

Book Talk!

Build Your Novel Worksheet

High Concept

Your High Concept is a touchstone statement that guides your story throughout its development and allows you to maintain a consistent tone, theme, and emphasis.

- What is your genre?
Your genre helps define the tone, tropes, and reader expectations. Keeping your genre in mind will make your story more consistent.
 - eg. fantasy, horror, mystery, romance, science fiction
 - _____

- What is your hook?
One sentence summarizing the thing that will immediately grab the reader’s interest. This is a high-level view of your whole story that should motivate you to explore ways in which it relates to every other element.
 - _____
 - _____

- What is your setting?
Where does your story take place? What features of the location will impact your characters and influence their actions?
 - _____
 - _____

- What is your primary conflict?
What is the conflict that sets all of the other setting events and character actions into motion? This may be an element of the setting or an action by a character.
 - _____
 - _____

- Who are the primary characters?
Who is your main protagonist? Who is their primary supporting protagonist? Who is the antagonist? Who is the primary supporting antagonist? The protagonists of a story must be characters, but the antagonists may be impersonal elements of the setting.
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Rough Outline

The rough outline describes the general progression of the story, from the instigating event through complications in the plot, to the resolution, and finally the denouement.

- 0 words written - the story begins.
Something has happened to start the action in the story moving. The opening passage begins to familiarize the reader with the story and set their expectations moving forward.

What is the instigating event?

- _____

- 10,000 words written - your first waypoint.
It's time to change things up and give the reader something new to think about. It introduces a new element.

What is the first major plot twist or complication in the plot?

- _____

- 20,000 words written - your second waypoint.
It's time to shake things up and make your reader reconsider the story up to now. It challenges the assumptions and motivations of the characters.

What is the second major plot twist or complication in the plot?

- _____

- 30,000 words written - your third waypoint.
It's time to raise the stakes and make your reader consider the implications of the story. It increases the reward for success or penalty for failure and expands the scope of the consequences to imply that they will extend beyond the ending of the story.

What is the third major plot twist or complication in the plot?

- _____

- 40,000 words written - your resolution begins.
It's time to start wrapping up plot threads and resolving conflicts so that your reader comes to the end with a sense of closure.

How does each unresolved conflict become resolved?

- _____

- 48,000 words written - your denouement.
Once the final conflict has been resolved, a new status quo should be established
What happens to the characters after the story ends?

- _____

Essential Elements

The essential elements of your story contain the characters, situations, concepts, or settings that you wish to emphasize and which are the most important to the story.

- Characters
Whether they are people, anthropomorphized creatures, or personified elements of the setting, it is the characters that take action to move the plot forward and provide touchstones to which the reader may relate.

Who are the primary and supporting protagonists? What do they want?

Who are the primary and supporting antagonists? What do they want?

- _____

- Conflict
The primary conflict is the reason the story is happening in the first place. The conflict is produced when a character desires something, and another character seeks to prevent it. Secondary conflicts should be an outgrowth or consequence of the primary conflict.

What is the primary conflict?

What are the consequences of this conflict's existence for the characters?

What is the natural outgrowth of this conflict if it is not resolved?

- _____

- **Setting**

The setting includes the physical location and cultural norms of the story. Elements of the setting may conflict with the characters, they may support the characters, or they may provide thematic resonance for the story.

Where is the story happening? What behavior is normal and expected?

How does this conflict with the characters? How does it support them?

What elements of the setting match or contrast with the characters?

- _____

- **Necessary Exposition**

Exposition provides the reader with needed information that is not easily communicated through the actions or dialog of the characters. This information may be historical, technological, geographic, or relational, but it will be information that is necessary for the reader to understand the motivations and actions of the characters.

What historical events are immediately relevant to the story?

What elements of technology (including magic) may be unfamiliar to the reader?

What aspects of the geographic location need to be described to the reader?

What relationships are important to the characters?

- _____

Chapter Design

Chapters allow the reader to measure their progress through the book and the writer to achieve small goals. The purpose of a chapter is to reward the reader for continuing to read and to allow them natural break points so the story may be easily interrupted or resumed.

- **Chapter Length**

Long chapters allow for longer scenes but require more time to write and demand more attention from the reader. Short chapters require less time to write and demand less attention from the reader but may restrict scene length. This guide recommends chapter lengths suitable to one or two writing sessions, with a total length of 1500 - 3000 words per chapter.

How many chapters do you plan to write?

What is your average goal length for each chapter?

