

Digital Flashcards  
for Great Storytelling

*Master Fiction*  
*One Card at a Time*

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# Hello fellow writers!

If you're a new writer, writing a novel can be overwhelming. There are too many important guidelines and techniques to remember, and it's easy to get confused and discouraged. Sometimes, you need a simple way to keep on track.

I've designed these flash cards to serve as a **ready reference guide** when you need immediate help. Keep them handy, and refer to them whenever your story feels flat or you need a reminder on how to make your story come alive. While many of these rules are made to be broken, it's best as a new writer to learn them well before you decide to wander.

I hope you find the cards helpful in your writing journey. Here's to great writing!

**Lynn Bohart**



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# CORE STORY COMPONENTS



# Story Structure



**Goal:** To arrange critical story events, including the beginning, middle, and end in the most compelling way.

**Rule:** The structure must maintain reader engagement, have a logical flow, and ensure that essential details are addressed.

## Tips:

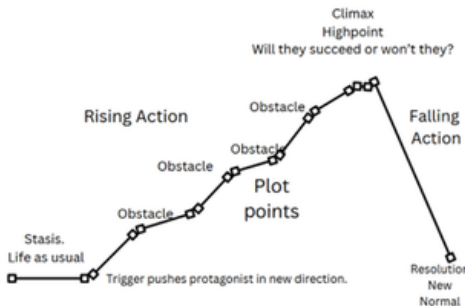
- There are at least 7 basic story structures to research and choose from.
- Your structure should include a cause-and-effect chain of events.
- Regardless of the structure you choose, ensure there are escalating stakes to keep momentum flowing.
- Most common story structures share certain elements: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.



# Structure Graph

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## Simple plot structure



# Identify Your Theme

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**Goal:** To create a central, underlying idea for why your story exists.

**Rule:** The story's theme should emerge organically from the action, characters, risk, and consequences.

## Tips:

- Figure out what your story is really about.
- Don't state the theme overtly.
- Allow the theme to guide the framework of the story.

## Examples:

- Love conquers all.
- Coming of age.
- Money is the root of all evil.
- Power corrupts.



# Story Opening vs Where The Story Begins

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**Goal:** Make a choice to frame the story in the most compelling way possible.

**Rule:** The story *opening* sets the stage for the upcoming series of events, while the story actually **begins** with the inciting incident, or a disruption in stasis.

## Tips:

- A story can *open* in the middle, at the end, or even in a flashback.
- The story *begins* when something happens to change the normal course of events and forces the protagonist to take action.

**Example:** A story may open with a scene at the end of the narrative, and then move backwards in time to reveal the inciting incident and the events leading up to the resolution.



# Create a Strong Story Opening

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**Goal:** To open your story in a way that draws the reader in and keeps them glued to the page.

**Rule:** Hook your reader by making a promise or creating a question that requires the reader's attention to the end.

## Tips:

- Open with a literary hook: a shocking statement, question, bit of humor, or striking image.
- Give your lead character a strong introduction.
- Introduce a major conflict.
- End the opening chapter by emphasizing something the reader needs to know.



# The Inciting Incident

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**Goal:** To disrupt the protagonist's everyday life, force her to take action, and jump-start the main plot.

**Rule:** The inciting incident must prompt a reaction from the lead character, thus putting the story in motion.

## Tips:

- The inciting incident is a trigger that forces action.
- Without an inciting incident, the story doesn't happen.

**Example:** In *“The King’s Speech”* (movie) George becomes King George VI when his brother abdicates the throne, forcing him to overcome his lifelong stutter to make a speech and inspire the nation during war.



# Conflict Drives Story

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**Goal:** To keep readers reading

**Rule:** The conflict is what gives the story depth and meaning.

**Tips:** Conflict can be:

- Internal (man vs himself)
- External (man vs man, man vs God or the environment)

**Example:** In *The King's Speech*, King George VI stutters terribly and yet must make a radio address to inspire the country during wartime. Overcoming this lifelong disability puts tremendous pressure on him so that he can be seen as a confident ruler. Great internal and external conflict.



# Writing Exposition

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**Goal:** To provide essential background information necessary for the audience to understand the story.

**Rule:** Avoid long paragraphs and/or pages of exposition or "info dumps."

## Tips:

- Reveal backstory only when it directly impacts the present story.
- Weave necessary information naturally into the narrative through action and dialogue.
- Avoid having characters explain things they probably already know just for the reader's benefit.
- Use visuals to provide information, thereby reducing the need for lengthy descriptions.



# Character Goals

## Create Momentum

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**Goal:** Create such an important goal for your lead character that the risks are high if he fails.

**Rule:** Goal + Obstacle = Momentum

### Tips:

- What does the lead character want most right now?
- What is he willing to do to get it?
- What are the risks if he fails?
- What stands in his way?
- What will success look like in the end?
- How will success or failure change your lead character?



