So, you want to write a novel?

Well, just write. That's all anyone can do. Oh, you want more than that? Well...

There's no one right way to do anything creative, and that includes writing. Try as many methods that appeal to you and maybe even some that don't! Take from everything the pieces that work, discard what doesn't, and always be willing to evolve.

First, a recommended reading list. Some, all, or maybe none of these books will be helpful to you. I have found a lot of use in all of them.

Save the Cat Writes A Novel – Jessica Brody
A more practical how to that expounds on formula and story beats with lots of genre examples

Story Genius – Lisa Cron
A step-by-step method in simple language full of humor

The Art of Character – David Corbett
A deep dive into what makes characters "real" and how to look within yourself to find them

Writing Down the Bones – Natalie Goldberg
A comforting read full of tips that's less how to and more charmingly personal

Bird By Bird – Anne Lamott
Homey advice that's humorous and more a memoir than a how to

The Artist's Way – Julie Cameron
The definitive way to get in touch with your inner artist, a how to in the strictest sense, requiring weeks of work but very much worth the journey

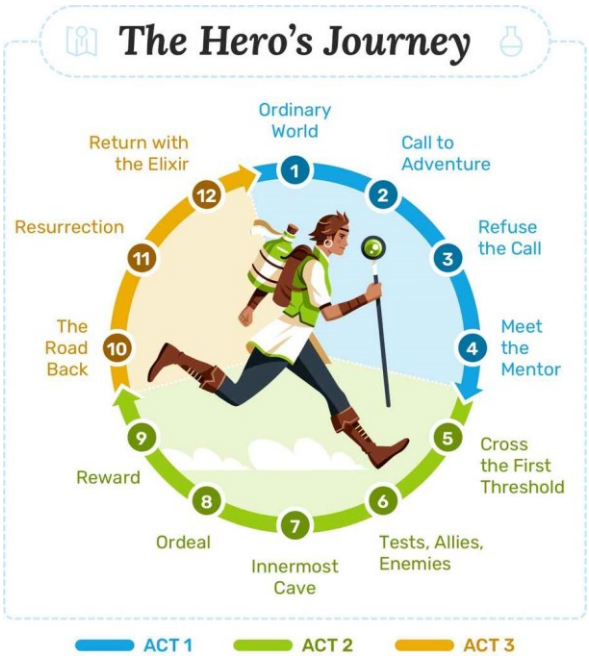
Big Magic – Elizabeth Gilbert
A lighthearted look at finding your inner artist

The Elements of Style – Willian Strunk Jr and E.B. White
An engineering guide of sorts for how to sentence

The Hero's Journey

From Reedsy: https://blog.reedsy.com/guide/story-structure/heros-journey/

The Hero's Journey is a timeless story structure which follows a protagonist on an unforeseen quest, where they face challenges, gain insights, and return home transformed.



1. **The Ordinary World:** We meet our hero.
2. **Call to Adventure:** Will they meet the challenge?
3. **Refusal of the Call:** They resist the adventure.
4. **Meeting the Mentor:** A teacher arrives.
5. **Crossing the First Threshold:** The hero leaves their comfort zone.
6. **Tests, Allies, Enemies:** Making friends and facing roadblocks.
7. **Approach to the Inmost Cave:** Getting closer to our goal.
8. **Ordeal:** The hero's biggest test yet!
9. **Reward (Seizing the Sword):** Light at the end of the tunnel
10. **The Road Back:** We aren't safe yet.
11. **Resurrection:** The final hurdle is reached.
12. **Return with the Elixir:** The hero heads home, triumphant.

1. Ordinary World

In which we meet our Hero.

The journey has yet to start. Before our Hero discovers a strange new world, we must first understand the status quo: their ordinary, mundane reality.
It's up to this opening leg to set the stage, introducing the Hero to readers. Importantly, it lets readers identify with the Hero as a "normal" person in a "normal" setting, before the journey begins.

2. Call to Adventure

In which an adventure starts.

The call to adventure is all about booting the Hero out of their comfort zone. In this stage, they are generally confronted with a problem or challenge they can't ignore. This catalyst can take many forms, as Campbell points out in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The Hero can, for instance:

- Decide to go forth of their own volition;
  - Theseus upon arriving in Athens.
- Be sent abroad by a benign or malignant agent;
  - Odysseus setting off on his ship in *The Odyssey*.
- Stumble upon the adventure as a result of a mere blunder;
  - Dorothy when she's swept up in a tornado in *The Wizard of Oz*.
- Be casually strolling when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man.
  - Elliot in *E.T.* upon discovering a lost alien in the tool shed.

The stakes of the adventure and the Hero's goals become clear. The only question: will he rise to the challenge?

3. Refusal of the Call
In which the Hero digs in their feet.

Great, so the Hero's received their summons. Now they're all set to be whisked off to defeat evil, right?

