

Short Story

How to plan a story:

- Part One: Ideas
- Part Two: Sketch the "basics" of your story
- Part Three: Fill in the details: Character and Conflict
- Part Four: Planning the Plot
- Part Five: Plan your scenes
- Part Six: Write
- Part Seven: Revise

Part One: Ideas

People often wonder where writers get their ideas for stories. It takes so many ideas to make a story or a novel! Here's a secret: writers don't think of all those ideas. They steal them! Not really, but they find ideas from many sources and combine them to make an original story.

- Look for ideas in real life, such as funny quotes, interesting people, or occurrences at school.
- Consider your favorite stories. You can use elements of them to make a new story.
- Brainstorm! Combine several ideas to form the basis of a new story. For example, Harry Potter books combine school, sports, destiny, a kid in a "Cinderella" type situation, battles between good and evil, and magic to create compelling stories.

Part Two: Sketch the "basics" of your story

These are the basics of all stories:

1. Sympathetic character
2. Who faces a problem
3. Character solves problem

Don't get into details, but have an idea of your main character and the conflict.

Part Three: Fill in the details: Character and Conflict

Character

First, build your main character. Here are important traits of a main character:

- Has a problem or need.
- Has the ability to solve the problem, whether or not he knows it (there's usually more suspense if he doesn't).
- Often has a flaw to overcome to solve the problem or win the reward.

Then, think about your secondary characters: the main character's friends and enemies. To get you started, here is a list of some types of secondary characters, along with famous examples of each.

- **Villains:** Block the main character from reaching goals. (The Green Goblin in *Spider-Man*)
- **Allies:** Assist the main character in reaching goals. (Robin in *Batman*)
- **Mentors:** Wise characters that help the main character. (Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Star Wars*)
- **Jokers:** Lighten things up! Often the main character's best friend is a joker. (Donkey in *Shrek*)

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Tips on creating characters:

- If you already have a plot in mind, think of who needs this plot -- who has a need the plot's reward would fulfill? Who could grow by overcoming the obstacles? That is your main character.
- Combine different types of characters. Examples: a funny villain (Dr. Evil in *Austin Powers*); a mentor who is also a joker (Hagrid in *Harry Potter*); a villain that becomes an ally and helps the main character solve the real problem (Floop in *Spy Kids*).

Conflict -- a storyteller's best friend

- The stronger the story problem, the stronger the story.
- Don't be nice to your character! Create obstacles to the goal. The story is more exciting that way, the character learns more, and the reward is more valuable since the character worked so hard for it.

These are ideas to get you started:

- **Person versus person:** The most popular, since conflicts between people are the most interesting to readers. (Example: Cinderella and her wicked stepmother)
- **Person versus himself:** Conflict between good and evil or strengths and weaknesses in a character. This is deep stuff and not usually the main conflict. (Example: The Grinch is evil and hates Christmas, but he is not evil at heart -- he is like that because someone hurt him. The Grinch feels inner conflict over the good and evil inside of him.)
- **Person versus nature:** Usually involves natural disasters or survival skills. This conflict is exciting, but often difficult to write about at length. (Example: The character in *Jurassic Park* must survive in and escape from a dangerous land of dinosaurs.)

Tips on creating conflict

- Combine different types of conflict. Maybe your characters struggle to survive and fight among themselves.
- Add more conflicts and obstacles if your story seems slow or not "big" enough.
- Before you write, know how the problem will be solved. Don't write yourself into a hole!
- The main character must solve the problem. Don't have someone (or something) enter at the last minute and save the day.

Part Four: Planning the Plot

Character and conflict are the heart of your story. The plot is just the sequence of events that happen as the character faces problems. Here are a few things to remember about plotting:

- A plot is based on cause and effect.
- The plot follows the effects of the character's actions and decisions.
- Avoid a series of events. You want a chain of events, each affecting the next. Each link in the chain should be necessary to your story!

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Elements of most plots

Plan these scenes and you should be ready to write. I've used examples from the movie *Shrek*.

- **"Get the story going" event:** Show character's problem & event that starts adventure. (Shrek's swamp is ruined when Lord Farquaad puts fairy tale creatures there. Lord Farquaad promises to remove the fairy tale creatures after Shrek rescues Princess Fiona.)
- **Adventure scene(s):** Meet friends & enemies, face obstacles, learn lessons, prepare for...(Shrek meets Donkey, they rescue Princess Fiona and set off for Duloc. Along the way, they become friends and have adventures, like fighting Robin Hood and his Merry Men.)
- **THE BIG EVENT:** Everything is on the line. Most exciting part of story. (The wedding scene.)
- **Wrap-up:** Tie up the loose ends and hand out rewards & punishments. (Shrek marries Fiona, Donkey falls in love with the dragon, and Farquaad is eaten by the dragon.)

