don't trust our reader to catch our meaning the first time. So we repeat ourselves. Unfortunately, any word that doesn't add to a story, detracts.

Now, before you slam this book shut on me, let me offer an alternative. For large groups of words that I just don't have the heart to kill, I keep a file on my hard drive titled "Babies." Whenever I write (what I consider) beautiful prose that just doesn't fit my story, I cut it from my manuscript and move it to my "Babies" file. That way, I don't feel like a murderer.

But for those little redundancies, the little repetitions (like in this sentence), the best alternative is death. Let's take a look at an example:

*Shelly sat cross-legged on the over-sized sofa. Her life was about to change. She peeked inside the envelope. The letter in the envelope was neatly folded. She took the letter out of the envelope and opened it. She was afraid of what it would say. She was scared that Larry was giving her the brush-off. Her trembling hands held the paper open. With great trepidation, she read the words that would change her life forever. She would never be the same again.*

Okay, redundancy irritates us. Did the writer think we were so bored we had nothing better to do than read the same thought over again? Or did the writer just think we were too stupid to catch on to what was happening? My guess is that the writer was trying to slow the pace and became lazy.

Regardless of the reason, we, as writers, don't want to irritate our readers. Therefore, we need to use care in choosing words that best say what we need to say, and then say those words once. We gotta trust our words to do their job and we gotta trust our reader to do his. So, let's revisit Shelly's letter and see what we can do with it:

*Shelly sat cross-legged on the over-sized sofa and peeked inside the envelope. She removed the neatly folded letter and opened it. Her hands trembled as she read the words that would change her life forever.*

Well—it's better, but we can see the need to slow the pacing. To do that, we can add one of the following to the paragraph:

- "She wiped her palms on the shirt Larry had given her."
- Something to give the depth of her feelings: "She wouldn't be able to bear life without Larry."
- The use of other senses: "The letter smelled of Old Spice. Shelly took a deep whiff and imagined Larry sitting next to her, holding her hand, rubbing her knuckles, bringing her fingers to his lips for a soft kiss."





See **Pacing** previously in this section for more ideas on controlling the pace.

Redundancy can also come in the form of a single word or phrase. For example, “free gift” or “sum total.” Entire websites are devoted to naming and eliminating these little nuisances.

Some writers repeat ideas in a list, such as, “*She was tired, worn out, and exhausted.*” Okay. Wouldn’t just saying she was exhausted serve the purpose? Better, say it more creatively and actively, like, “*Exhaustion hung to her like possums to their mama.*” (just kidding!)

Be aware of repetition in your writing. Crisp prose has no room for it. So, the next time you feel like a redundancy, repeat this to yourself ten times:

**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
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**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**  
**Any word that doesn’t add to your prose, detracts from it.**





## Exercise: Say it Once, Say it Right

Give your hand a try at eliminating these redundancies (see **Section 6** for possible solutions):

1. Janie had a tiny little hand.
2. Wilbur ate quickly, in a hurry, and rushed through dinner.
3. Jacqueline looked at the old antique and quietly whispered to the neighbor next to her.
4. "I don't wanna go home!" she whined.
5. "Don't touch me," she warned.
6. There was three seconds left on the clock. The arena was quiet, totally silent. Not a sound was heard anywhere. No one shouted. No one breathed. No one moved. Michael stood on the court and posed, then raised his arms and aimed the basketball at the net. He shot the basketball. It left his hands and in slow motion, it lifted into the weightless air, then silently slid through the net without so much as a swoosh. The quiet crowd exploded with cheers, catcalls, applause, clapping and screaming. With less than a single second left on the time clock, the Lakers stole the lead. They won. They had done it. (Hint: my solution to this one might surprise you)





## Advanced Techniques: Grammar/Punctuation

The greatest novel in the history of the universe will never reach publication if the author does not have a decent command of the English language. If your grammar needs a brush up, consider taking a grammar course at your local college, or at least invest in a good grammar text and study it. Most of the manuscripts I see have decent grammar. However, there are still certain mistakes that I see too often. Here are some solutions:

- Maintain tense. Changing from past tense to present tense within a scene is (almost) never acceptable.
- Check spelling. With all the spell check features available, there is no excuse for misspelling.
- Don't always trust spell check. Many spell check editors remove hyphens between compound adjectives that precede a noun, such as "well-known writer." Also, be careful not to automatically accept the suggested alternative spelling, and be sure to proof your work for the use of the *correct word*.
- Spell out state names, "okay," units of measure, people's names, months, and days of the week. It is okay to abbreviate titles that come before or after proper names (Mrs. Smith, Dr. John Doe, MD), BC and AD, initials of famous people (JFK, LBJ), corporations best known by their initials (TCI, IBM), organizations (YMCA, FBI), and universities (WVU, UCLA). It is also okay to use other acronyms, as long as they are generally understood or as long as the first time they are used the full name is included in parentheses afterwards.
- Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. "*Learning the correct grammar,*" Sandy said, "*can be interesting.*" Question marks are dependent upon whether the quote forms the question or if the quote simply happens to be within a question. Examples: *Shelly looked both ways, then asked, "Where's his car?"* or *Did you hear Joanne when she said, "No way, Jerk"?*
- Use double quotation marks for dialogue. When it is necessary to make a quote within dialogue, use single quotation marks. "Sandy said, 'Watch using single quotes.'" Single quotes should not be used for another other purpose. If you want to set off or accent a word in a sentence, use either double quotes or italics: John put the "good" china on the table. Joey ate from a "soon"—his word for "spoon."
- Keep your sentences parallel in construction. For example: "Johnny brought his mother's diary, handkerchief, and his father's wallet for show and tell." Was the handkerchief his mother's or someone else's? To phrase this properly, say, "Johnny brought his mother's diary and handkerchief and his father's wallet for show and tell." Or "Johnny brought his mother's diary, his mother's handkerchief and his father's wallet for show and tell."

I also see certain words misused with some frequency. These include:

- **Lay/Lie.** Definitely the most common error I run into. And no wonder. In present tense, **lay** means to cause to lie down or to place. It requires an object. Example: "He **laid** his hat next to his gloves," where **laid** (past tense of "**lay**") is the verb and his hat is the object. **Lie** means to be or to place oneself in a reclining position. Example: "He **lies** on the bed pretending to sleep." There is no object, nothing that further explains what or who lies, because the verb lie modifies the subject of the sentence (in this case, he). But it is past





tense that trips up 80% of the writers I've worked with. The past tense of **lay** is **laid**. No sweat. BUT—the past tense of **lie** is **lay**. Ugh! (Any wonder we get confused?) Examples:

Present tense: She **lays** the book on the table.

Past tense: She **laid** the book on the table.

Present tense: She **lies** on the sofa and enjoys the breeze.

Past tense: She **lay** on the sofa and enjoyed the breeze.

- **Alright/All right.** **Alright** is no longer considered an acceptable word. **All right** is the only correct spelling.
- **Then/Than.** **Then** means a time or accordingly. **Than** is a comparison.
- **Affect/Effect.** **Affect** is usually a verb meaning “to influence.” **Effect** is a noun, meaning “result.” Drinking does not **affect** his personality. If fact, it seems to have no **effect** at all.
- **Conscience/Conscious.** **Conscience** is a noun meaning having a sense of right and wrong. **Conscious** is an adjective meaning to be aware of.
- **Further/Farther.** **Farther** refers to actual, physical distance. **Further** refers to a thought or idea. “It is **farther** to Nancy’s house than we thought.” “The **further** we go in the discussion, the more apparent it becomes that the parents are always right.”
- **Each other/One another.** **Each other** is used when only two people are involved. **One another** is used when more than two people are involved. “Jane and Michael looked at **each other** and sighed.” “The Holzen triplets hugged **one another**.”
- **Have/ Of.** Use **have**, not **of**, after helping verbs such as could, would, should, may and might. *I should **have** (not **of**) known that.* I think this confusion occurs because of the pronunciation of the contracted **have**: ‘**ve**. So, our example sentence could have been written: *I should’ve known that.*
- **Past/Passed.** **Past** refers to something that happened at a previous time or that is on a farther side of something or going beyond something, and is typically a noun, a preposition, an adjective or an adverb. **Passed** is a verb that means to move past or through. The time was **past** for a frank talk. Time **passed** slowly. The library is **past** the post office. We **passed** the library before we arrived at the post office. That’s in the **past** now.

If your grammar exceeds the seventh grade level, you make take literary license and “adjust” the grammar as you see fit as long as it serves an artistic purpose. Such as using sentence fragments like this one for emphasis. Or starting sentences with conjunctions (like this one). However, if it doesn’t serve a purpose, use correct grammar so your reader (and publisher!) will realize that you do understand the proper way of doing it.





## PUNCTUATION NOTES:

### SPACING

Leave only one space after all punctuation marks, including the period. (The old rule of using two spaces after a sentence no longer applies. The purpose of that rule was to assist typesetters in seeing periods more easily when retyping your manuscript. But now, most manuscripts are submitted in electronic format and publishers want them ready to convert). The exceptions to this are hyphens and dashes, which have no spaces before or after.

### DATE AND TIME

Punctuate dates like this:

- September 1, 2002
- September 2002
- 1960s
- 60s
- 20<sup>th</sup> century

Punctuate time like this:

- spell out the number when in a body of text: five o'clock
- use figures when using a.m. and p.m.: 5 a.m. (use lowercase characters and put periods after each letter of a.m. and p.m.)

### ELLIPSES

Rarely do I see the ellipsis mark used correctly. First, it is formed by using three periods, separated by spaces ( . . . ). Not five periods, not two periods, but three periods, each with a space before and a space after. If an ellipsis mark occurs at the end of a sentence, it may include a fourth period, a question mark or an exclamation mark to show the end of the sentence. The main function of an ellipsis mark is to show omission of material within quoted matter. For example:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of death . . .”

Novice writers sometimes use ellipsis marks to hold their reader's attention. For example, ending a scene like this: “And then she heard a noise . . .”

This is generally frowned upon in the literary community, especially when it is overdone.

Ellipsis marks are *not* used to show an unfinished sentence, a pause within a sentence, or to set off a phrase. Please repeat: **ellipsis marks ARE NOT USED to show an unfinished sentence, a pause within a sentence, or to set off a phrase.** These functions belong to the dash.

### DASHES

The dash also tends to be abused and misused. First of all, a dash is formed by using two hyphens without any spaces before, between or after the hyphens. Many word processing programs will automatically change two side-by-side hyphens to an em-dash. Note: the em-dash (—) is actually preferable to the double hyphens (--). Second, the dash punctuates





sentences, not words. When combining two words to form a single word (as in one-half or well-dressed), use a hyphen. When looking for something stronger than a comma to punctuate a sentence with, use a dash.