Not so fast. The Hero might first refuse the call to action. It's risky and there are perils — like spiders, trolls, or perhaps a creepy uncle waiting back at Pride Rock. It's enough to give anyone pause.
In *Star Wars*, for instance, Luke Skywalker initially refuses to join Obi-Wan on his mission to rescue the princess. It's only when he discovers that his aunt and uncle have been killed by stormtroopers that he changes his mind.

4. Meeting the Mentor
In which the Hero acquires a personal trainer.

The Hero's decided to go on the adventure — but they're not ready to spread their wings yet. They're much too inexperienced at this point and we don't want them to do a fabulous belly-flop off the cliff. Enter the mentor: someone who helps the Hero, so that they don't make a total fool of themselves (or get themselves killed). The mentor provides practical training, profound wisdom, a kick up the posterior, or something abstract like grit and self-confidence.

Wise old wizards seem to like being mentors. But mentors take many forms, from witches to hermits and suburban karate instructors. They might literally give weapons to prepare for the trials ahead, like Q in the *James Bond* series. Or perhaps the mentor is an object, such as a map. In all cases, they prepare the Hero for the next step.

5. Crossing the First Threshold
In which the Hero enters the other world in earnest.

Now the Hero is ready — and committed — to the journey. This marks the end of the Departure stage and is when the adventure really kicks into the next gear. As Vogler writes: "This is the moment that the balloon goes up, the ship sails, the romance begins, the wagon gets rolling."
From this point on, there's no turning back.

Like our Hero, you should think of this stage as a checkpoint for your story. Pause and re-assess your bearings before you continue into unfamiliar territory.

6. Tests, Allies, Enemies
In which the Hero faces new challenges and gets a squad.

When we step into the Special World, we notice a definite shift. The Hero might be discombobulated by this unfamiliar reality and its new rules. This is generally one of the longest stages in the story, as our protagonist gets to grips with this new world.

This makes a prime hunting ground for the series of tests to pass! Luckily, there are many ways for the Hero to get into trouble:

- In *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, Spencer, Bethany, "Fridge," and Martha get off to a bad start when they bump into a herd of bloodthirsty hippos.

- In his first few months at Hogwarts, Harry Potter manages to fight a troll, almost fall from a broomstick and die, and get horribly lost in the Forbidden Forest.
- Marlin and Dory encounter three "reformed" sharks, get shocked by jellyfish, and are swallowed by a blue whale en route to finding Nemo.

This stage often expands the cast of characters. Once the protagonist is in the Special World, he will meet allies and enemies — or foes that turn out to be friends and vice versa. He will learn a new set of rules from them. Saloons and seedy bars are popular places for these transactions, as Vogler points out (so long as the Hero survives them).

7. Approach to the Inmost Cave
In which the Hero gets closer to his goal.

This isn't a physical cave. Instead, the "inmost cave" refers to the most dangerous spot in the other realm — whether that's the villain's chambers, the lair of the fearsome dragon, or the Death Star. Almost always, it is where the ultimate goal of the quest is located.

Note that the protagonist hasn't entered the Inmost Cave just yet. This stage is all about the approach to it. It covers all the prep work that's needed in order to defeat the villain.

8. Ordeal
In which the Hero faces his biggest test of all thus far.

Of all the tests the Hero has faced, none have made them hit rock bottom — until now. Vogler describes this phase as a "black moment." Campbell refers to it as the "belly of the whale." Both indicate some grim news for the Hero.

The protagonist must now confront their greatest fear. If they survive it, they will emerge transformed. This is a critical moment in the story, as Vogler explains that it will "inform every decision that the Hero makes from this point forward."

The Ordeal is sometimes not the climax of the story. There's more to come. But you can think of it as the main event of the second act — the one in which the Hero actually earns the title of "Hero."

9. Reward (Seizing the Sword)
In which the Hero sees light at the end of the tunnel.

Our Hero's been through a lot. However, the fruits of their labor are now at hand — if they can just reach out and grab them! The "reward" is the object or knowledge the Hero has fought throughout the entire journey to hold.

Once the protagonist has it in their possession, it generally has greater ramifications for the story. Vogler offers a few examples of it in action:

- Luke rescues Princess Leia and captures the plans of the Death Star — keys to defeating Darth Vader.
- Dorothy escapes from the Wicked Witch's castle with the broomstick and the ruby slippers — keys to getting back home.

10. The Road Back
In which the light at the end of the tunnel might be a little further than the Hero thought.

The story's not over just yet, as this phase marks the beginning of Act Three. Now that he's seized the reward, the Hero tries to return to the Ordinary World, but more dangers (inconveniently) arise on the road back from the Inmost Cave.

More precisely, the Hero must deal with the consequences and aftermath of the previous act: the dragon, enraged by the Hero who's just stolen a treasure from under his nose, starts the hunt. Or perhaps the opposing army gathers to pursue the Hero across a crowded battlefield. All further obstacles for the Hero, who must face them down before they can return home.