Part Five: Plan your scenes

Scenes: how you show your plot

- Decide how to show action, plot, character interactions, lessons characters learn, etc. Example: Don't just say, "Alex was shy." Have Alex demonstrate shyness by the way he interacts with others. Later, show Alex has gotten over his shyness by having him face someone he was previously afraid of.
- Each scene needs a beginning, middle, and end. See if you can use the end of one scene to transition to the beginning of another, and so on.
- Don't write a short scene for a major event, and don't make a scene out of something that doesn't need to be. Example: If several uneventful days go by as a character waits for important test results, don't write several day's worth of boring events. Skip to the test results and show the character has waited for days.

Dialogue

Dialogue does many things for your story.

- Reveals character (especially through reactions)
- Advances plot
- Brings scenes to life
- Adjusts the story's pace
- TAKES UP SPACE!!! (Start a new paragraph every time a new character speaks. This takes up space, which is useful if you need a story of a certain length.)

Tips on writing dialogue

- Avoid long greetings and goodbyes. These slow the story and add little.
- Convey character by showing a character's reaction or way of speaking.
- Don't use dialogue as a substitute for action. Example: If you have an earthquake in your story, write a great earthquake scene with lots of action. Don't have a character say "Oh! An earthquake!" and leave it at that.

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Setting

- Plan your setting -- know details about it. This makes your story more vivid.
- Setting helps you avoid "floating" scenes -- conversation or action that could be happening anywhere.
- Setting adds atmosphere to scenes. Example: In a beach story, a character might compare Aunt Mary's screeching to a seagull. In a city story, Aunt Mary might remind the character of a burglar alarm.
- In some books, the setting is like a character. Example: Survival stories like Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*.

Start with a bang! Your story's opening scene

- Start with the day that is different -- the day the hero is called to adventure
- Start your story as close to the "big event" as you can
- Show the main character and the problem, or hint at the problem.
- Use action to get your story rolling and make your reader want to see what happens next.

Part Six: Write

In your rough draft, just concentrate on getting it all on paper. You can go back and fix things later.

Part Seven: Revise

It's important to correct spelling and grammar mistakes, but first, make sure your story is in good shape. Look at your plan again and make sure that you showed those things in your story. Here are two examples:

Sometimes writers plan a great character, but reread their rough draft and discover they left out important information about the character. Check that you showed the character's problem, strengths, and weaknesses.