- A dash can indicate a sudden break or a change in continuity. Example: “I—uh—I just don’t know.”—or—“I don’t want to ever see you—what is that on your shirt?”
- A set of dashes can set aside a non-essential phrase within a sentence. Non-essential means that the sentence will still be a sentence without the phrase. Example: “Just as I was about to sit—and I do mean *just*—I saw the spider.” When used to set aside a phrase, both a beginning and an ending dash must be used (do not start the offset with a dash and end it with a comma).
- A set of dashes may be used to set apart an explanatory phrase, such as: “I love reading novels—fat, juicy, long-winded novels—on my summer vacation.”—or—“We need to get a first aid kit—bandages, tape, elastic bandages—for the cheerleading squad.”
- A dash indicates an unfinished sentence: “I hope that isn’t a snake—”

### COMMA USAGE

The comma appears to be a harmless little fellow, but don’t let appearances deceive you. Sure, the little guy never shouts, never declares, never questions, never even finishes a sentence for that matter, but that doesn’t mean he holds no power. In fact, he is the hardest working of all the punctuation marks, the only one often appearing more than once in a single sentence. He holds the power to change the meaning of a sentence and to disrupt the flow of prose. Therefore, isn’t it time to give the little guy his due and quit misunderstanding him? Here’s his M.O.:

- Use a comma to separate the clauses of a compound sentence connected by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so* and *yet*). The comma is placed before the coordinating conjunction, not after. Examples:

*The students ate spaghetti for dinner, but no one cleaned his plate.  
I gave three books to John, and John gave them to Nancy.*

However, do **not** use a comma before *and, but, or* and *nor* when they link pairs of words, phrases or elements other than main clauses. Examples:

*The students ate spaghetti for dinner and cake for dessert.  
I gave three books to John and four to Nancy.*

The trick here is to recognize if the conjunction separates a main clause (or major thought), or if it simply links pairs of words or phrases. Also, the comma may be omitted in short compound sentences when the connection between the clauses is close, such as:

*Justin stood in the corner and he watched.*

If the sentence is clearly understandable without the comma, it is probably okay to omit it.





- The comma separates two or more adjectives modifying the same noun if “and” could be used between them without changing the meaning. Example:  
*Janine pushed her long, straight hair out of her eyes.*

However, do not use a comma between unequal adjectives or when an adjective modifies another adjective (instead of the noun):

*His coal black hair glistened in the brilliant midday sun.*

The test is whether *and* can be substituted for the comma.

- The comma also separates the items in a list or a series. Example:  
*Jasmine visited the park, the museum, the courthouse, and the historical hotel on the last day of her vacation.*

Note that the comma before the last item in the series (the one directly before *and*) is optional. Also, note that no comma appears before the first element in the list (the park), nor after the last element in the list (the historical hotel).

- The comma is used in setting off transitional expressions (*however, regardless, of course* and so on) from the rest of the sentence. Examples:  
*The weight of the ball, however, was greater than the strength of the boy.*  
*Of course, we could have eaten after they arrived.*  
*Did he, after all, sleep in the den?*
- The comma is used with introductory elements:  
*No, he didn't wear a hat.*  
*Well, that was the just the beginning of my problems.*  
*When the bell rings, the students race through the halls.*
- A comma sets off long phrases that precede a principal clause:  
*Before we could call Great Aunt Mary, we had to locate her phone number.*  
*After listening to the forty-five minute sermon, the children were in no mood for lectures.*

Confused yet? Great! There are even more rules to remember!

- The comma sets off words or phrases that rename nouns. Examples:  
*John, my oldest cousin, loves to garden.*  
*Parkersburg, the third largest city in West Virginia, has a population of 38,000.*  
*The girl, who had cried the day before, played happily with the other toddlers.*





However, do not use a comma if the added information is essential to the meaning of the sentence, such as:

*The song “Unchained Melody” melts my heart.*  
*People who dream in color are thought to be clairvoyant.*  
*The girl who had cried the day before made friends; the girl who had been friendly sat quietly alone.*

The test is whether the sentence makes sense if the renamed noun is removed from the sentence.

- A comma can indicate the omission of a word or words:  
*To err is human; to forgive, divine.*
- A comma is used to set off a word of direct address:  
*Aunt Mary, this is my friend, Nathan.*  
*People, don’t let this happen to you.*  
*Thank you, Wilma, for teaching me about commas.*
- A comma is used to set off a quotation from a dialogue tag. Examples:  
*He said, “I didn’t do it.”*  
*“I don’t believe it,” Jason replied, “but maybe if you prove it, I will.”*  
*“I don’t believe it, either,” Anna said. “Prove it.”*
- A comma sets off a tag question from the rest of the sentence:  
*I didn’t see it there, did you?*  
*That’s the best movie of the year, isn’t it?*
- A comma also can be used to set off any sentence element that might be misunderstood if the comma were not used, such as:  
*To me, Millie would always be my best friend.*  
*Some time ago, Roxanne decided to become a dancer.*
- And finally, a comma is used to set off a city from a state, the year from a full date, a series of four or more numbers, and to set off titles and degrees from surnames and from the rest of a sentence:  
*My children were born in Winneconne, Wisconsin.*  
*My oldest daughter was born on November 21, 1986.*  
*I wish my husband made \$625,000 a year.*  
*My husband’s full name is Sherden C. Tritt, Jr., although he goes by “Butch.”*





As you can see, the innocuous little fellow known as the comma can be quite cantankerous. It's no wonder that comma usage is the number one mistake I see on manuscripts I edit. Study this little guy—once you've mastered him, you've accomplished a great feat.





## Exercises: Grammar/Punctuation

Correct the following sentences (note that some sentences may have more than one error). See **Section 6** for solutions.

1. Dana ate eggs for breakfast, while she sits on the floor.
2. “Is it alright for Judy to lay on the floor”?”
3. “I should of known, it was on my birthday Sept. 26”, she said.
4. Aunt Mary, never wore that hat more then 3 times.
5. ‘Making up stupid sentence’s effects my conscious,’ Sandy said.
6. I looked at she and she looked at I . . . and we just kept looking at one another.
7. Stacy—my youngest daughter, likes to run further then shes supposed, to go.
8. My dog lays on the floor . . . my cat prefers the windowsill: I like the couch.
9. The Doctor, dr. John Marshall Jr. would of taken my temperature if I hadn’t of told him that believe it or not my daughter was the patient.
10. If you have problems with these exercises than you should study you’re grammar.





# Section Five

## The Next Step



Preparing Your Manuscript  
The Query Letter  
The Synopsis  
Finding an Agent  
Self-Publishing



## The Next Step: Preparing Your Manuscript

So much of writing is subjective—my preferences are not necessarily the same as someone else's, nor are they necessarily right or wrong. But writing professionals (agents, editors, publishers and so on) generally agree with the following guidelines:

- The manuscript must be typed or computer-generated. No handwritten submissions, regardless of how wonderful your handwriting.
- Use clean, white, 8 ½ by 11 inch unlined paper of average thickness. No onion skin and no card stock. And please, no cute graphics or pretty flowers. Keep it professional.
- Use an easy-to-read font, preferably COURIER or TIMES NEW ROMAN. Nothing cute, nothing fancy. Just ordinary font easy on the eyes. The preferred font size is 12.
- Left adjust the print. Do not right adjust, center or fill the line to force a right flush.
- Leave at least a one inch margin on all sides—top, bottom, left and right.
- Double space.
- Unless otherwise instructed, leave only *one* space after a period.
- If you have followed the above suggestions, you should average 250 words per page. The reason for this is not so you can destroy the environment by wasting trees, but so the writing professional can read your work without a migraine and have plenty of space to make corrections, comments and suggestions in the margins and between the lines.
- Indent each paragraph 1/2 inch. Do this by setting and using the tab, not by typing spaces. Do not skip a line between paragraphs.
- Do not leave a line between scenes. Instead, center asterisks, dashes, or dots to show the line was intentionally left blank. Note: This is no longer consistently true. Some publishers now download your electronic manuscript into their publishing software, and want it as it will be printed. So, when submitting a paper copy, still include the asterisks. But check before submitting an electronic version.
- Unless your manuscript is a submission for a contest with different instructions, put the name of the manuscript and your name, separated by a slash, on the upper left corner of every page (you may skip the first page if the author name and info is included on the page). Example of how this should look: Living the Legacy / Tritt
- Again, unless otherwise instructed, put the word “page” and the page number (and do use a number, not the number spelled out), on the upper right corner of each page.
- Unless otherwise instructed, do not staple the pages. For small manuscripts, use a paper clip. For larger ones, put in an appropriately sized box and do not bind at all.
- Spell check. No matter how few words you've added or changed, run spell check one more time.
- Don't send the only copy of your work.
- Verify that all pages are included and that all are in readable condition. Copiers have a keen sense of humor and will eat your work, or better yet, substitute a blank or partially written page instead of the real thing. Do not trust them.
- Include a cover letter, unless requested not to. It can be short, simple and to the point, but should include the author's full name and address, telephone number with best time to call,





and email address. It should give the name of the manuscript, the approximate word count and a statement as to why you are sending it. (Be specific. If for publication in a magazine, list the magazine name. If for a contest, list the contest name and end date. If for a critique, say so. Many writing professionals dabble in multiple endeavors and don't like to figure out which one you are referring to.) You may also mention the reason you've written this specific manuscript and anything else pertinent or special about the manuscript or the author (such as it is based on a true story or the author is twelve years old). Give special instructions, such as if you do not want the manuscript returned. Do not get carried away; a cover page should never exceed one page and should be single spaced.

- If a query is enclosed, it should take the place of the cover letter. A query should have one paragraph about the manuscript, one paragraph about the author (include any awards, special qualifications and publishing history) and one paragraph about what you want (representation, published) and what you are willing to do to get it (book-signings, speeches, sacrifice your firstborn). Don't try to be funny. It's almost guaranteed that the professional won't share your sense of humor and will send you straight to the rejection pile.
- Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Be sure to include ample postage, enough for the professional to add three or four pages of her own in addition to your manuscript. If you live in a different country than the recipient, do not adhere to the postage. Instead, paper clip international reply coupons ("IRC," which are available at any post office) or enough money to completely cover the postage. This should be noted on the cover page.
- If a fee is required, send a check or money order, never cash. Again, if you live in a different country than the recipient, send a money order in the recipient's country's funds. For example, if you live in Canada and you are sending to a U.S. address, get a money order payable in U.S. funds. Most banks, post offices and—last resort—international airports, can handle this transaction for a small fee.
- Never pay an agent or publisher unless you are well aware of exactly what you will receive for your money. Legitimate agents and publishers do not charge reading fees. Likewise, be wary of an agent or publisher who recommends a specific book doctor or editor. It is likely that there is a kickback involved and you'll be paying for it.
- Double check everything before mailing, including the recipient's address. Seal, drop in the mailbox and say a prayer.

There are entire books devoted to manuscript formats and submission, but these are the basics. Unless you need specific information or guidance for writing a query letter, you should be fine. Remember, you will never be published (or win a contest) if you don't take that first step and make a submission. Rejection, however uncomfortable, is not fatal.





## The Next Step: The Query Letter

Your query letter is your first—and perhaps only—chance to capture an agent or publisher’s attention. It is the introduction to you and to your manuscript. It must be brief and it must be intriguing. So, now that you are appropriately worried, let’s get started.

The first paragraph of a query letter should state what it is you want (published, representation by an agent), and give the name, length and genre (type) of the manuscript you want published or represented. (See **Section 7** for a list of genres). You may also list any awards this particular work has earned or the audience this manuscript is appropriate for.

The second paragraph describes your novel in just a few sentences. Use your focus statement (as explained in **Section 2.**) and expand on it slightly.