11. Resurrection
In which the last test is met.

Here is the true climax of the story. Everything that happened prior to this stage culminates in a crowning test for the Hero, as the Dark Side gets one last chance to triumph over the Hero.
Vogler refers to this as a "final exam" for the Hero — they must be "tested once more to see if they have really learned the lessons of the Ordeal." It's in this Final Battle that the protagonist goes through one more "resurrection." As a result, this is where you'll get most of your miraculous near-death escapes, à la James Bond's dashing deliverances. If the Hero survives, they can start looking forward to a sweet ending.

12. Return with the Elixir
In which our Hero has a triumphant homecoming.

Finally, the Hero gets to return home. However, they go back a different person than when they started out: they've grown and matured as a result of the journey they've taken.
But we've got to see them bring home the bacon, right? That's why the protagonist must return with the "Elixir," or the prize won during the journey, whether that's an object or knowledge and insight gained.

Of course, it's possible for a story to end on an Elixir-less note — but then the Hero would be doomed to repeat the entire adventure.

Save The Cat – Beat Sheet

Paraphrased from *Save the Cat Writes A Novel* by Jessica Brody and:
https://www.jessicabrody.com/2020/11/how-to-write-your-novel-using-the-save-the-cat-beat-sheet/

Create a Story-Worthy Hero aka A Flawed Hero
Your character needs:

- A PROBLEM (or flaw that needs fixing)
- A WANT (or goal the hero is pursing)
- A NEED (or life lesson to be learned)

Your hero should have a big problem or flaw that begins internally and manifests into external problems in your hero's life.

You should psychoanalyze your hero to determine what is causing their big flaw or problem, This is called the shard of glass. It is a psychological wound that has been festering beneath the surface of your hero for a long time. How did that shard of glass get there? Why is your hero so flawed? What happened to make them the way they are?

Then you, the author, must know what will really fix your hero. This is not the thing they want (even though the hero will think it's going to fix everything), but it's the thing they need, the life lesson.

Ten universal life lessons:

- Forgiveness of self or others
- Love, including self love, family love, or romantic love
- Acceptance of self, circumstances, reality
- Faith in oneself, others, the world
- Fear and overcoming it or finding courage
- Trust in oneself, in others, in the unknown
- Survival including the will to live
- Responsibility, including duty, standing up for a cause, accepting one's destiny
- Redemption, including atonement, accepting blame, remorse, salvation

At the start of your novel, what does your hero want? (The thing they think will fix their life.)

How has your hero been pursing this goal?

What haven't they achieved this goal? (This roadblock can be internal, external, or both.)

What does your hero actually need? (What will really fix their life?)

The Beat Sheet:

#1: Opening Image. (0-1)%
This is the first beat of Act 1 and it serves as a "before" snapshot of your main character (who from here on out I will refer to as the "hero" of your story), where you visually *show*, in a single scene, who your hero is and what their world or life is like.

#2: Theme Stated (5%)
This is where a statement is made by a character (typically not the hero) that hints at what the hero's arc will be (that is, what the hero must learn/discover before the end of the book). This can also be referred to as a "life lesson."

#3: Setup (1% – 10%)
These scenes are used to explore the hero's status quo life and all its flaws. This is where the reader learns more about what the hero's life looks like before its epic transformation, including how your hero's life is flawed in some way. Here we also introduce other supporting characters and the hero's primary goal. But most important, we show the hero's reluctance to change (aka learn the theme or life lesson) while also hinting at the stakes at risk should the hero not change.

 # 4 – Catalyst (10%)
At 10%, an inciting incident (or life-changing event) should happen to the hero, which will catapult them into a new world or new way of thinking. This is an action beat that should be big enough to prevent the hero from being able to return to their status quo life. (things like break-ups, deaths, firings, and invitations are popular choices.)

#5: Debate (10% to 20%)
After the Catalyst, the hero usually takes multiple scenes or chapters to react to what happened in the Catalyst. This is a sequence in which the hero debates what they will do next. It's usually presented in the form of a question (such as "Should I go?" or "What do I do?"). The purpose of this beat is to show the hero's reluctance to change.

#6: Break Into 2 (20%)
This is the moment when the hero decides to accept the call to action, leave their comfort zone, try something new, or venture into a new world or new way of thinking. It's a decisive action beat that separates the status quo world of Act 1 from the new "upside-down" world of Act 2, which we are now in! It's at this moment that a new or modified goal is typically introduced, something that the hero is pursuing through the first half of Act 2.

#7: B Story (22%)
At this point in the story, we introduce a new character or characters who will ultimately serve to help the hero learn the theme or life lesson. This can also be referred to as a helper character, and it can come in the form of a love interest, nemesis, mentor, family member, friend, or other!

