



HOW TO WRITE A NOVEL

Module I: Story Fundamentals & Structure



GARY C. HORTON

© Copyright 2015

Legal Stuff

If you know someone who would like a copy of ***How to Write a Novel***, please refer them to the website below so they can get their own copy, plus the full novel writing course, writing lessons, tips, encouragement and inspiration at no cost.

<http://WritingisaSuperpower.com/novel>

While ***How to Write a Novel*** is free, it and the entire email course that comes with it are still fully copyrighted and registered with the Library of Congress. All rights are reserved.

You are NOT authorized to copy, sell or modify ***How to Write a Novel*** or any part of the free course that comes with it and you are NOT authorized to give it away.

Any violation of this copyright will be aggressively prosecuted to the full extent of the law which may result in a fine of up to \$250,000 per violation.

Please refer people to the website above if they would like a copy of ***How to Write a Novel*** and the free email course that comes with it.

Contents

Legal Stuff	1
Introduction.....	3
Critics, Cheerleaders and Life Support.	5
How to Begin	7
The Writer's Mind.....	9
Story Fundamentals	11
Basic Story Structure	16
The Next Step.	18
How to Earn a Darn Good Living as a Writer.	19

Introduction

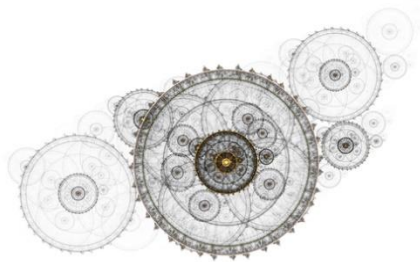
"There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

-W. Somerset Maugham

I spent a large part of my life writing novels nobody wanted to read simply because I didn't know any better. Finally, after years of study and many failed attempts, I published ***Some Glad Morning*** and reader's loved it.

With the success of ***Some Glad Morning***, I was approached by independent writers who wanted me to write a review of their novel. Most of these novels were unreadable for the same reasons my earlier novels had been unreadable.

Apparently, many aspiring novelists believe, like I once did, that typing hundreds of pages of made up stuff is writing a novel. It's not.



On the contrary, a novel is a precisely structured mechanism of emotion. I want to emphasize that point. A novel is **structured** and a novel is **emotionally engaging**.

A novel isn't written, it's *built*, one scene at a time, on a three act skeletal frame.

Many aspiring novelists fail to write a successful novel simply because, like my younger self, they don't know how. This is why I wrote the ***How to Write a Novel*** email course.

You'll soon realize I borrow heavily from the world of screenwriting. There are several good reasons for this. First, story structure is the same whether you're telling a story verbally, through film or in writing. Second, we experience more stories through movies than

through books. And third, it's easier, faster and more fun to learn story structure by watching movies.

At the end of this module I recommend two screenwriting books which you'll need to read before you begin Module II. These books are fun and easy to read, and lay the foundation on which we will build your understanding of the novel writing process. Everything we do is founded on the fundamentals taught in these two books so be sure to read them as soon as you can.

Thanks for inviting me on your journey of becoming a successful novelist. I'll do my level best to deliver on my end of the bargain. I'll show you all I know about writing novels so your journey to success is short and swift.

Your job is to read the training modules I email to you, plus the books I recommend, and to ask me questions when you're stuck or confused.

Expect to get a new training module every 2 to 4 weeks in your email. Also, between modules I'll send you a couple of emails each week to enhance the training. Here's what you can expect:

- Module I: Story Fundamentals & Structure.
- Module II: Learning from the Movies - More Structure.
- Module III: The Essential Moral Premise.
- Module IV: Scenes & Transitions.
- Module V: Analyzing Novels - Stealing the Genre Formula.
- Module VI: Planning Your Novel - The Storyboard.
- Module VII: Story Mechanics & the Writing Process.
- Module VIII: Grammar, Style & Editing.
- Module IX: Copyright, Publishing, Agents & Marketing

Finally, using words to describe the creative process is kind of like using words to describe Zen. There's a lot of room for confusion. That's why I'm always happy to answer your questions. My contact details are in the first email I sent you.

