

Journalism/Creative Writing Extended Project Fiction Track

Step One: Outlining Basics

Over the next several weeks you're going to be dedicating your time to creating a longer fiction piece. When it's all said and done, your piece should be **at least** ten to fifteen pages, but can be longer if you wish. Through handouts, I'll be walking you through each step of creating this piece. Some stuff is stuff we've learned previously in class. Some things will come naturally; others will be more difficult for you. Stick with it. You'll end up with a fantastic piece you can be proud of.

For this first day, we're going to come up with some basic outlines for your piece. Instead of me leaving space for you to put your ideas on this page, you can put your work directly in your journal/on your computer that way the day-to-day progression of planning all stays together.

Now first, I have to say, that the plot you're going to come up with on this first day will not be without it's flaws, but coming up with it all at once will help it flow better altogether. We'll iron out specifics and such in the coming days as we revisit all the parts in detail.

1. What is your premise and basic plot?

Pick your plot. At the beginning of the year, we talked about how all plots can fall into a few basic categories:

- Overcoming the monster: Protagonist vs. malevolent figure
- Rags to riches: Protagonist ascends from obscurity to wealth, love, and/or status
- Voyage and return: Protagonist makes life-altering voyage.
- The quest: Protagonist much reach a given objective at all costs.
- Comedy: Light-hearted and humorous, usually has an upbeat ending
- Tragedy: a character's crucial flaws or mistakes lead to ruin.
- Rebirth: Protagonist undergoes a powerfully transforming experience.

No plots are "original" so making yours interesting and complex (along with interesting characters) will distract from that fact. You'll want the main plot to be fairly straightforward because a confusing main plot will doom your subplots.

2. Decide who the characters will be (both main and secondary).

They don't even have to have names at this point. You don't even need to know who they are other than why they have to be in the story. The more characters there are, the more complicated the plot will be. More characters = more subplots. Multiple interconnected subplots will give the illusion that

the story is very complicated and will give the reader a lot of different things to look at at all times. It also gives you lots of chances to develop characters well. For now, just decide on the necessary characters and their roles.

3. Decide what drives each character.

For each character you've now created and said is necessary, decide why, specifically, they are in the story. What drives/motivates them? What do they want?

4. What aren't these characters giving away right off the bat? Give them secrets!

It doesn't have to be something they're actively lying about or trying to hide, we're just looking for things that could tie them into the plot or subplot(s) later. Their secrets do not have to be connected to their "drive" to be present in the story. Decide who is in love with who, what that one person did back in their childhood that's coming back to bite them today, what continues to haunt what's-his-face to this very day. This is where you start to see the characters take shape. Don't worry about who they are or what they look like. Just focus on what they're doing in the story.

5. What is going to change these characters?

Now, this will take some thinking. Everyone wants at least a few of the characters to come out changed by the end of the story, so think: how will they be different as a result of the plot/subplot?

6. Now, list out the major events of the story (with subplot) in chronological order. This will be your timeline.

Especially list the historical things that you want to exist in backstory. List everything you can think of (this doesn't mean you'll actually be writing in detail on everything you come up with, but it will help later with worldbuilding). Think about where the story is going. At this point, you likely haven't focused too much on details of the plot. Now is the time to focus on the rising actions, how the conflict builds, etc.

7. Decide where to start writing.

This is a hard decision. But now that you've got the timeline, pick an interesting point to begin at. Something with action. Something relevant to plot/subplot. Preferably not at the beginning of your timeline. You'll want to have things to reveal later as prior events are exposed. This is the point where you should think about what information should come out when. Essentially, you're rearranging your chronological timeline to be in story-order. Once you've got this new list done, you've got your plot. Does it need work? Probably. That's what the coming days are for.