#8 : Fun and Games (20% to 50%)
In this long sequence of multiple scenes or chapters is where we see the hero in their new "upside down" world of Act 2. They're either generally loving it or hating it. Succeeding or floundering. We want to see the hero pursuing that goal you set up at the Break into 2, so this is where you show the hero either making strides to achieve that goal or struggling to achieve that goal. This beat is also called the "promise of the premise" because it's the section of the story that represents the "hook" of the novel, in other words, (why the reader picked up the novel in the first place).

#9: Midpoint (50%)
This is literally the middle of the novel where the Fun and Games culminates in either a "false victory" (the hero has thus far been succeeding and/or has achieved their goal) or a "false defeat" (the hero has thus far been floundering and/or has lost their goal). But something else should happen here to raise the stakes and push the hero forward, ultimately toward real change. (Plot twists, time clocks, ramp-ups of the love story are popular choices.)

#10: Bad Guys Close In (50% to 75%)
If the Midpoint was a false victory, this section of the story will generally be a downward path where things get progressively worse for the hero. If the Midpoint was a false defeat, this section will generally be an upward path where things seem to get progressively better for the hero. But regardless of path, the hero's deep-rooted flaws (or internal bad guys) are closing in. After the Midpoint, the hero typically has either a new or modified goal to pursue throughout this beat.

#11: All Is Lost (75%)
This moment is the lowest point of the novel. It's an action beat where something happens to the hero that, combined with their internal bad guys, pushes the hero to rock bottom. There's typically a "whiff of death" during this beat, meaning something dies here (either literally or metaphorically) to symbolize the "death of the old hero" and upcoming "rebirth of a transformed hero"

#12: Dark Night of the Soul (75% to 80%)
This is another reaction beat where the hero takes time to process everything that's happened thus far. The hero should be worse off than at the start of the novel. This feels like the darkest hour for the hero, but it's just darkness before the dawn, or the moment right before the hero finds a solution to their problems, but also finally learn their theme or life lesson.

#13: The Break Into 3 (80%)
The "aha!" moment. This is where the hero realizes what they must do to not only fix the problems created in Act 2, but more important, fix themself and be "reborn" as an improved version of themselves. The character arc is nearly complete.

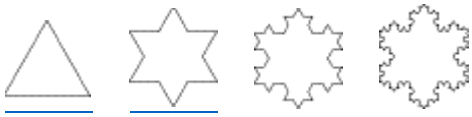
#14: The Finale (80% to 99%)
Now in Act 3, the hero must prove that they really have learned the theme and have transformed. To do that we, show them enacting the plan they came up with in the Break Into 3. Bad guys are destroyed, flaws are conquered, lovers are reunited. Not only is the hero's world saved, but it's a better place than it was before.

#15: Final Image (99% to 100%)
A mirror to the Opening Image, this is the "after" snapshot of who the hero is after going through this epic and satisfying transformation. In this final beat we show a visual representation of the hero's life after this exciting journey has changed them for the better.

The Snowflake Method

From: The Snowflake Guy Randy Ingermanson:
https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/

This method begins with a few simple ideas and then builds on each one, growing outward like a snowflake. Visualize it like this:



Step 1) Take an hour and write a one-sentence summary of your novel. Something like this: "A rogue physicist travels back in time to kill the apostle Paul." (This is the summary for my first novel, Transgression.) The sentence will serve you forever as a ten-second selling tool. This is the big picture, t the analog of that big starting triangle in the snowflake picture.

When you later write your book proposal, this sentence should appear very early in the proposal. It's the hook that will sell your book to your editor, to your committee, to the sales force, to bookstore owners, and ultimately to readers. So make the best one you can!
Some hints on what makes a good sentence:

- Shorter is better. Try for fewer than 15 words.
- No character names, please! Better to say "a handicapped trapeze artist" than "Jane Doe".
- Tie together the big picture and the personal picture. Which character has the most to lose in this story? Now tell me what he or she wants to win.
- Read the one-line blurbs on the New York Times Bestseller list to learn how to do this. Writing a one-sentence description is an art form.

Step 2) Take another hour and expand that sentence to a full paragraph describing the story setup, major disasters, and ending of the novel. This is the analog of the second stage of the snowflake. I like to structure a story as "three disasters plus an ending". Each of the disasters takes a quarter of the book to develop and the ending takes the final quarter. I don't know if this is the ideal structure, it's just my personal taste.

If you believe in the Three-Act structure, then the first disaster corresponds to the end of Act 1. The second disaster is the mid-point of Act 2. The third disaster is the end of Act 2, and forces Act 3 which wraps things up. It is OK to have the first disaster be caused by external circumstances, but I think that the second and third disasters should be caused by the protagonist's attempts to "fix things". Things just get worse and worse.

You can also use this paragraph in your proposal. Ideally, your paragraph will have about five sentences. One sentence to give me the backdrop and story setup. Then one sentence each for your three disasters. Then one more sentence to tell the ending. Don't confuse this paragraph with the back-cover copy for your book. This paragraph summarizes the whole story. Your back-cover copy should summarize only about the first quarter of the story.