Critics, Cheerleaders and Life Support.

Writing a novel is hard work. It takes a lot of concentration and mental energy. I'll show you my tricks for writing a solid novel efficiently, so you're strong all the way through the process.

However, it takes more than tricks to write a novel. It takes support from friends, family and those we love most dearly.



When you're completely immersed in writing your novel, you're in your own world. It can feel as if you're an old fashioned deep sea diver on the bottom of the ocean, wearing a large round brass helmet and leaded boots.

A hose trails from your helmet and feeds you air from the surface. You're isolated. You're vulnerable. You need to know with total confidence that someone you trust is on the surface watching your air supply and keeping you safe. This is your life support.

You'll also need someone who'll give you honest feedback on what you've written, so you'll know when it needs work and when it's good. We'll call this person the critic.

And you'll need cheerleaders. Friends who'll cheer you on to the finish line, give you a hug or a pat on the back when you need it and celebrate with you when you're published.

We all lose perspective occasionally and make stupid decisions. If you're writing a novel and trying to keep a career, family, business or a life going at the same time, it's easy to become mentally exhausted. This is when you will truly need someone to help you find a balance and remind you that, yes, you really can write a novel.

One person can be a critic, cheerleader and life support all rolled up in one, but it's important the life support people and cheerleader people know that that is their primary job.



The last thing you want is to come limping up to your life support person with your psyche in tatters and be confronted with a critic.

That's painful if not disastrous.

Your cheerleaders and life support people must know that when in doubt, they should cheer and support.

It's best if someone you're emotionally bonded with is your cheerleader and life support, like a wife, husband, boyfriend or girlfriend.

Find someone who you do not have a close emotional bond with to be your critic.

If you don't have a circle of friends to draw on, it is certainly possible to go it alone. However, I strongly recommend you find someone to be a cheerleader and support so you can do your best work.

For many, the creative personality has a dark side that manifests as depression. At such times, your cheerleaders and support people may truly be lifesavers.

How to Begin

Begin where you are, with what you have. Just start writing your thoughts about your novel in a notebook. That's how you begin.

Writing a novel is like putting a puzzle together, but first you must dream into existence all the pieces. Then, you must find where each piece belongs.



When you commit to writing a novel, ideas will come to you...ideas for dialogue, scenes, characters, titles...all sorts of stuff. These are the puzzle pieces. At first, it might be only a trickle of ideas, but the more you keep the channel open, the more ideas will come.

Not all the ideas will be usable. Some ideas might belong to another novel, one you haven't even dreamed of yet. You won't know which ideas go where until you're deep into the writing process.

The important thing is to capture all of the ideas as they come to you and ***keep the channel open***.

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium, and be lost. The world will not have it.

It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours, clearly and directly, to keep the channel open.

You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware directly to the urge that motivates you.

Keep the channel open.

— Martha Graham to Agnes DeMille

Here's how I record my ideas...

I carry a small pocket notebook and pen with me at all times. My best ideas come to me when I'm walking, washing dishes, napping and doing other things unrelated to writing.

I jot these ideas in my pocket notebook as they come to me. I don't edit or ponder over the ideas at this stage. I just get the ideas down.

I also have a larger spiral notebook on my desk. The pages in this notebook are the size of regular notebook paper and perforated so they can be easily torn out.

The pages also have three holes in the left margin so I can put them in a three ring binder when I begin to organize my ideas later.

At the end of the day, if I have ideas in the small pocket notebook, I transfer these to the spiral bound notebook. If the spiral notebook gets filled up with ideas, I start another one. This idea gathering stage can go on for months or years.

The spiral notebook encourages me to simply record my ideas and not worry about organizing them. Organization comes later. When I'm ready to organize my ideas and notes into scenes I move them into the three ring binder. More on that in a later module.

For now, keep the channel open, dream into existence all the pieces of your novel and make note of them as they come to you. Take your time and stay relaxed.