The third paragraph tells about you. If you’ve been published, so say and say where. If you’ve won awards for your writing, also say so. Also mention anything that gives you integrity as a writer (being the president of your local writing group, holding a Masters Degree in Creative Writing and so on). If you come up short in writing experience or credentials, fill in with why you are the appropriate person to write this story. (“I served as a Corporal in Vietnam from 1965 until 1968” or “I have been a detective with the Los Angeles Police Department for thirty years”).

And the fourth paragraph covers business basics, a summary of exactly what you want (“May I send the completed manuscript to you for review?”) and a hearty thank you: “I have enclosed a short synopsis and the first three chapters of *My Manuscript’s Name*. I have also enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your reply. It is not necessary to return my material. I very much appreciate your time in reviewing my material, and I look forward to hearing from you.”

Sign off in a business fashion: “Sincerely, Jane Doe.”

Some dos and don’ts:

- Do use standard business block format.
- Do keep your query to one page.
- Do be sure to include your name, address, phone number and email address in the header.
- Do include a self-addressed stamped envelope for a reply.
- Do address the query letter to a PERSON, not a position.
- Don’t say how wonderful your book is. Allow the editor/agent to make that decision.
- Do check and double check your spelling and grammar.

See **Section Seven** for a sample query letter.





## The Next Step: The Synopsis

So you thought writing a novel was hard, huh? Try boiling that novel down to 500 words. That's what a synopsis is—a mini-version of your novel that captures the essence of your plot, setting and characters in an intriguing way. That's enough to make even the hardest of writers run for cover. Now do you want the bad news? Some agents/publishers prefer a one-page synopsis; others want a more detailed, five to ten page synopsis. My suggestion? Create a daggone good two-page synopsis and be done with it. (See **Section Seven** for a sample synopsis).

How? If you've used the **Novel Summary Worksheet** in **Section Eight**, you pretty much have your synopsis done. (If you didn't use this worksheet in the planning of your novel, do it now. It outlines your synopsis for you). In the first paragraph of your synopsis, you must establish the main character(s), the setting (both time and place), and the focus of your story (use either your focus statement, or, in a character-driven story, you can use the character statement). From there, list only the highlights—what it is that takes your character or your plot from the opening of your novel to the resolution. Do not introduce subplots or anyone other than the major characters. Present major occurrences in chronological order and **KEEP IT INTERESTING** (easy to say, huh?). Most importantly, spend a paragraph on the climax and another paragraph on the resolution. Make sure you include how the character has changed or has been affected by the outcome in a character-driven novel, or how the situation has been changed or resolved in an action-based novel.

Here is a list of suggestions:

- A synopsis should always be written in present tense, regardless of the tense used in the manuscript.
- A synopsis should always be written in the third person, omniscient point of view. The first time you mention a character, put his name in ALL CAPS.
- Always refer to the character by the exact same name (not John in one paragraph and Captain Starkey in the next).
- Most professionals prefer to see the synopsis single spaced. Check the agency or publisher you are querying, and if no preference in spacing is noted, use single spacing here and double spacing on any chapters you send. Exception: if your synopsis exceeds two pages, double space.
- Be sure to use the full title of the manuscript, either centered in title format on the first page of your synopsis, or placed in the upper left hand corner, preceded by the word "synopsis."
- Be sure you have no spelling or grammatical errors in your synopsis.

After you've written your synopsis, let it sit for a couple of days, then come back to it. Does it make sense? Does it flow? Is it interesting? Allow some trusted friends (preferably friends in the writing business) take a look at it. And then relax. Once you've written a synopsis, you are truly a writer.





## The Next Step: Finding an Agent

Well, we've finally done it. We've written our novel, we've struggled through the synopsis, we've figured out the query letter—now, who do we send it to? It is time to make some decisions. Your first decision: do you want to self-publish or traditionally publish? If you self-publish, you pay for all the costs of bringing your book to print, and you do all of your own marketing and sales. You also keep all of the proceeds. If you publish in the traditional sense, you give the rights (or some of the rights) to your manuscript to a publisher. In exchange, you may (or may not) receive an advance (a “down-payment” towards future sales) and you may (or may not) receive royalties (a portion of the sale of each book), depending on whether or not your book sells well. If you decide to self-publish, see our discussion following this one. However, if you choose to publish your book traditionally, you must decide if you want to represent yourself or if you want to hire a Literary Agent to represent you. Many of the larger publishing houses do not accept unagented manuscripts, which is one good reason for getting an agent. Another is that your agent can often strike a much better bargain for you than you could negotiate yourself. In return, you “pay” your agent ten to twenty percent of your royalties. I believe that fiction writers who want to be published by a major publisher will do better with an agent than without one.

Respectable agents do not charge fees. Nor do they recommend a particular editor or refer you anywhere where you will be charged fees. They are paid solely from commissions of sales. The Association of Author's Representatives (AAR) is a voluntary professional organization whose members agree to follow a certain standard of ethics. Membership in this organization is a good sign.

So where do you find an agent? Start with any one of the several comprehensive listings of agents in such books as *Writer's Market* (Writer's Digest Books), *Guide to Literary Agents* edited by Rachel Vater (Writer's Digest Books), *Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents, 2003-2004: Who They Are! What They Want! and How to Win Them Over* by Jeff Herman (Prima Publishing), and *Literary Agents: What They Do, How They Do It, and How to Find and Work with the Right One for You* by Michael Larsen (John Wiley and Sons). In these listings, agents are usually first divided by fee-charging and non-fee-charging (go for the non-fee-charging), then in alphabetical order. Some agents only handle fiction, some only nonfiction, some both. Some agents do not accept queries from non-published writers. Some only represent certain genres. This is the time to do your homework. Do not waste your time, postage and paper on an agent who is not interested in your work. Also, pay attention to what the agent wants: query only, query and first three chapters, and so forth. Then, send exactly what is requested. (However: when an agent says “query only,” I still include the one or two page synopsis).

Also take the time to read the “insider advice” that comes in each of these books. They tell you what to expect and give you several suggestions.

Once you've found a list of agents who seem compatible with you and your work, address a query letter to each particular agent. In the envelope, include a one-page synopsis and, if requested, the first three chapters (or first fifty pages). Remember to include a self-addressed stamped envelope and be polite. Do not telephone the agent and do not write a nasty follow-up





if you don't hear from him within a reasonable amount of time. Try to send out ten to twenty queries a month. It is always okay to query more than one agent at a time.

Some agents are now accepting email queries. This is fine; just be sure to read carefully their exact requirements. If they request the query be in the text of an email and not an attachment, send it as such. And be sure to follow the guidelines for a professional query letter—just because email is a less formal approach does not mean you should be less formal in soliciting an agent. Professionalism is always appreciated.

Finding an agent is not an easy thing to do. Neither is finding a spouse. But somewhere in this world lives the perfect agent for you. So look, watch, listen, and keep your mind open. Your agent needs you as much as you need him.





## The Next Step: Self-Publishing

So, after a lot of soul-searching, you've decided to self-publish. Or maybe you intended to do so all along. A few years ago self-publishing was looked upon as "vanity" publishing—only those with money to buy immortality considered it. However, times have changed. For one thing, many of the publishing houses have merged and it has become even more difficult and more time consuming to land a traditional publisher. For another, some authors prefer to maintain control over their manuscript and want to keep all the proceeds from it. And some people have intentionally written their books for a small audience: a memoir, for instance, in which they've simply wanted to leave something to their descendants. Therefore, self-publishing has become widely acceptable. So much so that the major Internet book sellers (like Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com) now sell self-published books.

So how do you go about it? Again, there are many ways and entire books are devoted to the process. Your first consideration is probably your budget and your goal. How much can you afford to spend and what do you expect in return? If you have the financial resources, you can hire a full-service publisher who will do everything for you. All you do is provide a readable version of your manuscript and a check. The publisher will typeset it, help you design or choose a cover, get an ISBN and UPC code for you, print it, and then, if you want, even help you market it.

The opposite end is doing all the work yourself and simply hiring a printer. This is the least expensive way to go. However, you must supply the printer with a typeset version of your manuscript (this isn't difficult, but you must either have type-setting software, such as Adobe *Pagemaker*, or hire someone to typeset your work for you). If you are wanting to sell your book at bookstores (physical or Internet), you'll have to get an ISBN and a UPC code for it.

The ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is a unique, machine-readable identification number. You can get these (in sets of ten—you can't order just one number) at:

U.S. ISBN Agency  
630 Central Avenue  
New Providence, NJ 07974  
Tel: 877-310-7333  
Fax: 908-665-2895  
E-mail: isbn-san@bowker.com  
Website: www.isbn.org

As of this printing, the fee for ordering ten ISBN numbers is \$225 and takes about ten days to receive.

The UPC code is the Universal Product Code. In the United States, call the Uniform Code Council at 1-937-435-3870 or visit their website at <https://catalog.webec.uc-council.org/application>. To get a UPC code, you must become a member of the Uniform Code Council, and the fee is based upon the size of your "company."

Another consideration in self-publishing is the copyright. By law, you automatically own the copyright to any work you have created. However, you should place a copyright notice on





the back of your title page. The copyright symbol ( © ) should be printed (or you can spell out the word “copyright”), followed by the year and the owner of the copyright (your name or company). It should also include the statement: “All rights reserved.” An example of how this should look: “© 2002 Sandy Tritt. All rights reserved.” To register your copyright, you must first get an application from the Copyright Office website ([www.loc.gov/copyright](http://www.loc.gov/copyright)) or by calling the Forms and Publications Hotline at 202-707-9100 (You will want Form TX). Once you’ve completely filled out the application, send it with a \$30 filing fee and two copies of your book to:

Library of Congress  
Copyright Office  
101 Independence Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20559-6000

Now, if I haven’t confused you yet, let me keep trying. Besides just having a UPC code and an ISBN number, you also need to have them in barcode format. Unless you have a printer that prints barcodes (or know someone who does), you’ll probably be at the mercy of your printer to do this for you. This service should not cost more than ten to twenty dollars per barcode.

Once you’ve finally gotten all the necessary paperwork done and have gotten your book printed, it’s time to market it. As I mentioned earlier, most Internet bookstores will accept your book. However, most want to keep 50% of the selling price. But half is better than none, and you need the exposure. But they aren’t going to do anything for you as far as making you more visible. You’re going to have to do that yourself. Here are some suggestions to help market your book:

- Register your book with Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com. Solicit friends and readers to give reviews, as this affects your placement.
- Create a website devoted to your book. Get your website on as many search engines as possible and get as many links as possible from appropriate websites.
- Go to book fairs and book festivals. Usually for a small fee, you can set up a table and display your book.
- See if you can get a local bookstore to allow you to do a book-signing.
- If your book is of special interest to any specific groups (Vietnam veterans or elementary school teachers or Catholics), run an ad in magazines that cater to this audience. Better yet, see if you can publish an article related to your book or have a feature article about you and your book printed.
- See if your local newspaper will do an article on you. Most newspapers love to do “human interest” stories. Be sure to have them mention in the article how your book can be purchased.
- See if newspapers in other towns in which you have lived or that are mentioned in your book will do an article.
- Host an “open house” to introduce your book. Again, get as much publicity as you can.
- Personally take your book to locally-owned bookstores (chains usually buy from a list and are more difficult to break into) and ask if they will stock it for you.