Step 3) The above gives you a high-level view of your novel. Now you need something similar for the storylines of each of your characters. Characters are the most important part of any novel, and the time you invest in designing them up front will pay off ten-fold when you start writing. For each of your major characters, take an hour and write a one-page summary sheet that tells:

- The character's name
- A one-sentence summary of the character's storyline
- The character's motivation (what does he/she want abstractly?)
- The character's goal (what does he/she want concretely?)
- The character's conflict (what prevents him/her from reaching this goal?)
- The character's epiphany (what will he/she learn, how will he/she change?
- A one-paragraph summary of the character's storyline

An important point: You may find that you need to go back and revise your one-sentence summary and/or your one-paragraph summary. Go ahead! This is good–it means your characters are teaching you things about your story. It's always okay at any stage of the design process to go back and revise earlier stages. In fact, it's not just okay–it's inevitable. And it's good. Any revisions you make now are revisions you won't need to make later on to a clunky 400 page manuscript.

Another important point: It doesn't have to be perfect. The purpose of each step in the design process is to advance you to the next step. Keep your forward momentum! You can always come back later and fix it when you understand the story better. You will do this too, unless you're a lot smarter than I am.

Step 4) By this stage, you should have a good idea of the large-scale structure of your novel, and you have only spent a day or two. Well, truthfully, you may have spent as much as a week, but it doesn't matter. If the story is broken, you know it now, rather than after investing 500 hours in a rambling first draft. So now just keep growing the story. Take several hours and expand each sentence of your summary paragraph into a full paragraph. All but the last paragraph should end in a disaster. The final paragraph should tell how the book ends.
This is a lot of fun, and at the end of the exercise, you have a pretty decent one-page skeleton of your novel. It's okay if you can't get it all onto one single-spaced page. What matters is that you are growing the ideas that will go into your story. You are expanding the conflict. You should now have a synopsis suitable for a proposal, although there is a better alternative for proposals . . .

Step 5) Take a day or two and write up a one-page description of each major character and a half-page description of the other important characters. These "character synopses" should tell the story from the point of view of each character. As always, feel free to cycle back to the earlier steps and make revisions as you learn cool stuff about your characters. I usually enjoy this step the most and lately, I have been putting the resulting "character synopses" into my proposals instead of a plot-based synopsis. Editors love character synopses, because editors love character-based fiction.

Step 6) By now, you have a solid story and several story-threads, one for each character. Now take a week and expand the one-page plot synopsis of the novel to a four-page synopsis. Basically, you will again be expanding each paragraph from step (4) into a full page. This is a lot of fun, because you are figuring out the high-level logic of the story and making strategic decisions. Here, you will definitely want to cycle back and fix things in the earlier steps as you gain insight into the story and new ideas whack you in the face.

Step 7) Take another week and expand your character descriptions into full-fledged character charts detailing everything there is to know about each character. The standard stuff such as birthdate, description, history, motivation, goal, etc. Most importantly, how will this character change by the end of the novel? This is an expansion of your work in step (3), and it will teach you a lot about your characters.

You will probably go back and revise steps (1-6) as your characters become "real" to you and begin making petulant demands on the story. This is good — great fiction is character-driven. Take as much time as you need to do this, because you're just saving time downstream. When you have finished this

process, (and it may take a full month of solid effort to get here), you have most of what you need to write a proposal. If you are a published novelist, then you can write a proposal now and sell your novel before you write it. If you're not yet published, then you'll need to write your entire novel first before you can sell it. No, that's not fair, but life isn't fair and the world of fiction writing is especially unfair.

Step 8) You may or may not take a hiatus here, waiting for the book to sell. At some point, you've got to actually write the novel. Before you do that, there are a couple of things you can do to make that traumatic first draft easier. The first thing to do is to take that four-page synopsis and make a list of all the scenes that you'll need to turn the story into a novel. And the easiest way to make that list is . . . with a spreadsheet.

For some reason, this is scary to a lot of writers. Oh the horror. Deal with it. You learned to use a word-processor. Spreadsheets are easier. You need to make a list of scenes, and spreadsheets were invented for making lists. If you need some tutoring, buy a book. There are a thousand out there, and one of them will work for you. It should take you less than a day to learn the itty bit you need. It'll be the most valuable day you ever spent. Do it.

Make a spreadsheet detailing the scenes that emerge from your four-page plot outline. Make just one line for each scene. In one column, list the POV character. In another (wide) column, tell what happens. If you want to get fancy, add more columns that tell you how many pages you expect to write for the scene. A spreadsheet is ideal, because you can see the whole storyline at a glance, and it's easy to move scenes around to reorder things.

My spreadsheets usually wind up being over 100 lines long, one line for each scene of the novel. As I develop the story, I make new versions of my story spreadsheet. This is incredibly valuable for analyzing a story. It can take a week to make a good spreadsheet. When you are done, you can add a new column for chapter numbers and assign a chapter to each scene.