A Notebook for Names:

I also keep a separate three ring binder for character names. These are names I stumble across during my day. The names are organized according to gender, ethnicity, region, country, first name, and last name. I've been collecting names for over 30 years and now, when I need a name for a character, I can usually find one within minutes.

The Writer's Mind

"I dream of painting and then I paint my dream."-Vincent Van Gogh

Writing a novel can sometimes feel like trying to make chicken salad out of chicken poo. The problem is your mind is infinite and multidimensional while a novel is finite and linear.



Writing a novel is essentially the process of extracting ideas, visions, images and dialogue from your mind and arranging them in a linear form, one word after another.

In the early stages of planning a novel, your mind usually serves up these visions in a jumbled, random fashion like puzzle pieces dropped on the floor. If you don't know where the pieces fit, you might reject them.

Maybe, while you're struggling with the first line of the first scene, your mind is trying to force on you a snippet of dialog that belongs in chapter 12 of the seventh rewrite. But, you don't know it belongs in chapter 12 of the seventh rewrite and reject it.

That's a terrible mistake, because when you reject what your mind is creating it will soon shut down and not give you any ideas at all. Remember to write your ideas down, even if you don't understand them. Many of your ideas will lead to better ideas, but you won't know that unless you write them down.

Long before you sit down to write your novel, you must dream into existence all of the pieces. Like Van Gogh who first dreamed his painting and then painted his dream, relax into the world of your novel, dream your story and then write your dream.

Spend days, weeks, even months or years if you need to, dreaming your story and writing it all down. Keep a notebook with you at all times, because once your creative mind realizes that you're in the receiving mode it will serve up many, many ideas.

As you go through this training, you'll see how to shape your ideas so they are suitable for your novel and where they fit in your story.

The more clearly you can envision your story and the more real it feels to you, the more real it will be to your reader. Invest the time you need to fully dream your story.

It's like practicing a big fat lie until it rings true.

As you dream your story, it will evolve. You may realize that the novel you thought you were writing really wasn't the novel inside you at all. That initial story was only the beginning of the discovery process.

That's because the true story that's coming through you is too big for your conscious mind. You can only see bits of it at any given moment.

It's like the pieces of a puzzle that are jumbled and out of sequence. That's okay. That's perfect. Keep the creative channel open.

The more you write and the more you keep the creative channel open, the deeper you can reach inside yourself. Go as deep as you can. That's where the magic lives.

It's important to stay mentally relaxed.

When you're stressed, even a little bit, the mind shuts down and goes into fight or flight mode. Creativity is a luxury and gets shut down first when you're tense, so stay relaxed to keep the creative channel open.

Learn to meditate or listen to relaxing music or audios. Self-hypnosis audios have helped me a lot.

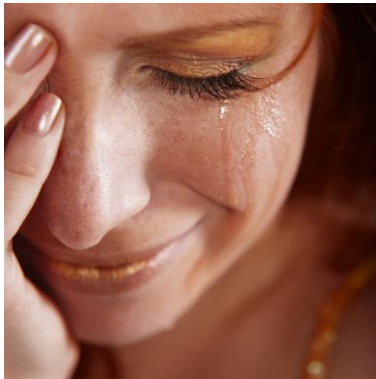
Story Fundamentals

"The most powerful story is a simple story well told."

Story fundamentals are discussed in detail throughout the course, however, below is an overview of the essential elements of a successful novel.

First and Foremost:

The first rule of a successful story is to **entertain**.



A successful story also proves an **enduring psychological truth** and is **emotionally engaging**.

If a story is not entertaining, few people will read past the first few pages. If it isn't emotionally engaging, or if it lacks a psychological truth, few people will find it satisfying and stick with it to the end.

That's why a successful story is first and foremost:

1. Entertaining
2. Emotionally engaging
3. Proves an enduring psychological truth (aka Moral Premise)

The Minimum Elements of a Story:

As a minimum, an entertaining story will contain a **main character** who is driven to achieve an **objective** but faces **conflict** as someone, or something, attempts to stop him.