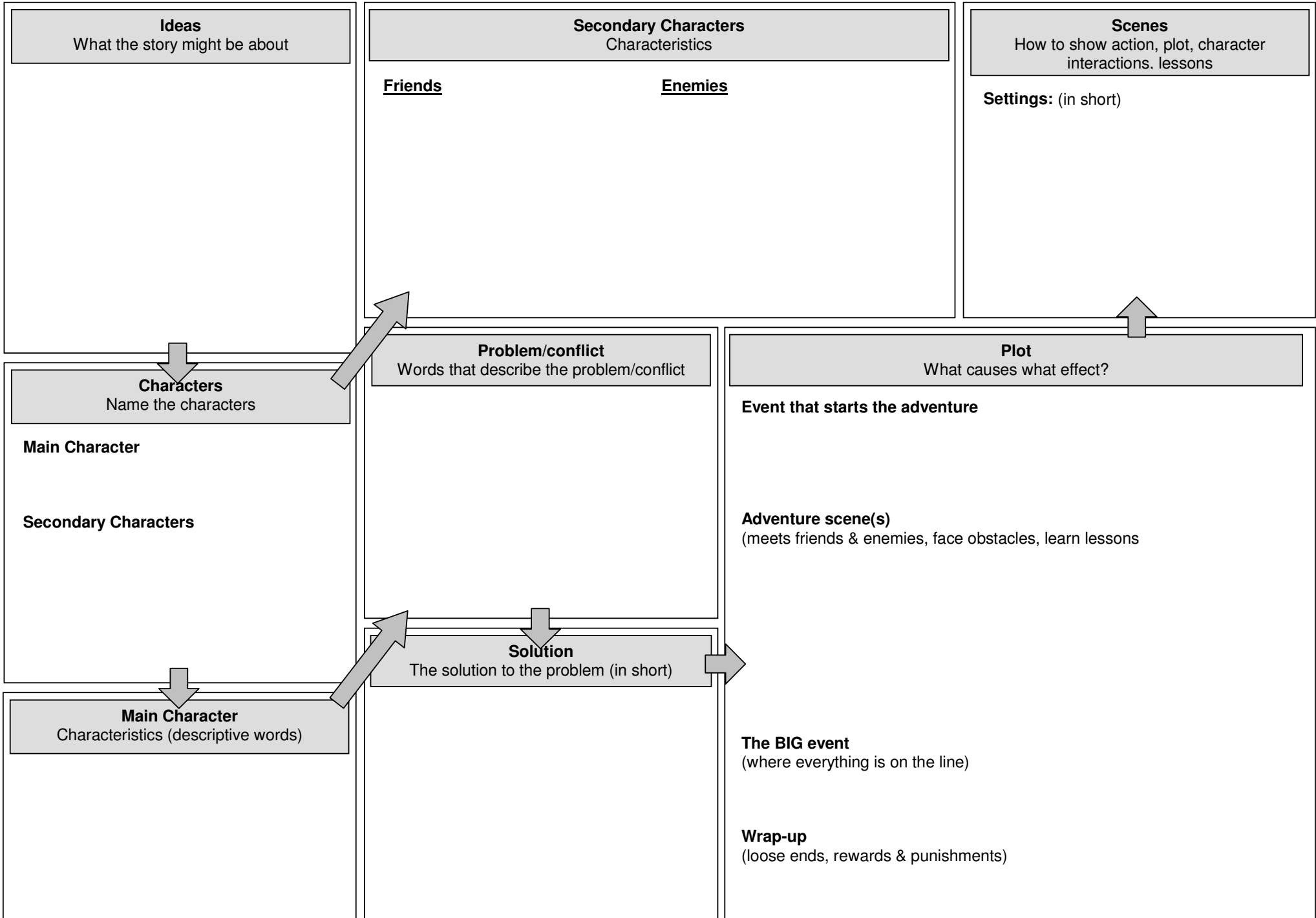
Sometimes writers find that important parts of their BIG SCENE were not properly set up earlier in the story. For example, if your character solves a riddle in the big scene, you need to show earlier in the story that your character is good at riddles.

Marks are awarded as follows: (see below)

1. Setting and Characters, skillful description – **5 marks**
2. Plot – Interesting, creative, original ideas – **5 marks**
3. Writing process – planning, draft, refining, proofreads final draft – **5 marks**
4. Language – punctuation, spelling and grammar – **5 marks**

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	5	4	3	2	1
Setting and characters	Skillful, creative description of setting, characters	Good description of settings, characters	Adequate description of setting, characters	Setting and characters stereotypical, lacks originality	Vague description of setting, characters lack personality
Plot	Interesting, creative plot; original ideas, makes for sustained interest	Plot is developed adequately; some originality	Correct sequencing of action but unoriginal, predictable	Plot is weak and unclear, some gaps in sequencing of action	Plot poorly developed; significant gaps in sequencing of action
Use of the writing process: Plans, drafts and refines the text, edits first draft and proofreads final draft	Excellent use of the writing process has produced a refined final draft. Proof reading has eliminated mistakes	Good use of writing process; evidence of progressive improvement in writing piece, mistakes still evident	Has used the writing process but has not translated it into a well-developed piece of writing	Some use of parts of writing process (very basic planning or evidence or editing of first draft) but many errors still remain	Little or no proof reading or editing done: writing still has many uncorrected errors
Language use: punctuation, grammar and spelling	Excellent use of language; correct sentences, punctuation and spelling. No errors in subject-verb concord	Creative use of language; mostly correct sentences, punctuation and few spelling errors. One or two errors in subject verb concord	Most sentences are correct; some errors in language use, punctuation and spelling. Several errors in subject-verb concord	Sentence structure fair but very basic; several errors in language use, punctuation and spelling. Has not grasped subject-verb concord	Poor sentence structure; many errors in punctuation and spelling. Many errors in subject-verb concord; understanding compromised



Scenes

How to show action, plot, character interactions, lessons

Scene 1: (What calls the main character to action?)
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 4:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 7:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 2:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 5:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 8:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 3:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 6:
Beginning

Middle

End

Scene 9: (Wrap-up)
Beginning

Middle

End