Step 9) (Optional. I don't do this step anymore.) Switch back to your word processor and begin writing a narrative description of the story. Take each line of the spreadsheet and expand it to a multi-paragraph description of the scene. Put in any cool lines of dialogue you think of, and sketch out the essential conflict of that scene. If there's no conflict, you'll know it here and you should either add conflict or scrub the scene.

I used to write either one or two pages per chapter, and I started each chapter on a new page. Then I just printed it all out and put it in a loose-leaf notebook, so I could easily swap chapters around later or revise chapters without messing up the others. This process usually took me a week and the end result was a massive 50-page printed document that I would revise in red ink as I wrote the first draft. All my good ideas when I woke up in the morning got hand-written in the margins of this document. This, by the way, is a rather painless way of writing that dreaded detailed synopsis that all writers seem to hate. But it's actually fun to develop, if you have done steps (1) through (8) first. When I did this step, I never showed this synopsis to anyone, least of all to an editor — it was for me alone. I liked to think of it as the prototype first draft. Imagine writing a first draft in a week! Yes, you can do it and it's well worth the time. But I'll be honest, I don't feel like I need this step anymore, so I don't do it now.

Step 10) At this point, just sit down and start pounding out the real first draft of the novel. You will be astounded at how fast the story flies out of your fingers at this stage. I have seen writers triple their fiction writing speed overnight, while producing better quality first drafts than they usually produce on a third draft.

You might think that all the creativity is chewed out of the story by this time. Well, no, not unless you overdid your analysis when you wrote your Snowflake. This is supposed to be the fun part, because there are many small-scale logic problems to work out here. How does Hero get out of that tree surrounded by alligators and rescue Heroine who's in the burning rowboat? This is the time to figure it out! But it's fun because you already know that the large-scale structure of the novel works. So you only have to solve a limited set of problems, and so you can write relatively fast.

This stage is incredibly fun and exciting. I have heard many fiction writers complain about how hard the first draft is. Invariably, that's because they have no clue what's coming next. Good grief! Life is too short to write like that! There is no reason to spend 500 hours writing a wandering first draft of your novel when you can write a solid one in 150. Counting the 100 hours it takes to do the design documents, you come out way ahead in time.

About midway through a first draft, I usually take a breather and fix all the broken parts of my design documents. Yes, the design documents are not perfect. That's okay. The design documents are not fixed in concrete, they are a living set of documents that grows as you develop your novel. If you are doing your job right, at the end of the first draft you will laugh at what an amateurish piece of junk your original design documents were. And you'll be thrilled at how deep your story has become.

The 27 Chapter Method

Created by Kat O'Keefe, this info is taken from Campfire Writing:
https://www.campfirewriting.com/learn/27-chapter-outline

The 27-chapter method is essentially the three-act structure, broken down into bite-size pieces so you know exactly which scenes should occur in which order in your story. Let's break down each of these sections.

Act I: Setup
The three blocks of Act I focus on introducing the main character in their ordinary world, disrupting them from their ordinary world, and then showing how their life will never be the same.

Block I (Setup): The scenes in this block show a snapshot of the protagonist before their life changes. These scenes comprise:

- **Introduction (Setup):** The reader meets the main character and sees them in their normal life.
- **Inciting incident (Conflict):** Something happens to disrupt the main character's ordinary life.
- **Fallout (Resolution):** The main character immediately reacts to the inciting incident.

Block II (Conflict): The scenes in this block build on the main character's reaction to the inciting incident that occurred in Block I. These scenes comprise:

- **Reaction/rebellion (Setup):** The main character pushes back against what happened or was revealed in the inciting incident.
- **Action (Conflict):** The hero takes action to fix what happened in the inciting incident.
- **Consequence (Resolution):** The main character must face the consequences of the action they took (or tried to take).

Block III (Resolution): The final scenes in Act I highlight how the main character's life will never be the same now that their ordinary world has been disrupted. These scenes comprise:

- **Pressure (Setup):** The main character starts to feel the weight of what's happening to them.
- **Pinch (Conflict):** A plot twist happens, making the main character wonder if they made the right decision when they decided to take action.
- **Push (Resolution):** The main character is forced once and for all out of their ordinary world.

Act II: Conflict
The three blocks of Act II form the middle of the story. In this Act, we see the main character interact with their new world and take on a number of new challenges.

Block I (Setup): Block I of Act II sees the protagonist enter their new world and start to explore it. These scenes comprise:

- **New world (Setup):** The main character explores the shiny new world (or state of mind) they're now living in.
- **Fun and games (Conflict):** The protagonist plays around in the new world, potentially meeting new characters.
- **Juxtaposition (Resolution):** We see a contrast between the main character's new world to the ordinary world they left behind.