- See if any other stores or places of business appropriate to your book will offer your book at their check-out. For example, if you've written a book about growing up Chinese, see if local Chinese restaurants will carry your book. If you've written a book about healthy lifestyles, see if your local health food store will carry it. Be creative. As a general rule, locally-owned stores and establishments are usually more open to such agreements.
- If appropriate, offer your book as a fundraiser for churches or organizations. Give a percentage of the selling price to the group for each sale.

Of course, if all you want is a memoir to pass on to your grandchildren, send your work to a printer, skip the UPC, ISBN and copyright notices, and just do it.

There are books devoted to self-publishing, and if you are serious about going this route, I suggest you pick up one or two and study them.





# Section Six

## Exercise Solutions



Dialogue  
Point of View  
Active Voice  
Show, Don't Tell  
Say it Once, Say it Right  
Grammar/Punctuation



## Exercise Solutions: Dialogue

1. “”  
 “”“”  
 “”  
 “”  
 “Have you seen Justin Powers lately?” Amber asked.  
 Jan’s heart beat faster. “Why?”  
 “Just wondered. I’m thinking about asking him to the dance.”  
 “He’s already got a date,” Jan said, trying to keep the venom out of her voice.  
 “Oh?”  
 “Yeah. You’re looking at her.”  
 Amber took a step back. “Well, what do you know.”  
 Jan looked at her watch. “My mom is waiting for me.”  
 “”  
 “”She turned and walked away.

- Deleted: Hi,
- Deleted: Jan said.
- Deleted: Hi,
- Deleted: Amber answered.
- Deleted: How have you been?
- Deleted: Just fine. How
- Deleted: s your Mom?
- Deleted: Good.
- Deleted: Uh,
- Deleted: Okay, I
- Deleted: I’ll see you later.
- Deleted: Bye.
- Deleted:

2. Give life to the following dialogue:  
 “Sit down here, honey, and let Mommy see.” Jane patted the kitchen chair.  
 “It hurts,” Mikey said, his voice trembling.  
 “I know,” Jane said. “Let me see it.”  
 Mikey removed his hand from his skinned knee. “Ow,” he said. Then he saw the blood and his whimper turned into a howl.  
 “There, there.” She threw a kiss at his knee.  
 Mikey’s wailing grew louder.  
 Jane went to the freezer, took out a Popsicle, and handed it to Mikey. “Here you go.”  
 Mikey wiped his eyes. “Orange?” he asked, taking the treat.  
 Jane smiled. “Of course.” *Note that the comma after “smiled” was changed to a period. “Smiled” is an action, not a dialogue tag.*  
 Mikey mumbled, shoving it into his mouth.  
 Jane grabbed the first aid kit and went to work.






## Exercise Solutions: Point of View Exercises

1. Ray was ten minutes early for his appointment the next day. He stood in the doorway and tugged at his beard, wondering if he should interrupt or come back later.
2. Carol looked up from her work. She smiled at the sight of the large man in the doorway. "Come on in," she said.
3. Ray hesitated. Talking to schoolteachers still intimidated him. But he forced himself forward and walked to the desk. "I'm Ray Gambel." He extended his hand. "David's brother."
4. Carol accepted his handshake. Although he looked nothing like David, there was something familiar about him. She motioned toward an empty chair and waited while he sat. "This is a creative writing class, generally for seniors, but David submitted writing samples last spring to qualify. He's the only junior in the class."
5. Ray nodded. He knew the kid was smart.
6. Carol shuffled through the folders on her desk. "I'm concerned about some of his poetry. I wondered if you would take a few minutes to read it."
7. "Sure."
8. She handed him a stack of papers. Some teachers would have graded the papers and forgotten the content, but Carol worried about her students.
9. Ray slowly read through the poems. The first was titled "If I'd Have Loved You More." Ray immediately knew it was about their mother. David and Joey had written songs during the summer with the same type of stark lyrics. Ray sighed and looked at the next title, "When Wishes Come True." He rubbed his forehead and handed the paper back to Carol. "Our mother died last November. David never got along with her too good."
10. "David seems to have a lot of anger and guilt he's trying to work through. I'd like to refer him to Mr. Meeks, the school counselor."
11. "We talked to Rev. Mitchell right after Mom died, but David wouldn't cooperate. Rev. Mitchell said not to bring him back unless David decided he wanted to talk about it."
12. Carol smiled. David had always been polite in class, but he had that air of arrogance that said he wasn't going to do anything he didn't want to.
13. "Him and Joey—that's another brother—they wrote some songs this summer about Mom."
14. Carol's eyes widened in sudden recognition. "You're a musician, aren't you?"
15. "I got a band."
16. "You played at Dino's Lounge on Labor Day Weekend." He was the one with the wonderful voice, the one who filled the air with ions of sensuality.
17. Ray's face reddened. Labor Day Weekend was Gary's last time with the band. They'd chugged two pitchers of beer and gotten rowdy—even did the *Lion Sleeps* thing. It wasn't the type of show he'd want a schoolteacher to attend. "You weren't there late, were you?"
18. Carol's blue eyes danced. "You were wonderful."
19. Ray wished his face would quit burning.
20. "Would you mind if I gave David's poetry to Mr. Meeks? And suggest he talk to him?"
21. "No."
22. "I'll ask David for his permission before I do." She rose to her feet. "I think David will be fine. Thank you for coming in."



- 
23. Ray stood.
  24. Carol offered her hand. “Anytime you need to talk to someone, give me a call. I’m in the phone book.”
  25. Ray shook her hand. “Thank you.”
  26. “It was wonderful meeting you, Mr. Gambel,” Carol said, allowing her hand to linger in his. “I hope to see you again. Soon.” And she was sure that one way or another, she would.

NOTES by paragraph, explaining why we are in the viewpoint we are in:

1. We are in Ray’s viewpoint, because the act of “wondering” puts us in his head. (Since this is the opening of the scene and the scene opens with focus on Ray, we would also assume we were in Ray’s viewpoint).
2. “At the sight of the large man” can only come from Carol’s viewpoint (since we have eliminated the narrator for the purposes of this exercise). Therefore, we will assume the entire paragraph is from Carol’s viewpoint.
3. Ray thinks, “Talking to schoolteachers still intimidated him.” Therefore, we are in Ray’s viewpoint.
4. Carol thinks, “Although he looked nothing like David, there was something familiar about him.” Therefore, we are in Carol’s viewpoint.
5. Ray thinks, “He knew the kid was smart.”
6. Even though this paragraph focuses on Carol, we are not privy to her thoughts nor do we see anything strictly from her eyes. Therefore, the viewpoint remains with Ray.
7. Ray.
8. Only Carol knows that she is different than some teachers who would have graded the papers and forgotten the content. Therefore, Carol gets viewpoint with this paragraph.
9. Since Ray “knew” it was about their mother, we are in Ray’s viewpoint. Carol wouldn’t “know” this.
10. Although this is dialogue from Carol, anyone can hear it and nothing happens to make us think we are in Carol’s head.
11. Still Ray.
12. Carol thinks, “David had always been polite in class, but he had that air of arrogance that said he wasn’t going to do anything he didn’t want to.” Therefore, Carol gets the viewpoint here.
- 13-15. Nothing happens that takes the viewpoint away from Carol.
16. Still Carol’s viewpoint.
17. We’re in Ray’s head here.
18. Nothing happens to take us out of Ray’s head. Additionally, only Ray would notice the color of Carol’s eyes—Carol wouldn’t.
- 19-25. Still Ray’s viewpoint.
26. Carol thinks “And she was sure that one way or another, she would.”

And the entire scene from Ray’s viewpoint could read:



Ray was ten minutes early for his appointment the next day. He stood in the doorway and tugged at his beard, wondering if he should interrupt or come back later. An attractive woman sat at the desk, immersed in work. Finally, she looked at him and smiled. “Come on in,” she said.

Ray hesitated. Talking to schoolteachers still intimidated him. But he forced himself forward and walked to the desk. “I’m Ray Gambel.” He extended his hand. “David’s brother.”

“Miss Stampley,” she said. She motioned toward an empty chair and waited while he sat. “This is a creative writing class, generally for seniors, but David submitted writing samples last spring to qualify. He’s the only junior in the class.”

Ray nodded. He knew the kid was smart.

Miss Stampley shuffled through the folders on her desk. “I’m concerned about some of his poetry. I wondered if you would take a few minutes to read it.”

“Sure.”

She handed him a stack of papers and he slowly read through the poems. The first was titled “If I’d Have Loved You More.” Ray immediately knew it was about their mother. David and Joey had written songs during the summer with the same type of stark lyrics. Ray sighed and looked at the next title, “When Wishes Come True.” He rubbed his forehead and handed the paper back to Miss Stampley. “Our mother died last November. David never got along with her too good.”

“David seems to have a lot of anger and guilt he’s trying to work through. I’d like to refer him to Mr. Meeks, the school counselor.”

“We talked to Rev. Mitchell right after Mom died, but David wouldn’t cooperate. Rev. Mitchell said not to bring him back unless David decided he wanted to talk about it.”

Miss Stampley smiled and Ray felt encouraged to go on. “Him and Joey—that’s another brother—they wrote some songs this summer about Mom.”

Miss Stampley’s eyes widened. “You’re a musician, aren’t you?”

“I got a band.”

“You played at Dino’s Lounge on Labor Day Weekend.”

Ray’s face reddened. Labor Day Weekend was Gary’s last time with the band. They’d chugged two pitchers of beer and gotten rowdy—even did the *Lion Sleeps* thing. It wasn’t the type of show he’d want a schoolteacher to attend. “You weren’t there late, were you?”

Miss Stampley’s blue eyes danced. “You were wonderful.”

Ray wished his face would quit burning.

“Would you mind if I gave David’s poetry to Mr. Meeks? And suggest he talk to him?”

“No.”

“I’ll ask David for his permission before I do.” She rose to her feet. “I think David will be fine. Thank you for coming in.”

Ray stood.

Miss Stampley offered her hand. “Anytime you need to talk to someone, give me a call. I’m in the phone book.”

Ray shook her hand. “Thank you.”

“It was wonderful meeting you, Mr. Gambel,” Miss Stampley said.

If Ray hadn’t known better, he would have thought that she purposely left her hand in his just a bit too long. But surely, that couldn’t have been. His face still hot, he lumbered from the room.





Or, the scene from strictly Carol's viewpoint could be like this:

Carol looked up from her work. She smiled at the sight of the large man in the doorway. "Come on in," she said.

The man walked hesitantly to her desk. "I'm Ray Gambel." He extended his hand. "David's brother."

Carol accepted his handshake. Although he looked nothing like David, there was something familiar about him. She motioned toward an empty chair and waited while he sat. "This is a creative writing class, generally for seniors, but David submitted writing samples last spring to qualify. He's the only junior in the class."

Ray nodded.

Carol shuffled through the folders on her desk. "I'm concerned about some of his poetry. I wondered if you would take a few minutes to read it."

"Sure."

She handed him a stack of papers. Some teachers would have graded the papers and forgotten the content, but Carol worried about her students. She watched as he looked through the poems. Something about the sight of him made her pulse beat just a little faster.

Finally, Ray rubbed his forehead and handed the papers back to Carol. "Our mother died last November. David never got along with her too good."

"David seems to have a lot of anger and guilt he's trying to work through. I'd like to refer him to Mr. Meeks, the school counselor."