# Every Scene Needs a Purpose

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**Goal:** To make sure each scene somehow moves the story forward so readers stay engaged.

**Rule:** Each scene should advance the plot, reveal character, or build tension.

## Tips:

- Each scene should have a clear goal.
- Each scene should create an emotional experience for the reader.
- Every scene should also include some form of action, dialogue, and visual storytelling
- If a scene doesn't have these elements—cut or combine it with a different scene.
- Each chapter can have more than one scene.



# Raise the Stakes

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**Goal:** To create an immersive story that readers can't put down.

**Rule:** Make the story outcome really matter.

## Tips:

- Find individual 'strands' of conflict to complicate the journey.
- Increase consequences as the story progresses.
- Let the protagonist makes mistakes or lack confidence.

**Example:** In "The Lord of the Rings" Frodo must fight his own psychological battle to carry the ring while he's pitted against trolls, Orcs, Ringwraiths, Gollum, a giant spider, and more along the way.



# Control Your Pacing



**Goal:** To manage the reader's experience and engagement level.

**Rule:** The pacing should follow the content; fast content (action) = fast pacing, lengthy content=slow pacing.

## Tips:

- Short sentences create urgency.
- Longer passages are used for emotional scenes, character introspection, and description.
- While too much action can be exhausting, too much reflection or description can be boring.
- Good pacing alternates between fast scenes and slower reaction scenes.
- Vary the story's rhythm intentionally.



# Important Story Beats



**Goal:** Beats are designed to mark intentional shifts in tone, emotional arcs, or plot direction.

**Rule:** If nothing changes in a beat, the scene likely lacks purpose.

## Tips:

- Create a 'beat sheet' to map your story beats.
- Start by identifying key signposts, such as the Opening Image, Set-up, Inciting Incident (Catalyst), Debate, Midpoint, All is Lost (Pinch Point), Climax, Final scene.
- Beats change the course of the story and create new conflicts in your characters' lives.



# Consistent Point of View



**Goal:** To create a clear lens through which the reader experiences the story.

**Rule:** Consistency ensures clarity, eliminates confusion, and builds trust in the story.

## Tips:

- Avoid head-hopping, especially within the same chapter or scene.
- Create a unique voice.
- Only the omniscient POV allows readers to know what all characters are thinking.
- Minimize filter words like “She saw,” or “He heard.”
- Use deep POV: write as the character and not about them.



# Write Meaningful Dialogue

**Goal:** Create authentic and distinct dialogue for each character.

**Rule:** Dialogue should reveal character traits and personality and move the story forward.

## Tips:

- All dialogue should serve a purpose.
- Characters shouldn't always speak in complete sentences.
- Write dialogue that captures the characters' thought processes, which may not be what you'd expect.
- What characters don't say is often more powerful than what they do say.
- Use interruptions and overlaps.



# Revealing Character Arcs



**Goal:** Allow readers to connect deeply with the character's journey and the outcome.

**Rule:** Main characters should grow/change in some way by the end of the story.

## Tips:

- A change can be as simple as a shift in their belief system or behavior.
- The change may be a shift in their understanding of the world around them.

**Example:** Although Frodo discovers his courage during the journey, he is also profoundly impacted emotionally and psychologically. In the end, this forces him to leave the Shire to live among the Elves.



# Author's Voice



**Goal:** To write with a unique style and technique.

**Rule:** “Voice” is the expression of the writer on the page, which may be different from that of the narrator or character.

## Tips:

- Read a variety of authors in your genre to get a feel for their voice.
- Be clear on the story itself and what type of voice would best offset it, i.e. a clipped, slang style might not work for a WWII novel.
- Write a few scenes in different styles, using humor, or blunt or flowery language.
- Read aloud to catch unnatural dialogue, awkward phrasing, and to identify the natural cadence.



# KEY WRITING TECHNIQUES



# Crafting a Hook



**Goal:** To grab the reader's attention at the beginning of the story, motivating them to keep reading.

**Rule:** The hook should make a promise about what the reader will find most interesting about the story.

## Tips:

- The hook can be an opening sentence, paragraph, or chapter.
- It can surprise or shock the reader, create a question in their mind, be a bit of humor, or provide a major plot point.

**Examples:** In murder mysteries, the hook is often the murder itself. Second ex: The first line in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, is a shocking statement... "It was a pleasure to burn."

# Show, Don't Tell



**Goal:** To avoid always ‘telling’ your reader what the character sees and feels and instead drawing them into the story by ‘showing’ them in a visual way.

**Rule:** Use action and detail instead of explanation or description.

## Tips:

- Replace emotions with behavior.
- Use the five senses.
- Use verbs instead of adjectives.

## Examples:

Telling: She was angry.

Showing: Her face burned with anger.

Telling: I smelled the vomit on the floor.

Showing: The foul odor of vomit clogged my nostrils.