Block II (Conflict): In the second block of Act II, the main character experiences some struggles as they encounter challenges in their new surroundings. These scenes comprise:

- **Build-up (Setup):** Complications occur: the main character faces some serious struggles, internal or external.
- **Midpoint (Conflict):** Something big happens that changes everything for your main character.

- **Reversal (Resolution):** The main character decides on a new course of action based on what's been revealed at the midpoint.

Block III (Resolution): The final block of Act II sees the protagonist dedicated to finding a solution to the challenges they're dealing with. These scenes comprise:

- **Consequence (Setup):** The hero reflects on all that's happened to them on their journey so far.
- **Trials (Conflict):** The protagonist takes action to solve their problems and makes progress based on the lessons they've learned in previous conflicts.
- **Dedication (Resolution):** Despite the challenges they're facing, the main character resolves to solve their issues.

Act III: Resolution

In the final act of the story, the protagonist experiences their greatest challenge yet. Everything they've learned has led up to this moment.

Nine Blocks of Act III for the 27-chapter outline, color-coded into three mini-acts.

Block I (Setup): The hero experiences a huge setback, the biggest of the story so far. These scenes comprise:

- **Calm before the storm (Setup):** The hero feels the pressure as they decide to put their plan into action.
- **Plot twist (Conflict):** Something terrible occurs, the worst complication in the story to this point.
- **Darkest point (Resolution):** The main character is at their lowest. Is all lost?

Block II (Conflict): In this block, the protagonist must find the resolve within themselves to overcome their challenges. The scenes in this block are:

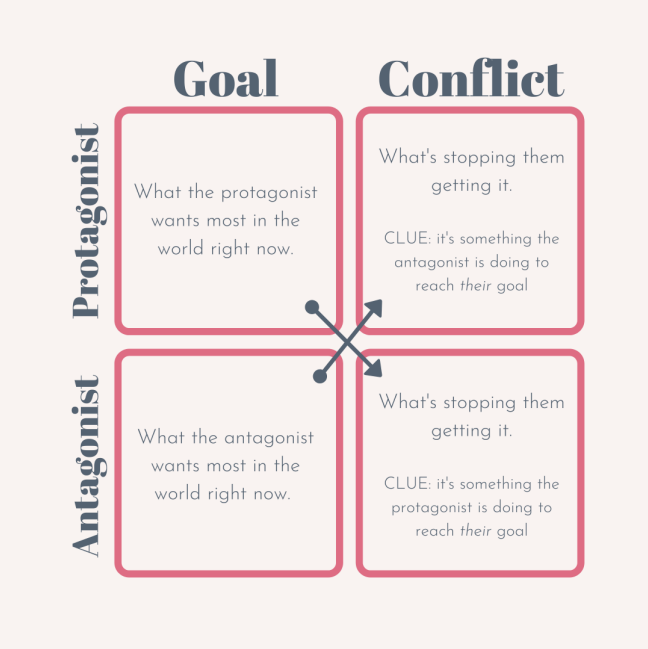
- **Power within (Setup):** The hero reaches deep inside to bring themselves back from the brink of destruction.
- **Action (Conflict):** With renewed resolve, the protagonist formulates a plan to take action.
- **Convergence (Resolution):** All of the characters and main plot points gather for the big finale.

Block III (Resolution): We've reached the end of the story. In the final block, the hero must face their trials and emerge victorious. These scenes comprise:

- **The final battle (Setup):** The hero faces down their nemesis. This scene is not always a literal battle: sometimes, the hero is tackling an internal demon in a high-pressure situation (like declaring their eternal love before a big group of people).
- **Climax (Conflict):** Everything has led to this moment. The hero succeeds or fails, depending on your story.
- **Resolution (Resolution):** We see the hero in the aftermath of the climax. Are they celebrating their victory or licking their wounds?

There you have it! All of the scenes you need to include to complete your 27-chapter outline.