"We talked to Rev. Mitchell right after Mom died, but David wouldn't cooperate. Rev. Mitchell said not to bring him back unless David decided he wanted to talk about it."

Carol smiled. David had always been polite in class, but he had that air of arrogance that said he wasn't going to do anything he didn't want to.

"Him and Joey—that's another brother—they wrote some songs this summer about Mom."

Carol's eyes widened in sudden recognition. "You're a musician, aren't you?"

"I got a band."

"You played at Dino's Lounge on Labor Day Weekend." He was the one with the wonderful voice, the one who filled the air with ions of sensuality.

His copper eyes looked down before they came back up to meet hers. "You weren't there late, were you?"

"You were wonderful." She noticed a hint of color on his cheeks. It was time to get back to business. "Would you mind if I gave David's poetry to Mr. Meeks? And suggest he talk to him?"

"No."

"I'll ask David for his permission before I do." She rose to her feet. "I think David will be fine. Thank you for coming in."

Ray stood.

Carol offered her hand. "Anytime you need to talk to someone, give me a call. I'm in the phone book."

Ray shook her hand. "Thank you."

"It was wonderful meeting you, Mr. Gambel," Carol said, allowing her hand to linger in his. "I hope to see you again. Soon." And she was sure that one way or another, she would.





## Exercise Solutions: Active Voice Exercises

(Please note that these are not the only possible or correct solutions)

1. Sandy started to sit up.

**Sandy sat up.**

2. Wilma was leisurely looking out the window when she started noticing the big bird.

**Wilma glanced out the window and noticed the big bird.**

3. There were fifteen new members at the prose workshop.

**Fifteen new members attended the prose workshop.**

4. Joan was very good at reading her story.

**Joan read her story well.**

5. It is my intention to thoroughly teach how very bad passive voice really is.

**I intend to teach the evils of passive voice. (Okay, I couldn't come up with much else that sounded right.)**

6. I could see that my constantly repetitive lessons were starting to get annoying.

**I saw that my repetitive lessons were annoying.**

### Challenge:

Ray Gambel started to thinly slice potatoes, and he was constantly watching the clock. It was 3:45. There was a phone on the counter and he would look at it, as though that would really make it ring. The letter he'd gotten from his father was very precise: he would call on Friday afternoon at 3:30 p.m. Eastern time.

Ray quickly wiped his hands on his jeans. He reached into the pocket of his new plaid flannel shirt and there was the envelope. He took it out of his shirt pocket and looked at it. While he was looking at it, he noticed there wasn't a return address. But the postmark was there and it was clearly visible: "El Paso, Texas, March 10, 1969."



**Possible Solution:**

Ray Gambel sliced potatoes, watching the clock. 3:45. He looked at the phone, as though that would make it ring. His father's letter had been precise: he'd call on Friday at 3:30 Eastern time. Ray wiped his hands on his jeans and took the envelope out of his shirt pocket. There was no return address, but the postmark was clear: "El Paso, Texas, March 10, 1969."





## Exercise Solutions: Show, Don't Tell

I came up with the following solutions. I expect, however, for your solutions to vary somewhat.

1. Jessica was a pretty girl, although she was rather stupid at times.

**Jessica smoothed her blond hair back over her shoulder and reached for the letter. Too late, she realized that her fingers were still sticky with peanut butter and jelly. "Oh, no," she said, looking at the sticky evidence. She ran her tongue over her perfectly-shaped teeth, then licked the residue off.**

2. Kathy told Martin that he was too old for her.

**"Hey, Martin, old man. You know, dude, like sometimes I think you're just like, you know, kinda too long in this world for my experience, know what I mean, dude?" Kathy blew a gum bubble that covered her face, then popped, covering her pigtails with pink goo.**

**Martin snarled, showing his loose dentures. "Yeah, and you ain't supposed to be chewing that stuff, not 'til you get them braces off."**

3. "I wouldn't go in there," the secretary snipped.

**The secretary curled her lip, then drew her head back until her eyes fell into a direct line with her nose. "I wouldn't go in there," she said, her voice haughty.**

4. Jeremy wanted to win, but he was afraid he wouldn't.

**Jeremy bounced the basketball, studying the guard. Representatives of every major college in the state were watching, and he had to make that basket. Ten seconds until the game ended, and he held the winning score in his hands. The guard had him by four inches. And he was fast.**

**Jeremy glanced again at the stands, at all the recruiters in their navy suits, and knew his future came down to this one basket. He jerked to the right and threw the ball over his head. It soared over his opponent's reach and hit the rim, rolling around and around and around.**





## Exercise Solutions: Say it Once, Say it Right

My solutions:

1. Janie had a tiny little hand.  
**Janie's hand was tiny.**
2. Wilbur ate quickly, in a hurry, and rushed through dinner.  
**Wilbur rushed through dinner.**
3. Jacqueline looked at the old antique and quietly whispered to the neighbor next to her.  
**Jacqueline looked at the antique and whispered to her neighbor.**
4. "I don't wanna go home!" she whined.  
**"I don't wanna go home!"**
5. "Don't touch me," she warned.  
**"Don't touch me."**
6. There was three seconds left on the clock. The arena was quiet, totally silent. Not a sound was heard anywhere. No one shouted. No one breathed. No one moved. Michael stood on the court and posed, then raised his arms and aimed the basketball at the net. He shot the basketball. It left his hands and in slow motion, it lifted into the weightless air, then silently slid through the net without so much as a swoosh. The quiet crowd exploded with cheers, catcalls, applause, clapping and screaming. With less than a single second left on the time clock, the Lakers stole the lead. They won. They had done it.

**Silence. Total silence. No one breathed. Michael posed, then shot the basketball. In slow motion, it lifted into the air, then slid through the net without so much as a swoosh. The crowd exploded with cheers and catcalls. With less than a second left on the time clock, the Lakers stole the lead.**

Disclaimer: Of course, there are any number of "correct" answers to these exercises. The idea is to make the prose as vivid as possible. And what about the opening redundancy? *Silence. Total silence.* Well, sometimes a little redundancy makes for powerful writing. Just make sure that it has a purpose. Study good fiction and develop an ear for when redundancy is powerful and when it just plain sucks the life out of your prose.





## Exercise Solutions: Grammar/Punctuation

1. Dana ate eggs for breakfast, while she sits on the floor.  
**Dana ate eggs for breakfast while she sat on the floor.**
2. “Is it alright for Judy to lay on the floor?”  
**“Is it all right for Judy to lie on the floor?”**
3. “I should of known, it was on my birthday Sept. 26”, she said.  
**“I should have known; it was on my birthday, September 26,” she said.**
4. Aunt Mary, never wore that hat more then 3 times.  
**Aunt Mary never wore that hat more than three times.**
5. ‘Making up stupid sentence’s effects my conscious,’ Sandy said.  
**“Making up stupid sentences affects my conscience,” Sandy said.**
6. I looked at she and she looked at I . . . and we just kept looking at one another.  
**I looked at her and she looked at me, and we just kept looking at each other.**
7. Stacy—my youngest daughter, likes to run further then shes supposed, to go.  
**Stacy, my youngest daughter, likes to run farther than she’s supposed to go. –or—  
Stacy—my youngest daughter—likes to run farther than she’s supposed to go.**
8. My dog lays on the floor . . . my cat prefers the windowsill: I like the couch.  
**My dog lies on the floor, my cat prefers the windowsill and I like the couch. –or—  
My dog lies on the floor, my cat prefers the windowsill; I like the couch. –or—My dog lies  
on the floor, my cat prefers the windowsill, and I like the couch.**
9. The Doctor, dr. John Marshall Jr. would of taken my temperature if I hadn’t of told him that  
believe it or not my daughter was the patient.  
**The doctor, Dr. John Marshall, Jr., would have taken my temperature if I hadn’t  
have told him that, believe it or not, my daughter was the patient.**
10. If you have problems with these exercises than you should study you’re grammar.  
**If you have problems with these exercises, then you should study your grammar.**





# Section Seven

## Appendices



Sample Query Letter

Sample Synopsis

List of Genres

Glossary

Writing Resources



## Sample Query Letter

Wanna B. Writer  
Novel Street  
Parkersburg, WV 26101  
(xxx) xxx-xxxx  
email@server.com

June 7, 20xx

Ms. Agent  
Agent Agency, Inc.  
123 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, New York 10016

Dear Ms. Agent:

I am looking for an agent to represent me and my 94,000 word family saga. *The Mistress of Gambel Hill* is the story of a passionate musician's struggle to overcome his heritage of alcoholism. I have enclosed a synopsis for your review.

My first novel, *Living the Legacy*, won second place in the 1998 West Virginia Writer's Novel competition and an excerpt won first place in the People's Choice Awards. My short stories have received many awards and have been published in literary magazines and local journals. In addition, I have published seven technical manuals. I am the founder and CEO of *Inspiration for Writers*, a critiquing and editing service, and currently serve as the Publication Consultant for *Confluence Literary Magazine* and as secretary for West Virginia Writers, Inc. In the past, I served as a contributing editor for *MAPICS the Magazine* and as president of the Ohio Valley Literary Group.

Could I send the completed manuscript to you? I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your reply. Thank you so very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Wanna B. Writer





## Sample Synopsis

### The Mistress of Gambel Hill

**“Don’t flirt with your father’s mistress, for she is a jealous demon and won’t rest until she has consumed all that you love.” ~ Deloris Gambel, 1969**

Life is finally good for RAY GAMBEL. After years of struggle, he has successfully formed a traveling rock ‘n roll band with his talented brothers. His only problem is three a.m., when he sits in his upscale hotel room, the beat of Bob Seger and the Dave Clark Five still pounding in his head, and sleep refuses to rescue him. Ray’s greatest fear is losing his brothers – he has already lost his mother to cancer and one brother to Vietnam, and he worries he will lose his remaining family. He misses CAROL, his schoolteacher wife back home in West Virginia, and regrets that her infertility has prevented them from having the house full of kids they’ve always wanted. Jack Daniel’s helps ease his loneliness and gets him through the long nights.

SAM, Ray’s estranged father, contacts Ray for the second time in five years. In 1968, amid rumors of a hit and run accident, hard-drinking Sam abandoned his family, leaving Ray with a critically ill mother and three juvenile brothers to raise. Now, twelve years later, Sam is sober and counsels recovering alcoholics at the Salvation Army in Louisville. He wants to reunite with his sons, but Ray tells him to stay where he is: gone. But when the Gambel Brothers Band plays in Louisville, Sam appears in their audience. Although Ray tells his brothers to avoid their father, the youngest defiantly embraces him and Sam becomes an unwanted part of Ray’s life.

Ray is thrilled when Carol finally becomes pregnant, but even more torn between his life on the road and his desire to be home with his wife. Ray’s drinking intensifies and he finds himself crashing. He loses control of the band, the respect of his brothers, and finally, Carol’s trust.

Ray knows he must stop drinking. And he tries. But his body can’t take the abrupt change in chemistry and delirium tremens trigger a near-fatal heart attack. While recovering, Ray listens to his father’s story and his offer for assistance, but insists he can handle his problem on his own.

Ray is alone when Carol goes into labor. Complications require an emergency Cesarean section. Suspicious fibroid cysts are found and Ray must approve the hysterectomy that ends his hope for a large family. Worse, his newborn daughter’s lungs are congested with amniotic fluid and her prognosis is uncertain. Ray relents to the pressure and turns again to Jack Daniel’s.