- _____

- **Elements**

Chapters allow individual elements of the story to be emphasized in turn. This guide assumes a novel length of 50,000 words, with an average chapter size of 2000 words.

Assign two or three elements to each chapter. That chapter describes the way those elements interact to advance the action of the story.

- Chapter Breaks

Chapter breaks are used to control the pacing of the story. More cliffhangers mean a faster pace. More resolutions mean a slower pace.

Each chapter should end on either a determination, a cliffhanger, or a resolution. A determination is a break in the story between a character's decision to take action and the description of that action. A cliffhanger is a break in the story between a character's need to take action and their decision to take action. A resolution is a point in the story at which no further action in the scene needs to be taken.

Assign one category to each chapter.

- Advancement

The purpose of a chapter within the story is to advance the action so that conflicts may be introduced, prosecuted, or resolved.

Assign each chapter a conflict to advance or resolve.

Session Design

Each writing session takes the elements, chapter break category, and conflict from the Chapter Design Worksheet and turns it into a set of scenes.

- Scene Design

One purpose of a scene is to group a set of events, dialog, and exposition so that the reader relates them to each other and the overall action of the story. Every scene is composed of elements, a conflict, and an ending in exactly the same way as when designing the chapter.

If the chapter is composed of more than one scene, every scene in the chapter will require its own elements, conflict, and ending. Breaks between scenes are denoted by three asterisks "***". Every scene within a chapter should contribute to the overall conflict advancement of the chapter.

Start a new scene within a chapter whenever:

- The location of the action changes without the movement being described in the previous scene;
- The primary characters of a scene cannot interact with the primary characters of the previous scene;
- The reader is being provided with exposition in a way that does not match the action of the previous scene.

- Paragraph Design

Scenes are composed of paragraphs. One purpose of a paragraph is to group a set of thoughts so that the reader can easily relate them to each other and to the action of the chapter. The larger a paragraph block gets, the more the reader must absorb as a single related thought. One purpose of a paragraph break is to allow the reader to absorb the previous paragraph before moving on to the next one.

Break a paragraph whenever:

- A dialog begins or the dialog speaker changes;
- A new concept is being described;
- A new location is being described;
- A new object is being emphasized;

- A new action is taken by a character;
 - An event occurs;
 - Every 5 sentences or 100 words;
 - The block of text begins to look large or intimidating.
- Sentence Design

Paragraphs are composed of sentences. One purpose of a sentence is to group a set of words so that they form a complete thought. Long sentences are more difficult to absorb as a single thought.

Start a new sentence whenever:

 - A speaker in dialog addresses a new listener;
 - A new object within a location is being described;
 - A new aspect of an emphasized object, person, or concept is being described;
 - A new action occurs within an event being described;
 - A complete thought has been formed.

Finish Strong

- Stay positive.

Life happens. If you miss a day or don't get as much accomplished as you desire, don't get discouraged. Find a writing buddy and encourage each other to complete the word count for the day. Check in with support forums and writing blogs. Find someone and encourage them.
- Just write, don't edit.

Don't go back and read what you wrote the day before.

Don't change your mind in the middle of your word count and erase everything.

Don't try to edit as you write, or worry about grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

Do write until your daily word count is complete.
- Adapt.

If you have a new idea for your story or you want to change something about an element, go back to your notes and make those changes. As your story grows, you will find yourself erasing some notes and adding others. Flag the changes in your outline so you can revisit them later and press onward with the new direction in mind.
- Overcome.

There are an endless number of problems that will arise during writing month - and an endless number of solutions for them.

 - Set aside a specific time of day to do nothing but write.
 - Think about your story when you are not writing so that the day's word count is ready to bubble to the surface.
 - Use a mobile word processor that syncs with your main document and write your story instead of playing a game on your phone.
 - Use a speech-to-text app and dictate your story during periods when you can speak but can't use your hands.
 - Read the Book Talk! blog at readwriterelease.com and get encouraged!
 - Chuck it all and just get scribblin'!

Chapter and Session Builder

Prologue (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	5 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	10 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
1 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	6 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	11 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
2 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	7 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	12 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
3 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	8 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	13 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
4 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	9 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	14 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Chapter and Session Builder

15 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	20 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	25 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
16 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	21 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	26 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
17 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	22 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	27 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
18 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	23 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	28 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
19 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	24 (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	Epilogue (word count _____) Elements/Conflict/Break _____ _____ _____ _____ _____