Conflict Square

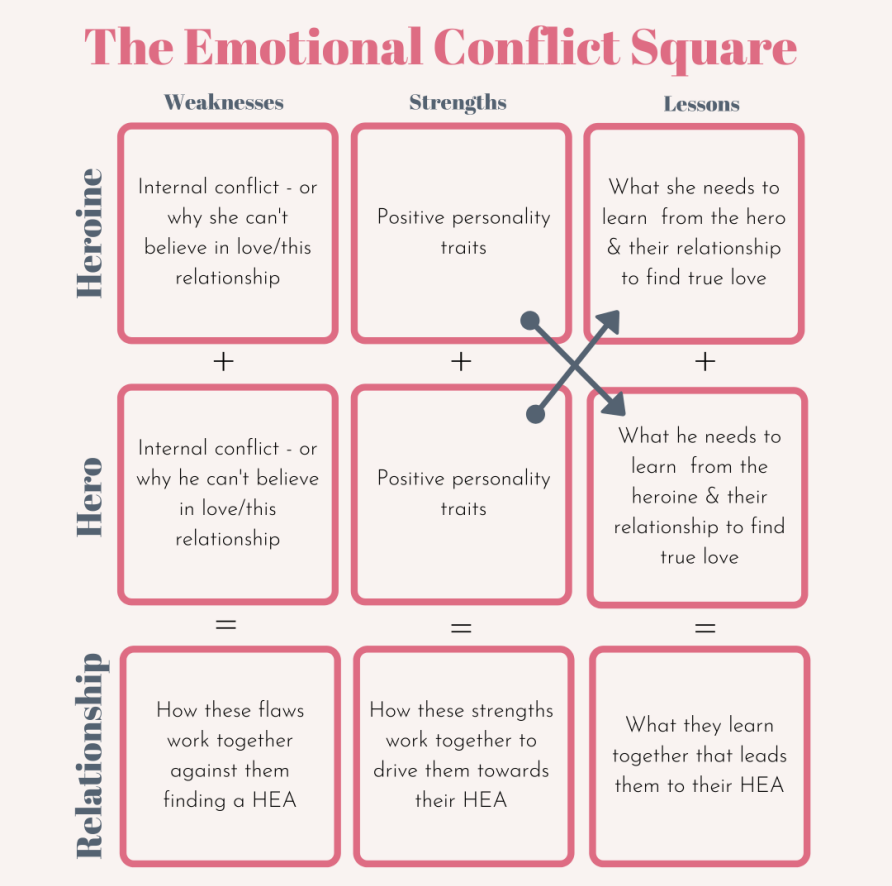


From Sophie Pembroke: https://www.sophiepembroke.com/3-ways-a-conflict-square-can-fix-your-romance-novel/

The protagonist has a goal that's being thwarted by the antagonist, while also stopping the antagonist from reaching their goal.

For romance, you can use the below hybrid conflict square. "Hero" and "heroine" need not be gendered, they are simply listed as such for ease of reading.

HEA = Happily ever after, a necessity in the romance genre.



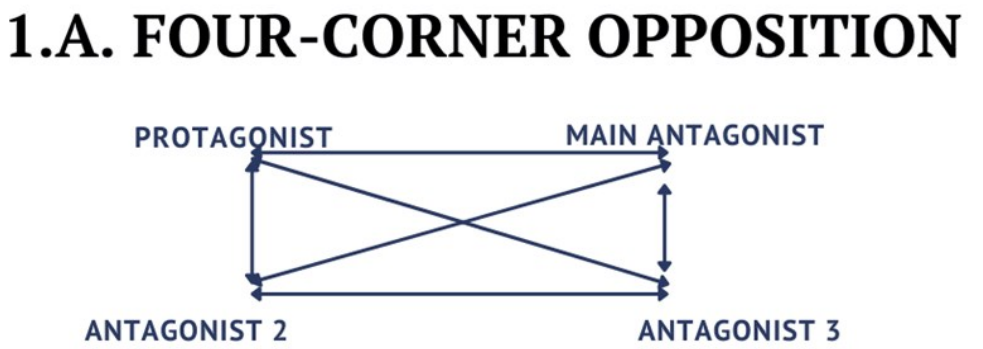
4 Corner Opposition

From: John Truby's 4 Corner Opposition, taken from: https://loripuma.com/blog/simple-tool-twisty-plot

Each corner represents a character and each of the lines in-between the corners represent conflict between the characters.

Each character who has a place in a corner has a story goal and takes small steps to reach their goal throughout the story. Each antagonist uses a different strategy for attacking the hero and creating obstacles that make the hero's journey to achieving their overall story goal more difficult.

In addition, each antagonist has conflict with at least one, if not more, of the other antagonists. This means that it's harder for the antagonist to reach their goals too.



A good plot comes from the hero and the antagonists all striving to get what they want and creating obstacles for each other that make their goals more difficult to achieve. Twisty plots happen when antagonists not only block, delay, or ruin your protagonist's plans for reaching their story goal, but when what one antagonist does impacts other antagonists' plans too.

If you focus too much on what's happening between your protagonist and main villain, you miss opportunities to make your story more surprising to readers (and way more fun to write).

Here are some questions that you can ask about your story before you draw your own diagram.

- First, does each protagonist and antagonist have a goal with a clear end result? (i.e. Will readers know when the character reaches the goal? Or fails to reach it?)
- Second, are all the goals different from each other? Have you made the protagonist as different as possible from each of the antagonists in terms of their motivation?
- Third, does each antagonist have a unique strategy for creating obstacles for the protagonist? One might specialize in using physical force, another in emotional manipulation, financial maneuvering, social intrigue, or creating practical problems like stealing the key that the hero needs to get into a building.
- Fourth, does each antagonist have at least one other antagonist who creates obstacles that make it harder for them to reach their goal? (Another antagonist might want them dead, or might want to humiliate them, or they might vie for the same resource, etc)