Within a week, Carol and the baby recover, but Ray’s drinking is out of control. He realizes that if he is to keep the family he loves so much, he must get help. He remembers the years before the family demon seized his father, when Sam taught his sons to love music and protected them from their abusive mother. Ray calls his father and admits he is an alcoholic.

Sam helps Ray map out a plan to banish the mistress of Gambel Hill. The next day, Ray hosts a surprise birthday party for Sam, but it is Ray’s infant daughter who receives the greatest gift of all: a sober father and a new legacy.





## List of Genres

*Genre* is a fancy word for type or category. I've listed the major genres, with sub-genres indented under them, when appropriate.

Action/Adventure

Detective/Police/Crime

Military/War

Suspense

Erotica

Gay/Lesbian

Heterosexual

Ethnic

Experimental

Family Saga

Fantasy

Gay/Lesbian

Gothic

Historical

Coming of Age

Medieval

Military/War

Civil War

Vietnam

World War I

World War II

Romance

Horror

Humor/Satire

Juvenile

Chapter Book

Coming of Age

Picture Book





Young Adult

Literary

Mainstream/Contemporary

Coming of Age

Commercial

Family Saga

Mystery/Suspense

New Age

Psychic

Supernatural

Regional

East Coast

Mid-western

Southern

West Coast

Religious

Christian

Spiritual

Romance

Erotica

Gay/Lesbian

Gothic

Historical

Mainstream

Suspense

Science Fiction

Sports

Thriller

Supernatural

Suspense

Western

And many others—if you don't see your genre here, add it.





## Glossary

**Active Voice** - Writing that uses active verbs and active forms of verbs, and that is written in a straightforward, subject first manner.

**Agent** – See Literary Agent.

**Allegory** - An extended metaphor that uses objects, characters and events to represent larger meanings.

**Analogy** - Comparison of dissimilar objects to reveal something similar. (She paced the floor like a caged tiger).

**Antagonist** - The character or force that tries to prevent the protagonist from achieving his goals.

**Anticlimax** - A small or trivial resolution in place of the expected larger and more significant resolution.

**Beginning** - The opening of the story, which must establish the protagonist, the setting, the tone, the point of view, and the story question.

**Chapter** - A division or segment of a novel. Chapters are usually numbered and sometimes sub-titled.

**Characters** - The people who perform the actions of a story.

**Character Flaw** - A problem with the character's personality or perception that must be overcome or accepted to resolve the story problem.

**Character Statement** - What a character wants, more than anything else in the world.

**Character Trait Chart** - A worksheet that can be used to assign and track basic physical, emotional, and psychological traits of a character.

**Cliché** - An overused, commonplace expression. (“Bundle of joy,” “light as air,” “pretty as a picture.”)

**Climax** - The turning point in a story, when tension is at the highest. This usually occurs near the end of the work.

**Cover Letter** - A letter that is sent with a manuscript stating why the manuscript is being sent (requested by an agent, for a contest, etc.), and sometimes including a brief bio of the author.





**Critique** - An evaluation of the manuscript, assessing each of the fundamentals of fiction or nonfiction.

**Denouement** - The final unfolding of the plot, also called the resolution or the outcome.

**Dialogue** - A character's exact words, usually offset by double quotes.

**Dialogue Tag** - Identifies the character speaking, and sometimes, the manner in which the words were spoken ("Janet said," "Irene whispered," "Albert shouted.")

**Editor** - A person who prepares a manuscript for submission or for publication, usually by correcting spelling, grammatical, and sentence construction errors.

**End** - The resolution of the story, where all the subplots converge and the story question is resolved.

**Exposition** - Background information that the reader needs to understand the story, that is usually summarized and presented as unobtrusively as possible.

**First Person** - The point of view in which the narrator is the person telling the story, and the narrator refers to himself as "I."

**Flashback** - A break in the forward movement of the story to show, in real time, a scene that happened previously.

**Focus Statement** - One sentence that describes what a story is about.

**Foreshadowing** - The use of narrative intervention to hint at what will happen in the future.

**Genre** - The category or type of work.

**Imagery** - Figurative language used to evoke a mental picture or create a specific atmosphere.

**Internal Dialogue** - The presentation of a character's thoughts.

**Intimacy** - How close (or distant) the narration is to a character's thoughts.

**Literary Agent** - An author's representative who aids in selling the rights of a manuscript to a publisher.

**Manuscript** - An unsold novel or nonfiction book.

**Middle** - The largest section of a novel that contains the "guts" of the story. It follows the beginning and lasts until the climax.





**Monologue** - a long speech by one character.

**Motif** - A recurring theme or dominant idea.

**Narrative** - Telling what is happening or what has happened. Often, this is done in summary.

**Novel** - A piece of fiction, usually larger than 60,000 words.

**Omniscient** - All knowing. The third person point of view in which any character's thoughts or actions may be revealed, as well as knowledge of things that none of the characters are privy to.

**Onomatopoeia** - The sounding out of words, such as "vrrrooommm" or "Bang!"

**Pacing** - The speed with which a passage reads. Dialogue and action can speed up the pacing, while descriptive passages can slow it down.

**Passive Voice** - The use of passive verbs, helping verbs, and passive sentence construction in which the object of the sentence is presented before the subject.

**Personality Components** - Emotional or psychological traits of a character, often presented as adjectives.

**Plot** - What happens in a story.

**Point of View** - The vantage point from which the story is told. The major options are first person ("I"), second person ("you") and third person ("he").

**Prologue** - A preface or introduction.

**Protagonist** - The main character of the story.

**Purple Prose** - Excessively sentimental writing intended to manipulate the reader's emotions.

**Query Letter** - A letter asking to be considered for publishing or representation.

**Redundancy** - The repetition of an idea or word.

**Resolution** - The completion of the plot, in which the character's goals are either achieved or changed, and the end result is known.

**Second Person** - The point of view in which "you" are a character and "you" are the one at the center of the action. (You know what I mean.)

**Setting** - Where and when a story takes place.





**Scene** - A subdivision of a chapter (or of a novel, if chapters are not used), representing continuous action in one locale.

**Story Question** - A question of what is at stake and what must be accomplished in order for the story to be successfully resolved. “Can Jonathan overcome his penchant for other women so that Ariel will marry him?” “Can Superman save the world from a new group of terrorists?”

**Stream of Consciousness** - Interior monologue presented in unedited form, with all the random thoughts and interruptions of normal thought processes.

**Subplot** - a secondary story line.

**Synopsis** - a summary of a manuscript used to interest an agent or a publisher.

**Tag** – See Dialogue Tag. Can also refer to a character trait that serves as an identification of a character and is repeated each time the character enters a scene (such as rasping, clicking the tongue, tapping a cane).

**Tense** - The form of verb used to designate the relationship to time. Present, past, past perfect and future are the most used tenses.

**Third Person** - The point of view in which distance is maintained from the reader by using “he/she,” as opposed to “I” or “you.”

**Trait Chart** – See Character Trait Chart.

**Viewpoint** - The character whose eyes we are seeing the action through.

**Voice** - The author’s individual style in using language.

**Writer’s Block** - The inability for a writer to continue or complete a work.





## Writing Resources

I suggest every writer keep the following resources within arm's reach:

- Quality dictionary
- Thesaurus
- Road Atlas
- Desk Reference (a book of facts—everything from weight conversions to historical dates to well-known authors)
- Book of Baby Names (especially one by nationality)
- Medical Encyclopedia

Specific resources that have been especially useful to me are:

- *The Writer's Guide to Character Traits* (Linda N. Edelstein, Ph.D., Writer's Digest Books)
- *Creating Character Emotions* (Ann Hood, Story Press)
- *Ultimate Visual Dictionary* (Dorling Kindersley)
- *The Billboard Book of Number One Hits* (Fred Bronson/Billboard)
- *Random House Word Menu* (Stephen Glazier, Random House)
- *Roget's Super Thesaurus* (Marc McCutcheon, Writer's Digest Books)
- *Word Painting* (Rebecca McClanahan, Writer's Digest Books)
- *Writer's Market* (Kirsten C. Holm, Writer's Digest Books)

Other resources to consider:

- *Literary Agents* (Michael Larsen, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)
- *Creating Characters* (Dwight V. Swain, Writer's Digest Books)
- *The Internet Research Guide* (Timothy K. Maloy, Allworth Press)
- *Teach Yourself Body Language* (Gordon R. Wainwright, NTC Publishing Group)
- *Body Language* (Mark Asher, Carlton)
- *Bernstein's Reverse Dictionary* (Theodore M. Bernstein, Time Books)
- *Complete Book of the Zodiac* (Sterling)
- *The Everyday English Handbook* (Leonard Rosen, Doubleday)
- *The Art & Craft of Novel Writing* (Oakley Hall, Story Press)
- *Building Believable Characters* (Marc McCutcheon, Writer's Digest Books)
- *Dynamic Characters* (Nancy Kress, Writer's Digest Books)
- *the most common mistakes in ENGLISH usage* (Thomas Elliott Berry/ McGraw-Hill Paperbacks)





# Section Eight

# Reproducible Worksheets



How to Use Worksheets  
Novel Summary Worksheet  
Chapter Summary Worksheet  
Character Trait Chart Worksheet  
Personality Components Worksheet  
Character Growth Charts Worksheet



## Reproducible Worksheets: How to Use Worksheets

At the end of this section are five worksheets that can help you plan your novel and create vivid characters. Every writer approaches writing from a different perspective. Some writers plan in detail before they write a single word. Other writers just start writing and see where they end up. The worksheets can help you regardless of which way you work. If you are a planner, use the worksheets up front. If you are a “see-where-you-end-up” person, use the worksheets after you finish your first draft to make sure that your characters are consistent and that each scene contributes to the resolution.

**Do not write on the worksheets provided.** Instead, copy and save the provided sheets as masters. This way, you may use them for as many stories/characters/plots as you wish. You may also print additional copies by going to [www.InspirationForWriters.com/wbthanks.html](http://www.InspirationForWriters.com/wbthanks.html) and selecting the format and worksheet you want.

Each worksheet has a heading that includes “Manuscript” and “Page \_\_ of \_\_”. This is so you may organize your sheets by manuscript, creating complete documentation of each manuscript. An example of how you may want to use the sheets are:

Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>1</u> of <u>15</u>	Novel Summary
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>2</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 1
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>3</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 2
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>4</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 3
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>5</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 4
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>6</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 5
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>7</u> of <u>15</u>	Chapter Summary, Chapter 6
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>8</u> of <u>15</u>	Character Trait Chart, Roy
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>9</u> of <u>15</u>	Personality Components I, Roy
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>10</u> of <u>15</u>	Personality Components II, Roy
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>11</u> of <u>15</u>	Character Growth Chart, Roy
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>12</u> of <u>15</u>	Character Trait Chart, Anna
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>13</u> of <u>15</u>	Personality Components I, Anna
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>14</u> of <u>15</u>	Personality Components II, Anna
Manuscript: <u>Body Parts</u>	Page <u>15</u> of <u>15</u>	Character Growth Chart, Anna

Line-by-line instructions for using each worksheet follow.