If the main character reaches his goal, the story will have a happy ending. If he fails to reach his goal, the story will have a sad ending.

An entertaining story is also **logically structured** and concludes with an **emotionally satisfying ending** where the **main character has changed**.

Thinking about your novel:

As you think about your novel, it will help to know what questions to ask of your imagination. You probably won't get an answer right away and the answer may change over time, but keep asking.

Use the following as a starting point:

1. Who is your main character?
2. What is her objective?
3. What is the conflict? Who or what is trying to stop her?
4. What ending would be the most emotionally satisfying for the reader?

The Main Character:

The main character, aka lead, protagonist or hero, is the vehicle that carries the reader through the story. The main character is driven by an internal conflict of values and, in turn, **drives** the story. When developing your main character, ask yourself the following:



1. Who is the main character?
2. What is her internal conflict of values?
3. What does she want?
4. Why can't she get it? Where's the conflict?
5. Who's trying to stop her?
6. What happens if she fails?

The Objective:

The objective is the engine of the story. It fuels the forward motion and keeps the main character moving.

An objective can be either the drive towards something or the drive away from something. Seeking a treasure, love or a better life or avoiding death, prison or poverty are a few examples.

A successful story will have only 1 primary objective for the main character. This becomes the story question...Will the main character reach her objective?

To truly drive the story, the objective must be vital to the main character. It must be big. Is it life or death? Wealth or poverty? Love or loneliness?

Conflict:

It's not enough that your main character has an objective, there has to be a reason why he can't reach it...that's conflict.



Conflict is two or more opposing forces.

Imagine that there is a line on the ground. You're at one end of the line and if you walk to the other end, without stepping off, you win a million dollars.

Easy, peasy...right?

Now, add a little conflict. You're at one end of the line and on the other end of the line is someone else. The first person to walk from one end to the other, without stepping off, gets a million dollars, but somewhere near the middle of the line, you meet face to face with the other person.

Only one person can win. That's conflict. That's interesting.



Conflict is what keeps us engaged in a story. It's why we watch sports. In sports, the objective is clearly defined, but only one athlete or team can win.

A novel will have an overarching conflict that drives the story, but each scene will also have conflict which drives that particular scene.

The degree of interest in a story is directly related to the degree of conflict, otherwise known as tension.

An Enduring Psychological Truth/The Moral Premise:

You don't have a story until you know why your main character does what he does.

It's your main character's inner motivation that reveals who he really is and governs his outward action as he strives to reach the story's objective.

The challenges the main character must overcome are all rooted in a single psychological, spiritual or emotional issue within the main character.

In the course of a story, the main character will meet all sorts of physical obstacles as he tries to reach some physical goal. These physical obstacles actually represent a single spiritual, emotional or psychological obstacle inside the main character's psyche.

Before the main character can get past the physical obstacles, he must first come to terms with the internal psychological obstacle that is defeating him.

In other words, a story is the outward physical manifestation of the main character's internal struggle of conflicting values. This is the seed of your story.

Your novel grows out of the psychological moral dilemma within the main character. Resolving or failing to resolve the moral dilemma proves the enduring truth of the moral premise.

The moral premise is covered in detail in Modules II & III.

An Emotionally Satisfying Ending:



As a novelist, your primary purpose is to create an emotional experience for the reader. A reader picks up a novel in hopes of becoming emotionally engaged with the characters; to struggle with them, love with them, cry, laugh and suffer with them.

Through these emotional experiences, a story builds to a concentrated emotional peak. At that moment, the novelist delivers to the reader the answer to the story question... Did the main character reach her objective?...and with it, a final emotional release.

This emotional release is like a drug. This is why people read novels.

Structure and Scenes:

In addition to a Main character, an Objective, Conflict, a Moral Premise and an Emotionally Satisfying Ending, a novel must be properly structured and built scene upon scene. So now, let's explore basic story structure.

Basic Story Structure

Story *is* structure, a precisely made mechanism of emotion. Remember, a satisfying story creates an emotional response in the reader. It all begins with structure.

Just as a sentence must be structured to be understood, a story must also be structured.

