

Journalism/Creative Writing Extended Project Poetry Track

Step Four: How to Outline Ideas

We're going to come up with some basic outlines for your collection. 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.

Outlining for Narrative Collections:

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 must 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.

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.

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.

Outlining for Thematic Collection

1. Know your theme

You should have an idea of what your overarching theme/topic is that you're wanting to write about. Write down that theme now.

2. What do you think about said theme?

I'm assuming you want to write on that given theme because you have your own personal thoughts/opinions about it. What are they? Write down everything you think about said theme. Which thoughts do you actually want poems over?

3. How are you going to communicate those thoughts?

Once you've got a list of what all you're wanting to say on this theme/topic, break down which ideas will be separated into poems. Don't try and tackle all the big ideas in one poem. Split them up. Let the poems build on each other. In a thematic collection, each poem should be like a different side/facet of a diamond. Your collection is the whole diamond, but depending on which side

of the diamond you're looking at, a new view is introduced. That's what your poems are. Different sides/views of the same diamond.

In what order are you going to present your poems?

You should have a list going of what you want to say and how you want to say it. Now we need to decide the order. If I were you, I would just put order numbers next to each item on your list. Odds are, the poems in the collection won't go in exactly the same order you have them listed now, which is why you need to decide what order you **do** want them to go in.