## Reproducible Worksheet Instructions: Novel Summary Worksheet

The **Novel Summary Worksheet** summarizes the entire novel on one page. Sections of this worksheet have been discussed in various parts of **Section Two, The Basics**. Using this worksheet should help give your novel focus and direction, and may also be used as an outline for your synopsis. The areas covered are:

**Focus Statement** – Write one sentence that describes your novel. For a discussion of this, see **Section Two, The Basics: Plot**. The focus statement will help you keep your novel moving in a forward, progressive manner.

**Protagonist** – Enter the name of the main character. Be sure to fill out a **Character Growth Chart** for this character, and, if you wish, a **Character Trait Chart** and a **Personality Components Worksheet**. It'd be helpful to enter the Character Statement here as well.

**Antagonist** – Enter the name of the person or thing that will try to prevent the protagonist from achieving his goal. A detailed discussion of the Protagonist and Antagonist can be found in **Section Two, The Basics: Characterization**.

**Other Major Characters** – Enter the names of other characters who play a major role in the novel. If relevant, enter their relationship with the protagonist.

**Main Setting(s)** – Enter the physical place where most of the novel will take place. In the next worksheet (**Chapter Outline Worksheet**), setting may be assigned by scene. The setting should include a panoramic vision of the scene, such as the type of area (rural, suburban, urban, etc.), the size of the area, the general location (Southeast, West Coast, Argentina), the landscape of the area (mountains, desert, snow-covered, ocean, etc.). A closer view of the setting is also needed: does most of the action take place in a lavish apartment, the slums, a farmhouse, a coffee shop? **Section Two, The Basics: Setting** discusses this in more detail.

**Time Period Covered** – We need to know when the novel takes place (from beginning to ending).

**Point of View** – Enter the point of view that is used throughout the novel. This may be omniscient, third person controlled consciousness, third person panoramic, second person or first person. See the discussion in **Section Two, The Basics: Point of View** for more information about point of view. If the entire novel uses the same viewpoint character, you may also enter that here. Otherwise, if the viewpoint character changes by scene, enter the viewpoint character on the **Chapter Summary Worksheet**.

**Tense** – Enter the tense—present, past, or even future—that this novel will be told in.





**Beginning Summary** – Give a sentence or two that describes the situation when the novel starts.

**Middle Summary** – Give a brief description of what occurs in the body of the novel.

**Climax** – Give a summary of what happens in the turning point of the novel.

**Resolution** – Give a summary of how the novel ends.





## NOVEL SUMMARY WORKSHEET

Focus Statement	
Protagonist	Antagonist
Other Major Characters	
Main Setting(s)	Time Period Covered
Point of View	Tense
Beginning Summary	
Middle Summary	
Climax	
Resolution	



## Reproducible Worksheet Instructions: Chapter Summary Worksheet

The **Chapter Summary Worksheet** allows each chapter to be broken into a series of scenes. The number of scenes per chapter will vary by writer. If more than two scenes are used in a chapter, use multiple copies of the worksheet, numbering each sheet to maintain order.

The top of the **Chapter Summary Worksheet** provides a place to enter the name of the manuscript, the page number of this page in the novel outline packet, and the name or number of the chapter. If chapters have titles instead of numbers, it may still be useful to assign a chronological number to help keep them in order.

Each scene section begins with a place to enter the scene number, as well as the total number of scenes (you may enter either the total number of scenes in the chapter or in the novel, whichever you prefer). A place is provided to enter the following information about each scene:

**Location** – Enter the physical location of the scene. Be specific. Is it in a townhouse? On a boat? In a hay wagon? On Fifth Avenue? In a seafood restaurant? Also, enter any other pertinent information about the setting here: the weather, the lighting, the sounds in the background (or the foreground), the smells, and so forth. Mention as many things as you can think of, even if you don't use them all.

**Time** – Enter the date this scene takes place (yes, it is important to enter the exact date here, even if you do not mention this at all in the scene. See **Section Two, The Basics: Setting** for information on why this is important). Also enter the day of the week (print out a calendar if you need to), the time of day and any other information you may want to include.

**Viewpoint Character** – Enter the name of the character whose viewpoint this scene will be seen through. You may also want to mention here the state of mind of the viewpoint character. Preferably, a scene should have only one viewpoint character. It is also possible that the narrator will be the viewpoint character.

**Summary** – Enter a brief description of the scene, including the purpose the scene serves.

**Notes** – Enter any other information that should be known. Examples of this are: historical events that occurred on this date, music that was popular on this date, the physical or mental condition of the characters involved and so forth. You may also want to mention here if the scene includes any special effects, such as a dream sequence, a flashback, etc.

Remember, entering information on the worksheet doesn't mean you have to mention it in your manuscript. However, it is important that you, the author, know exactly what is going on all the time.





## CHAPTER SUMMARY WORKSHEET

Scene \_\_\_ of \_\_\_

Location
Time
Viewpoint Character
Summary
Notes

Scene \_\_\_ of \_\_\_

Location
Time
Viewpoint Character
Summary
Notes





## Reproducible Worksheet Instructions: Character Trait Chart

The Character Trait Chart allows us to assign basic physical, mental and emotional traits to our characters. Following are things to keep in mind when filling out this chart:

**Full name** – a character’s name is very important. Surely, different types of people come to mind when we hear the names “Bubba” and “Thurmond Elton Radclift, III.” Therefore, we must carefully consider both the first and last names of our character, as well as his or her nickname. Consider the character’s age, ethnic background and social status in naming your character. A good quality Book of Baby Names (with meanings, preferably) is a great addition to your reference library. The telephone directory can help to find last names; there are also websites and books that list surnames by ethnic origin.

Besides the character’s official name, we also need to know what he is called (and, perhaps, what he *prefers* to be called). All of this information should be recorded in the “full name” block.

**Date of Birth** – we should carefully consider assigning our character a birthday. Even though I am not a follower of astrology, I check my character’s sun and moon signs, as this helps in fleshing out the character. I also check for important historical occurrences on both the day of birth and during the character’s developing years of life (any of us who know people who lived through the Great Depression know that they have been affected by that).

**Age** – since your book can take place in any year, it is good to have an idea of how old your character is in addition to his date of birth. If your novel covers several years, include the age span.

**Sign** – if you’ve checked your character’s zodiac sign, enter it here. A discussion of how this affects (or doesn’t affect) your character is presented in **Section 3**.

**Address** – this can be as detailed or as vague as you wish, but it should answer a few questions: does the character live in a large city, the suburbs, a small town or deep in the country? Does he/she live in the United States or elsewhere? If in the States, which region? What are the economics of the neighborhood/area/region?

**Race/Ethnic Background/Nationality** – again, give some thought to this, as a person’s heritage often plays a big role in who he is and who he becomes, and helps us to understand his background.

**Height** – this doesn’t need to be specific. “Tall” or “average” is fine unless it is a defining characteristic of the character.





**Weight/Body Build** – again, we don't really need to know a character's exact weight, only if he or she is stocky, slender or "had a figure that . . ."

**Hair** – keep in mind the character's ethnic background in assigning hair and eye color. Of course, you do not always have to assign typical coloring to your characters, but if you don't, you'll need to explain. You may also want to mention the length of the character's hair, the style, and the type (curly, wavy, straight).

**Eyes** – besides the color of the character's eyes, also include the shape, length of lashes, shape of brows and anything else peculiar to this character. This is a good place to be creative in listing the eye color. Instead of "brown," try "copper" or "chocolate." Instead of blue, be specific: sapphire, aquamarine or crystal blue.

**Peculiar Physical Traits** – list any peculiarities of your character's appearance here. Does his left eye twitch when he lies? Does he chew his lip when apprehensive? Does he smoke? What? What brand? How often? If he wears eyeglasses, what do they look like? Does he wear contacts? Does he have any moles, scars or birthmarks? Any nervous habits? This is often a key to the personality and, if used consistently through the manuscript, helps the reader identify the character.

**Smell** – everyone has a smell. It can be the clean smell of deodorant soap, the strong smell of a specific perfume or aftershave, the musty smell of old age, the tell-tale smell of stale beer. Of course, a character's smell can change from scene to scene, but try to imagine what he/she typically smells like on an average day.

**Voice** – does he have a deep, resonant voice? Does she have a throaty voice or a squeaky voice? Does his voice crack? Does she usually shout or whisper? Can he carry a tune? Is his tone pleasant or grating? Does she speak with perfect grammar or slur her words? Does he insert an expletive between every second word? Which one or ones? Does he have a distinguishing laugh? Does he talk rapidly or slowly?

**Usual Walking Style** – does he limp? Is he always in a hurry and runs everywhere he goes? Does she skip? Wiggle?

**Health** – does your character have any health problems or weaknesses? Does he/she walk with a limp, have a plastic jaw, suffer from migraines? Arthritis? How is his/her blood pressure? Is he a walking heart attack, or does she run five miles every morning before dawn? How does he feel about his health? Is she a hypochondriac? Or has she never been to a doctor in her life?

**Mannerisms** – what else distinguishes this character from everyone else? Does he greet people with a hug? Do his hands move when he talks? Does he snap his fingers regularly? Does he shrug his shoulders? Does he slouch? Have military-like posture? Does he slurp? Burp? Gulp? Eat on the run? Prefer steak or hamburger? Sushi or spaghetti? Eating out (and where) or at home? Big meals or small? Is he polite or piggish?





**Style of Dress** – what type of clothes/shoes/accessories does he/she wear? Does he have a favorite flannel shirt he wears every Saturday? Does she apply makeup before breakfast? Is his dress impeccable or gaudy? Trendy? Casual? Classic? Expensive? Second-hand? Matching? Scuffed? Any peculiar tastes in clothes/shoes/accessories? What is his favorite article of clothing?

**Preferred Drink** – what does he normally drink? Jack Daniel's and coke? Long-neck beer? Pepsi Cola? Nehi Grape? Coffee with extra cream? Perrier?

**Preferred Music** – is he a rock 'n roll fanatic? Does he like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones? Mozart or Beethoven? Maybe Hank Williams. Or Travis Tritt. Or Frank Sinatra or Herb Albert or Hip Hop or Rap. Be specific.

**Occupation** – what does he do for a living? Where does he do it at? What is his proficiency at his job? Is it his job of choice?

**Social Class** – is he wealthy? Deeply in debt? Does he run with the jet set? Is he happy with his social class?

**Education** – how much schooling has he had? What kind of schools has he attended? Does he have any college degrees or military service?

**Intelligence** – does he thrive in any situation he's placed in? Does he barely get by? Does he have common sense?

**Birth Order** – it's often been discussed that first-borns have different personality traits than last-borns, single-birth individuals have different traits than multiple-birth individuals. A discussion of this is in **Section 3**.

**Marital Status** – is your character married? Divorced? Single? How does he feel about his status?

**Sexual Orientation/Values** – is your character heterosexual? Homosexual? Does he have any unusual orientations? Is he promiscuous? Loyal?

**Political Views** – is he Democrat or Republican? Or Independent? Is he conservative or liberal? Are politics important to him?

**Religious Beliefs** – does he have a formal religion? Does he believe in God? Satanism? New Age Spiritualism? Is he a hard-core atheist? What is the depth of his belief?