# Use Sensory Detail



**Goal:** To ground the reader and immerse them mentally and emotionally in the scene. by creating mental imagery.

**Rule:** Use sensory details whenever possible.

## Examples:

- Sound: The crunch of gravel beneath the worn tires.
- Touch: The warm, sticky air of summer in New Orleans.
- Smell: The sickly sweet scent of decay.
- Taste: The stinging taste of chili peppers.
- Sight: The pregnant clouds ready to drop their load.

# Create Tension on (Nearly) Every Page



**Goal:** To engage readers emotionally and keep them turning pages.

**Rule:** Keep readers asking “What happens next?”

## **Tips:**

- Create internal conflict by having characters deal with conflicting emotions.
- Don't let characters get what they want too easily.
- Force them to navigate roadblocks in every scene.
- Weave in secrets and lies.
- Give your lead character flaws that interfere with success.
- Avoid resolving every conflict in a scene.

# Foreshadowing



**Goal:** To build suspense or create anticipation by hinting at something that will happen later in the story.

**Rule:** Foreshadowing is a promise that you must fulfill. It should be relevant to the story.

**Tips/examples:** Foreshadowing can be-

- a direct warning or prophecy, such as a character predicting their own death.
- indirect, as in offering up subtle clues or symbolic items.
- a book title, i.e. *Murder on the Orient Express*.
- written as dialogue, such as, “The number 7 is my unlucky number.”

# Writing a Great Plot Twist



**Goal:** To surprise and re-engage the reader or to engage them more fully.

**Rule:** Must be surprising but logical in hindsight, better yet inevitable.

## Tips:

- Must feel relevant to the plot and add layers to the story.
- Must be grounded in logic based on subtle clues beforehand.
- Force your reader to focus on something else, while you leave a trail of breadcrumbs toward the twist.

## Examples:

- The ally who turns out to be the traitor.
- Someone thought to be dead is alive.

# Building Tension



**Goal:** To transform a passive reading experience into an active one for readers, and to keep the reader engaged.

**Rule:** To continuously escalate the stakes in the story while withholding a resolution.

## Tips:

- Create a ticking clock - a countdown to something important.
- Force the lead character to make a series of difficult choices.
- Give the lead character an internal conflict that keeps getting in the way.
- End chapters with unresolved questions.

# Writing Parallel Storylines



**Goal:** To deepen the theme, create additional tension, and enrich reader experience.

**Rule:** Each storyline must have its own arc and be connected to the main theme.

## Tips:

- Each storyline will have distinct threads that come together at or near the climax.
- Both storylines should have a unified conclusion.
- Use anchors like family photos, letters, or shared experiences to physically connect the storylines.
- To prevent monotony, be sure to create two distinct but emotionally charged storylines.

# Writing Emotion



**Goal:** To have readers care enough about the characters and the storyline to keep reading.

**Rule:** Emotion arises from conflict.

## Tips:

- Be sure to show, don't tell.
- Describe inner sensations, actions, and physical reactions rather than naming the feeling directly.
- Use emotion to drive a character's behavior. If they're sad they might sniffle or reach for a tissue.
- Use similes and metaphors.
- Write authentic emotions.
- Use powerful word choices.

# Keep Readers Reading



**Goal:** To purposely deploy techniques to grab a reader's attention and keep them turning pages.

**Rule:** Variety is the key to engagement.

## **Tips:**

- Vary sentence and paragraph length.
- Create visual images with powerful, descriptive words and phrases.
- Readers react to change, so surprise your reader with action, humor, or drama.
- Use something inherent to the setting (photos, childhood home, image) to affect your character emotionally.
- Narrow your reader's attention from the broader view to something specific.
- Use a character's internal thoughts to draw the reader's attention to an important piece of information.

# Be Ruthless When You Rewrite



**Goal:** To make your story as strong and compelling as possible.

**Rule:** Great writing happens in revision because early drafts are mostly raw material.

## **Tips:**

- Take a break to gain objectivity.
- Focus on your structure first to reveal the big picture.
- Read aloud to help identify awkward phrasing and find mistakes.
- Don't be afraid to cut characters who don't serve a purpose, sentences that don't strengthen the narrative, or chapters that don't move the story forward.
- Be careful to not revise endlessly.

# In Closing



I hope you found these flash cards helpful. Keep them close by as you write. If you'd like to study some of these topics in more depth, I invite you to visit my website at [www.lynnbohmart-author.com](http://www.lynnbohmart-author.com) to view my ***Tiny Guides Library***. There you will find a series of free and low-cost micro eBooks that give you more context on singular subjects, along with examples. You will also find my mystery novels and short story books.

I wish you luck as you move forward. I know it can be difficult, tedious at times, and even lonely. But you're not alone. Don't hesitate to reach out to me at: [Lildog67@icloud.com](mailto:Lildog67@icloud.com).

Happy writing!

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