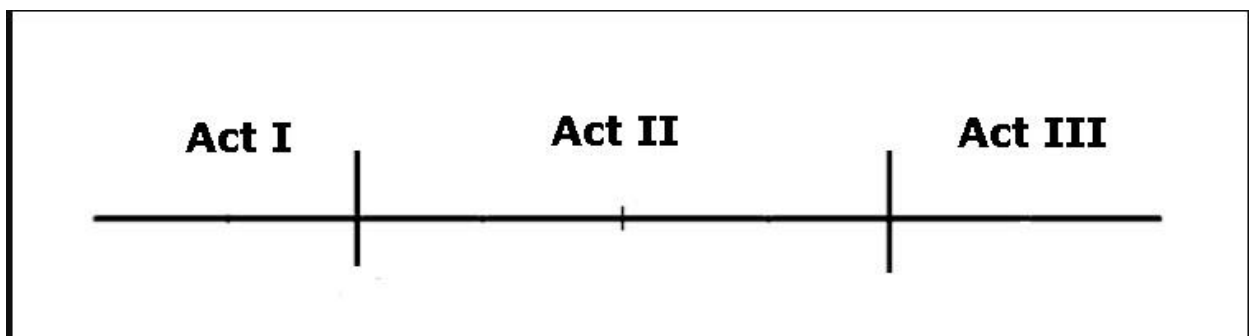
Once you've written your novel and you're in the editing phase, it will be relatively easy to change scenes or characters if the structure is solid. However, if you've written a novel with a rotten structure, the only way to improve it is to rewrite the whole thing.

So, get the structure right in the beginning and you'll save yourself a lot of heartache and frustration.

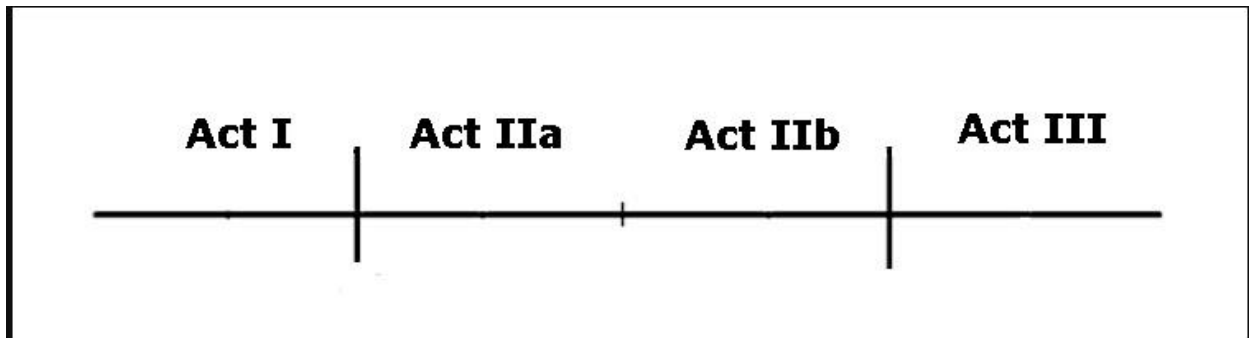
An unstructured story is as engaging as cold oatmeal. Amazon is awash in unstructured novels that nobody reads. You don't want yours to be one of them.

Life is structured in three acts. It's how we humans are wired to understand our existence. We are born. We live. We die.