**Views on Money** – what are his spending habits? Is he a saver or a spender? Is money important to him?





**House** – what type of house or apartment does he live in? How does he feel about it? Does he own or rent? Does he take care of it? Is he embarrassed by it?

**Car** – what type of car does he drive? Does he own it? How does he feel about it? How does he take care of it?

**Most important possession** – what material possession is most important to him? Why? How long has he owned it? Where did he get it from?

**Hobbies/Recreations/Sports** – what does he do in his spare time? How important are these activities to him? How talented is he at them?

**Talents** – does he have any special talents? Is he good with children? A gifted musician? Can he read minds? Predict the future? Bake a killer lasagna?

**What is a normal day like for this character?** – what is the first thing he does when he gets out of bed? Who is he with? Where does he go? How does he feel about it?

**Greatest Fear** – what, more than anything else in the world, does this character fear? Being alone? Dying a pauper? Spiders? War?

**Major Goals** – what does he want to accomplish? How important is it to him? What is he willing to do to accomplish his goals? Is he secretive about them?

**Lives with?** – who does he or she live with? How does he feel about this person (these people)? Is he happy with this arrangement?

**Spends the most time with?** – who does he spend the greatest portion of his time with. Why?

**Views Family** – how does he view his family? Does he feel appreciated? Does he appreciate them? Does he love them? How much?

**Family views him** – how does his family view him? Do they love him unconditionally? Are they critical? Supportive?

**Views Friends** – how does he view his friends? Does he seek out their company? Does he think they are a bunch of losers?

**Friends view him** – how do his friends view him? Do they doubt his sincerity? Know the “real” him? Accept the “real” him?

**Views Boss/Co-Workers/Employees** – what are his work relationships like? Is he respectful? Arrogant? Defiant? Loyal?





**Boss/Co-Workers/ Employees view him** – do his fellow workers respect him? Know him? Care about him?

**Feelings Toward Animals** – how does he treat animals? Is he abusive? Disinterested? Loving? Does he like animals more or less than humans? Is he particularly fond of any certain animal? Does he fear any animals?

**Who is his hero?** – who does he most admire? Why?

A discussion of the **Character Trait Chart** can be found in **Section Three, Lifecycle of a Character: Conception.**





## CHARACTER TRAIT CHART

Full Name		Date of Birth	Age
Address			
Race/Ethnic Background/Nationality		Height	Weight/Body Build
Hair	Eyes	Peculiar Traits	
Smell	Voice	Usual Walking Style	
Health		Mannerisms	
Style of Dress		Preferred Drink	Preferred Music
Occupation	Social Class	Education	Intelligence
Birth Order	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation/Values	
Political Views		Religious Beliefs	Views on Money
House	Car	Most important Possession	
Hobbies/Recreations/Sports		Talents	
What is a normal day like for this character?			
Greatest Fear		Major Goals	
Lives With?		Spends the Most Time With?	
Views Family:		Family Views Him:	
Views Friends:		Friends View Him:	
Views Boss/Co-workers/Employees:		Boss/Co-Workers/Employees View Him:	
Feelings Toward Animals:		Who is His Hero?	



## Reproducible Worksheet Instructions: Personality Components

The **Personality Components Worksheet** is simply a two-page list of adjectives that can be assigned to a character. To get the best use of this list, make a copy of it for each character. Then, highlight in yellow the three to six traits that most strongly define this character. Highlight in blue other traits this character displays on an every day basis. Highlight in pink and green traits that only occur in specific situations, such as when drinking, when angry, when in the presence of certain people (such as his mother, wife, boss, mistress), or when placed in extreme situations. List the situation next to the color used to highlight it.

For example, Roy may have the following strong characteristics, which we would highlight in yellow: annoying, downtrodden, ignorant and pretentious. He also has the following characteristics, to a lesser degree, so we would highlight them in blue: bewildered, clumsy, compulsive, daffy, disgusting, dowdy, dumb, dull, excessive, flamboyant, hypocritical, ignorant, immature, immodest, incompetent, inept, insecure, insulting, irreverent, petty, sarcastic, self-absorbed, shallow, sleazy, and sloppy. However, whenever he drinks, he becomes abusive, aggressive, argumentative, belligerent, incoherent, irresponsible, jealous, lewd, obnoxious, and perverted, so these traits we'd color pink. Finally, when he is in the presence of his wife's youngest sister, he is approachable, charismatic, charming, debonair, good-natured, and macho, so these would be colored green.

This helps us see Roy in different lights, yet allows us to be consistent in portraying him. The bottom of the second page of Personality Components has a place to enter the situations in which the character portrays the chosen traits.

Be sure to write your manuscript name and the name of your character at the top of the page.





## PERSONALITY COMPONENTS

Absent-minded	Charismatic	Determined	Forgiving	Indifferent
Abrasive	Charming	Dignified	Fragile	Indiscreet
Abusive	Chaste	Direct	Frank	Inept
Accident prone	Cheerful	Disciplined	Friendly	Infantile
Accommodating	Classy	Disgusting	Frigid	Informed
Accomplished	Clumsy	Dishonest	Frugal	Inhibited
Adaptable	Cocky	Disorganized	Frustrated	Inhumane
Adventurous	Compassionate	Distant	Fun-loving	Innocent
Affectionate	Compliant	Distraught	Gaudy	Insecure
Agnostic	Composed	Dogmatic	Gentle	Insensitive
Agreeable	Compulsive	Domineering	Glamorous	Insouciant
Aggressive	Conceited	Dowdy	Gloomy	Insulting
Alone	Condescending	Downtrodden	Good natured	Intelligent
Aloof	Confused	Dramatic	Graceful	Intimidating
Ambitious	Congenial	Dull	Gracious	Intolerant
Amusing	Confident	Dumb	Grandiose	Introspective
Angry	Conscientious	Easygoing	Gregarious	Introverted
Annoying	Conservative	Educated	Greedy	Inquisitive
Antisocial	Considerate	Eccentric	Grotesque	Insightful
Anxious	Consistent	Egocentric	Grumpy	Intellectual
Apathetic	Conventional	Egotistic	Haggard	Intelligent
Apologetic	Content	Elusive	Hateful	Intuitive
Appreciative	Contrite	Embittered	Heartbroken	Inventive
Apprehensive	Controlling	Emotional	Hesitant	Irresponsible
Approachable	Cooperative	Empathetic	Holy	Irreverent
Argumentative	Cowardly	Energetic	Honest	Irritable
Aristocratic	Crafty	Enigmatic	Honorable	Jealous
Arrogant	Cranky	Enthusiastic	Hopeful	Judgmental
Articulate	Creative	Excessive	Hospitable	Kind
Artistic	Critical	Excitable	Humble	Knowledgeable
Assertive	Crude	Exotic	Hypocritical	Lascivious
Audacious	Cruel	Extravagant	Hysterical	Lazy
Authoritative	Cultured	Exuberant	Idiosyncratic	Lethargic
Belligerent	Cunning	Faithful	Ignorant	Lewd
Bewildered	Curious	Fanatical	Imaginative	Liberal
Bewitching	Cynical	Fatalistic	Immature	Logical
Boisterous	Daffy	Fearless	Immodest	Lonely
Bored	Dainty	Feisty	Impatient	Loving
Bossy	Debonair	Finicky	Impeccable	Macho
Brave	Deceitful	Flamboyant	Impudent	Maniacal
Brazen	Decent	Flexible	Impulsive	
Calculating	Delicate	Flippant	Incoherent	
Callous	Defiant	Flirtatious	Incompetent	
Carefree	Despicable	Flustered	Inconsiderate	
Careful	Detached	Focused	Indecisive	





## PERSONALITY COMPONENTS

Manipulative	Paranoid	Religious	Simple	Tireless
Masochistic	Passionate	Remorseful	Sincere	Tolerant
Materialistic	Passive	Remote	Sleazy	Tough
Mature	Patient	Resentful	Sloppy	Traitorous
Mean	Perceptive	Reserved	Sluggish	Trivial
Melodramatic	Persistent	Resilient	Smart	Trusting
Merciful	Persuasive	Respectful	Sneaky	Tyrannical
Messy	Pert	Righteous	Snobby	Unapproachable
Meticulous	Perverted	Romantic	Soft-spoken	Unassuming
Miserly	Pessimistic	Rowdy	Spiritual	Unclean
Modest	Petty	Rude	Spiteful	Uncommunicative
Moody	Philanthropic	Ruthless	Squeamish	Unconventional
Naïve	Pious	Sadistic	Stern	Uneasy
Nasty	Plain	Saintly	Stingy	Uninhibited
Neurotic	Polite	Sarcastic	Stoical	Unmotivated
Noble	Pompous	Sassy	Straight-laced	Unreasonable
Noisy	Practical	Savvy	Strict	Unscrupulous
Nonchalant	Presumptuous	Self-absorbed	Stubborn	Vain
Non-committing	Preentious	Self-conscious	Submissive	Vengeful
Nostalgic	Prim	Self-effacing	Subtle	Verbose
Obedient	Private	Self-righteous	Supportive	Vindictive
Obnoxious	Profane	Selfish	Surly	Virtuous
Obscene	Promiscuous	Selfless	Suspicious	Vivacious
Observant	Prosaic	Senile	Sweet	Vulgar
Obsessive	Proud	Sensitive	Sympathetic	Vulnerable
Open-minded	Psychopathic	Sensual	Tactful	Well-groomed
Opinionated	Psychotic	Sentimental	Talkative	Wholesome
Opportunistic	Pushy	Serene	Telepathic	Wicked
Optimistic	Quiet	Serious	Temperamental	Withdrawn
Organized	Quirky	Shallow	Tense	Worldly
Ornery	Rational	Sheepish	Tentative	Zany
Outgoing	Rebellious	Shy	Thoughtful	Zealous
Outspoken	Reclusive	Silent	Thrifty	
Overbearing	Reliable	Silly	Timid	

Highlight in YELLOW the 3-6 traits that most strongly define this character.

Highlight in BLUE the traits that this character also displays on an everyday basis.

Highlight in PINK the traits that appear only when \_\_\_\_\_.\*

Highlight in GREEN the traits that appear only when \_\_\_\_\_.\*

\* such as when drinking, when angry, when in the presence of his mother, wife, boss or someone else, or when placed in extreme situations.



## Reproducible Worksheet Instructions: Character Growth Chart

The **Character Growth Chart** allows you to add dimension to your characters by giving them the necessary wants, conflicts and resolutions that make them sympathetic and “real.” This chart should be completed in full for the protagonist. Other major characters should have a character statement, but the other sections are optional. The sections of the Growth Chart include:

**Character Statement** – What, more than anything else in the world, does this character want?

**Character Conflict** – Who or what must this character overcome in order to achieve his character statement?

**Resolution** – Does the character achieve his goal? If not, what does he learn in the process?

**Character Growth** – How does this character change throughout the course of the novel?

**Other comments** – Use this area to list anything else that is important to this character or that affects his growth or achievement of his dreams.

A discussion of the character statement and growth is located in **Section Three, Lifecycle of a Character: Birth.**





## CHARACTER GROWTH CHART

Character Statement (what, more than anything else in the world, does this character want?):
Character Conflict (who or what must this character overcome in order to achieve his character statement?):
Resolution (Does the character achieve his goal? If not, what does he learn in the process?):
Character Growth (How does this character change throughout the course of the novel?):
Other comments:

