



Structuring Your Story

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There are many ways to structure your story and it will be trial and error to find out what works for you. All our writers agree on:

- Keeping a notebook to record your ideas and those moments of inspiration – keep one next to your bed for those ideas that arrive in the night!
- Declan uses index cards to record ideas and plot points, using them when he feels ready to help construct his story.
- Sinead writes a synopsis, an overview of the story and then creates a chapter plan, writing a few lines on what happens in each chapter. Doing this she can see how the story develops, where the highs and lows are, where it may sag.
- Carlo makes character notes and writes short pieces from each character's point of view to get to know them better. He creates a calendar of their lives and uses maps to help him get a feel for the locations they inhabit. Your story may not end up being a first person story, but by using 'I' you get right into the head of your character and get to know them very quickly.
- All our writers agree that the middle third of the book is the hardest to write – be prepared to hit that section – Carlo suggests writing the end, the last paragraph, to give you something to aim for.

This ten point plan will help you create the bones of your novel:

1. Write one a paragraph summarising what the book is about.
2. Jot down the characteristics/name/age and relationships of your major characters and repeat for the minor characters. Look at where the characters intersect and where there is the possibility of conflict. Look for subplots that can be developed to run parallel with the main story.
3. Note the location and settings that will feature in your novel. Use maps or photographs to assist you, estate agents websites or Google Street view to ensure that your geography is correct. If you are creating a fantasy world, create your own map.

4. Define your character's goals – work out the plot and create tension. *Every character needs something hard to get.* Remember your characters must change as a result of the story.
5. List the obstacles that prevent the main characters from what they want. These could be psychological, physical or emotional.
6. Plan the conclusion. Write a paragraph and put it over your desk. You have now finished the book, so the goal is achievable.
7. Create a brief outline of the plot.
8. Make a list of chapter headings (you may not use these in the finished book, but they will help you see the story development). Think about what the reader needs to learn in each chapter in order to move the story forward. Try and focus on this point or points to keep your story on track.
9. Set up hard copy files for each character and location. Think about creating a story board – visual prompts will help you get to know your characters and access their story.
10. Write the opening paragraph - and keep writing until you get to the end! You do not need to polish the opening chapters until you have reached the end of the book – as Sinead says, it's only when you get to the end that you know your characters properly, and then you may decide to cut those opening chapters or replace them. Ultimately you want your book to start right before the action begins.

Story is about action and your character's *reaction* to events.

Understand a character's motivation and you will understand why they react in a certain way. This reaction will drive your plot.

Consider creating a story board. Look for pictures of people that fit what your characters look like, from pictures you find online, or from magazines. Take a large piece of board and create a mind map of your story. See how events and characters link and overlap. You can do this for the whole story, or just for a scene. Put it up somewhere close to where you write so you can look at it for inspiration.

To view The National Emerging Writer Programme online go to www.writing.ie.
The full DVD is available to borrow from your local library or to purchase from Amazon.