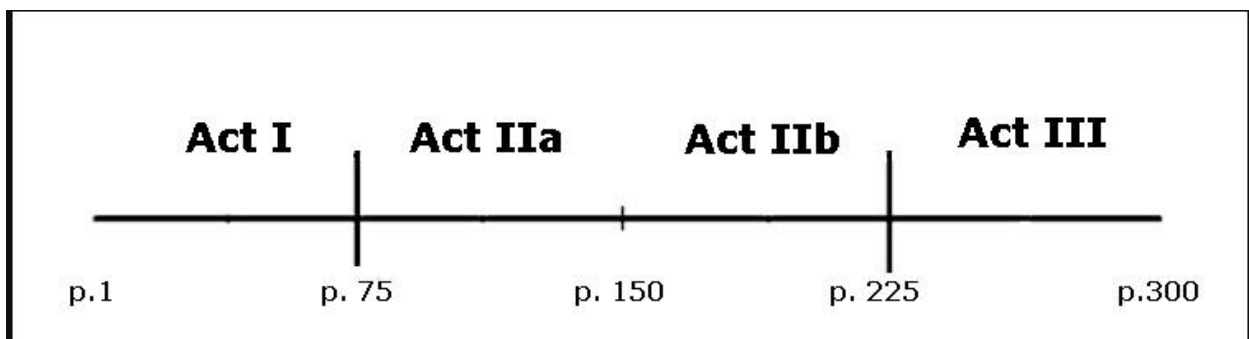
Likewise, a story, in any form, has three acts: Act I, Act II and Act III.



You'll notice that Act II is twice as long as Act I and Act III. If we divide Act II in half, we'll have four equal parts.



So, if we plan to write a 300 page novel, each part will be 75 pages long.



Now we have the most basic skeleton for writing a novel. The beauty of this simple structure is that instead of trying to write 300 pages, you can focus on just writing 75 pages at a time.

I suggest that you keep your first novel to 300 manuscript pages or less. That length is manageable. Plus, editors will charge you by the word or page and it can get expensive.

A novel typically has more than one storyline. For example, the primary goal of the main character might be to save the world from nuclear holocaust, but he also wants to win the heart of the beautiful Swedish diplomat.

In this example, saving the world is the **A story** and getting the girl is the **B story**. The B story doesn't start until Act II. More about that later.

The Next Step.

Before you begin **Module II**, you'll need to first read the following two books, in this order:

1. **Save the Cat** by Blake Snyder
2. **Save the Cat Goes to the Movies** by Blake Snyder.

These are fun and easy to read, and build on the basic three act story structure you learned in this module. In these two books, Blake Snyder teaches how successful screenplays are structured and has a unique way of looking at movies I'm sure you'll enjoy.

Everything Mr. Snyder teaches in his books is directly translatable to writing a novel. In fact, **Save the Cat** and **Save the Cat Goes to the Movies** will make the entire concept of story much easier to grasp.

In **Save the Cat**, you'll learn universal plot structure and essential story beats, plus see how they work in a few popular movies.

In **Save the Cat Goes to the Movies**, you'll see how this same universal plot structure and 15 story beats fit all movie genres. Plus, you'll be given 50 examples of movies where Mr. Snyder takes you by the hand and shows you beat by beat how they work to create an entertaining story.

In Module II, I'll translate Mr. Snyder's basic screenplay structure and 15 beats into a plan for a 300 page novel.

So, to prepare for Module II, which you'll receive four weeks from the moment you received Module I, please read Mr. Snyder's books and watch the movies he recommends until you thoroughly understand the three act story structure, 10 movie genres and the 15 story beats he describes.

How to Earn a Darn Good Living as a Writer.

As a writer, you have a very valuable skill. It's truly a superpower. After all, writing transcends time and space. It can move people to love or to kill. It entertains, inspires, binds hearts and builds nations. And, when properly employed, it can create wealth out of nothing.

Unfortunately, most writers don't accept how valuable their skill is and rarely earn what they're worth.

I made my first money as a writer in September of 1986. I had just gotten out of the Army and stumbled into a gig writing for an insurance company. This led to writing for a commercial real estate developer which led to other things.

In addition to fiction, over the years I've written a newspaper column, corporate video scripts, intelligence reports, ad copy, technical papers, grant applications, economic development plans and military manuals.



Today, the internet has given writers even greater power, *if* they know how to use it.

On my blog, WritingisaSuperpower.com, I've written a detailed article called ***How to Earn a Darn Good Living as a Writer***. In this article, I reveal what has proven to be the most straight forward, ethical, liberating and lucrative way to make money as a writer.

Read the full article at: <http://WritingisaSuperpower.com>