



**A Step-by-Step  
Writing Guide**



# **The Trellis Method**



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# **The Trellis Method**

## **Story Structure**

**Grant P. Ferguson**



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## DEDICATION

*For Dana...*

Your love turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, creating the daily magic that makes my dreams come true.

# INTRODUCTION:

## How to Use This Book

### *Your Writing Passions and Dreams*

You feel a calling on your life to write fiction, but not just any old novel. You want to *write a book readers will love*. However, you soon discover that writing and editing a book-length manuscript takes on a life of its own. Continuous learning seems to dilute your passion and dreams. Unfortunately, the busyness of life often interferes with adopting, adapting, and practicing your writing craft.

### *The Writer's Challenge...*

Not finishing your novel doesn't happen because you're a poor writer, lack passion, or don't have dreams. An unfinished manuscript happens when you lack a framework. I'm talking about using prompt-based worksheets that walk you through the entire process from start to finish. The Trellis Method's easy-to-use worksheets will guide you through the completion of your first draft in record time. You can use the Trellis Method again and again. When you use these prompt-based worksheets, not

only will you incorporate your passions and dreams, but you'll learn the techniques of top writers as you actually write.

## *What Causes Writing Problems?*

Aspiring writers often study randomly, reading books, articles, and courses about how to write. Over time, they become saturated with too much information without a step-by-step method to write a book. They feel overwhelmed with too much information. At this stage, many abandon their writing goals. For example:

- Most writing books, articles, and courses focus on endless techniques, and many emphasize rules.
- The how-to guides frequently lack practical application.
- Too often, these guides don't give aspiring writers a finite list of proven steps to start and finish writing a novel.
- Without a writing system, they're not sure how to first meet and then exceed readers' expectations.

Writers need a method that shortens the learning cycle, offers a start to finish approach, shows how to satisfy readers, and uses their passions and dreams to make their work stand out.

## *The Solution*

The Trellis Method transforms your writing routine, unlocking your ability to fulfill your goal to write a book readers will love.

- This step-by-step approach speeds up learning.
- The Trellis Method gives you the confidence to plan, outline, and write a book that pleases your target audience.
- The writing system helps you visualize the concepts, apply the principles.

The Trellis Method gives writers a plot structure, provides a scene-flow framework, and prompts for reader-expected content.

## *How the Trellis Method Works*

The step-by-step design shows you how to:

- Adopt and adapt time-tested writing principles used by bestselling authors and timeless storytellers.
- Use three writing lenses to navigate the tricky intersection of *story plot*, *scene flow*, and *actual content*.
- *Plan, outline, and write* novels using the essential workbooks and prompt-based worksheets. For example:
  1. **Story Genres Workbook:** Creates the genre's *key scenes*, *conventions*, and *dramatic question*.



2. **Story Premise Workbook:** Generates a strategic guide for producing the story.
3. **Dynamic Character Workbook:** Guides the creation of characters who react with realistic emotions.
4. **Story Plots Workbook:** Creates the main and subsidiary events taking place within the story.
5. **Story Themes Workbook:** Defines why this story matters to readers.
6. **Story Spine, Body, and Beats Workbook:** A set of writing “tools” to develop the overall narrative.
  - Your **Story Spine** creates a snapshot of the basic story.
  - The **Story Body** develops the story synopsis.
  - The **Story Beats** organize the plot events into familiar patterns expected by readers.
7. **Story Scenes Workbook:** Uses all the details gathered up to this point. For example:
  - Focuses on the power of three “writing lenses” to create scenes that connect one to the next.
  - Prompts for actual content that exceeds readers’ expectations.
  - Arranges the content to create engaging scenes.

## *The Concept of a Garden Trellis*

Imagine a **garden trellis**. The **vertical lattice** structure supports the entire flowering plant. Then, the **horizontal lattice** structure provides connecting points for the plant to branch out. Over time, the flowers, supported by the vertical and horizontal lattices, **grow outward** to display their full beauty. The **Trellis Method** serves the writer by supporting the overall story. For example:

- **Structure your story's key plot events on the vertical lattice.**
- **Support the flow of scenes on the horizontal lattice, giving readers the emotions they crave.**
- **Grow the actual content outward, exceeding your target readers' expectations, surprising and delighting them.**

The Trellis Method nurtures the most important story details that resonate with readers.

## *Inspiration for the Trellis Method*

The inspiration for the Trellis Method came from studying the best of what top writers had already figured out. Like a never-ending cycle, many of these top authors studied the writing techniques of their favorite storytellers. They read masterworks to identify what went into creating popular stories. Then they adopted and adapted those techniques to tell fresh tales.

## *The Reason Story Structure Matters*

Aspiring writers will appreciate how this unique writing system breaks down the storytelling practices of bestselling authors. The book, workbooks, and visual aids assume you want to:

- **Harness the raw power of your passions and dreams to write a book people will love.** This book is for writers who want to *entertain, inform, and inspire* their readers.
- **Focus on storytelling (not the mechanics of language, punctuation, spelling, and grammar).** The ability to tell engaging stories is the chief reason books and their authors achieve popularity.
- **Learn writing principles (not unbreakable rules).** The Trellis Method is like a roadmap, guiding your efforts but giving you the freedom to detour as you choose.

## *What This Book Is Not*

This book is *not* a promise that you'll become a bestselling author. Instead, the Trellis Method incorporates time-tested techniques, highlighting opportunities to create a work of fiction based on the best of what top writers have already figured out. However, the content quality and commercial viability of your story depend on learning and applying these time-proven writing principles.

Bottom line, the effort required to turn a story idea into a full-length novel rests on your shoulders. Ten two-letter words sum up what it takes to write a novel: *if it is to be, it is up to me*.

## *How to Use This Book*

The Trellis Method encourages writers unfamiliar with story structure to follow the roadmap that guides from story idea to book completion, but you're free to detour from the roadmap whenever you choose.

### Phase I: Plan

1. Choose Genres
2. Validate Premise
3. Develop Characters
4. Plot Events
5. Identify Themes

### Phase II: Outline

6. Outline Beats

### Phase III: Write

7. Write Scenes
8. Edit Drafts
9. Get Feedback
10. Finalize Content

## *How This Book Is Organized*

The Trellis Method helps you get to the good stuff quickly. Parts 1-5 provide the foundation for understanding and using the Trellis Method. You'll find additional information in the appendix. The bibliography gives selected sources consulted. Full-size copies of the visual aids are available in the infographics section.

- **Part 1: The Quest to Write a Book**

You'll find an overview of the search for the best of what top writers already figured out, emphasizing how the three writing lenses help you use *plot structure*, *scene flow*, and *actual content*.

- **Part 2: The Plot Lens**

This lens helps writers understand *traditional plot structure*, highlighting how *the series of action events are essential to fulfilling readers' expectations*.

- **Part 3: The Scene Lens**

A scene is like a short story, linking one to the next, and this lens showcases how *scene structure influences scene flow, emotional intensity, and story pacing*.

- **Part 4: The Content Lens Focuses on Story Details**

A full-length novel contains many moving parts, and *the*

*content lens shows how the pieces fit together in the familiar pattern desired and expected by readers.*

- **Part 5: Create Your First Draft**

This part encourages writers to *complete the workbooks and worksheets and produce the essential first draft*. At the back of this book, you'll find additional details.

- **Bibliography:** A list of selected sources consulted.
- **Infographics:** Detailed **illustrations**.

## *You've Got This!*

Just as great storytelling triumphs over writing skills, so too does perseverance reign over raw writing talent. For example:

- **Raw talent alone doesn't cut it.** Ask talented athletes what happens if they don't learn and practice their chosen game strategy and tactical skills.
- **What you don't know about writing, you can learn.** This writing system speeds up learning while you write a book.
- Your **passions, knowledge, skills, and practice amplify innate talent to make your dreams come true.** You feel a calling to write a book readers will love. Now heed that call.
- **Writers who adopt and adapt the best of what top writers had already figured out can fulfill their writing dreams.** It's doable, and the hard work is worth your time and effort.

## PART 1:

# The Quest to Write a Book

### *Discover What Others Have Figured Out*

At the start of a four-decade career, I stumbled upon a success formula that overcame workplace problems. Authors had already recorded practical solutions in books. Discovering and applying solutions freed me from worry, and I became a lifelong learner. Charlie Munger<sup>1</sup>, of investment fame, put it this way: “I believe in the discipline of mastering the best of what other people have already figured out.” The Trellis Method helps you discover the best of what top authors have already figured out, and the encouragement to harness the power of your dreams and passions.

### *What If?*

A life-changing question: “What if?” What if you could find and apply the writing techniques of top writers? In my research, I found abundant intellectual wisdom. However, more times than not, the practical application of those writing techniques proved elusive or vague. So, I dug deeper into this complex topic of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie\\_Munger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Munger)

identifying and applying the writing practices of top writers, and along the way discovered many viewpoints, opinions, and contradictions.

## *A Focus on Storytelling*

My study of several bestselling novels revealed that many top writers told remarkable stories with unremarkable writing skills. Through more study, I confirmed that an author's storytelling expertise (not their writing skills) often sets one writer apart from all the others. Most top writers used their unique passions and dreams to add delicious spice to their feasts of words. That turned out to be good news. Anyone can learn the storytelling principles used to write a book readers will love, and it's your passions and dreams that can set your work apart from others.

## *The Streisand Effect*

In my research, I came across this truism: The attempt to hide, remove, or censor information can cause unintended consequences. For example:

- Consider what happened in 2002 when Kenneth Adelman, a retired software engineer, started a project to photograph the entire Californian coastline and publish thousands of aerial



images. Early in the project, he received a letter from Barbra Streisand's attorneys, demanding he remove a photograph showing the celebrity's mansion.

- The famous singer and actress felt Adelman had invaded her privacy.
- Adelman's intent was to photograph and preserve images of the entire coastline, not snap a picture of Streisand's home, so he refused to take down that one image. After all, the image was one of thousands and revealed nothing material.
- Streisand slapped him and his non-profit with a \$50 million lawsuit.

Before the lawsuit, there had been only 6 downloads of the image showing Streisand's property. However, after the news headlines emphasized Streisand lost her lawsuit, thousands downloaded the same image from the California Coastal Project. One change raised awareness overnight, and that difference was so big it's now referred to as the *Streisand Effect*<sup>2</sup>.

## *Raising Your Writing Awareness*

Here's a writing principle similar to the Streisand Effect: A change in the writing process can raise your awareness and focus on what matters most to readers. However, it takes the right set

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streisand_effect)

of writing lenses to focus on the right things. With some elbow grease and a change in your writing routine, you can adopt and adapt three powerful lenses. By changing your writing focus, you'll notice where you can enhance a story. After all, an engaging story makes a book stand out, and it's your passions and dreams that make the difference.

## *What Forms a Writing Lens?*

For centuries, scholars have discussed the merits of story structure, and while I don't count myself as an expert, I know where to find them. Similar to what Charlie Munger suggested, use the best of what top authors had already figured out. Finding the information is actually the simple part. What's difficult is identifying and balancing the intersection of plot events, scene flows, and actual content. For example:

- My research suggested that most narrative frameworks focus primarily on the story's plot events, but bestselling authors figured out how to balance that structure with scene flows and actual content.
- Top writers focus on balancing the intersection of plot events, scene flow, and actual content.

## *A Troubling Issue*

After studying historical and current bestselling authors, I marveled at the similarities and practicality of their methods. What paid off for top writers could serve as your storytelling model.

- Most top authors had adopted a personalized method of writing and editing structured stories.
- They balanced the mix of plot events, scene flow, and actual content.
- Although their methods shared many commonalities, each writer adapted the structures and techniques to fit his or her ideal stories and target audiences.

But my research raised a troubling issue about writers who know about the benefits of story structure but resist using time-tested storytelling frameworks. They're at a disadvantage when their works are compared to authors who structured their narratives.

## *Resistance to Story Structure*

A scan of articles and books about writing pointed out that there were several approaches. Most promoted the methods of their respective authors. Sometimes, the recommendations

emphasized rules rather than flexible principles, and two things stood out.

- First, writing a full-length novel was complex.
- Second, the chief way to deal with the complexity was to adopt and adapt writing steps that encourage writers to use their passions, dreams, style, and preferences.

## *Why Writers Resist Story Structure*

The following paraphrased statements from several articles and books emphasized the reasons writers resist structuring stories:

- Some writers felt constrained by the rules and conventions of story structure and preferred to follow their intuition or creativity instead.
- Other writers believed that using a story structure was too rigid or formulaic, and that it limited their artistic expression or originality.
- Certain writers feared that adhering to a story structure would make their stories predictable or boring.
- More than a few writers admitted they did not fully understand how to apply story structure to their specific genre, style, or theme.

- Even though writers knew the general principles of story structure, some did not know how to adapt the framework to fit their own vision or voice.
- Some struggled with finding the balance between following the structural roadmap and taking a detour when necessary.
- Many expressed a need for more guidance or feedback on using a story structure to help them craft an interesting story that suited their purpose and audience.
- Some writers simply forgot or neglected to use story structure as a tool to improve their stories because they focused on other aspects of writing (e.g., developing characters, creating dialogue, describing settings).
- A few admitted they lacked the confidence, discipline, or motivation to revise and edit their stories according to a story structure.
- Some expressed the need for more practice or reminders on how to use story structure as a framework to organize and enhance their stories.
- Others showed a reluctance or a lack of confidence in making the structural choices and decisions about their characters, plot, theme, and style.

- A number felt they lacked a clear vision of their story's theme, message, or purpose, and therefore struggled to align their plot points with their core idea.
- Several lacked feedback or guidance from writers, editors, or readers about strengths, weaknesses, and improvements.

## *Overcoming Resistance*

Detailed step-by-step workbooks, prompt-based worksheets, and checklists help writers overcome resistance.

- Plot events, scene flow, and actual content formed unique writing lenses.
- These lenses raise awareness and help writers enhance their stories.
- The intersection of the three lenses helps writers solve the storytelling puzzle without compromising their passions and dreams.

## *The Trellis Method*

The Trellis Method uses three lenses to focus on plot events, scene flow, and actual content.

- **Plot Lens:** Focuses on where to place plot events designed to cause character conflicts that produce the emotions readers crave.
- **Scene Lens:** Focuses on structuring scene flow, emotional intensity, and narrative pacing, connecting the equivalent of one short story to the next, enticing readers to keep reading.
- **Content Lens:** Focuses on combining the relevant story elements and familiar patterns readers expect, adding important details that serve as the narrative's spice.

These lenses help writers focus on what it takes to tell a great story. The intersection of the Plot Lens, Scene Lens, and Content Lens concentrates attention on what matters most to readers — *a great story*.

## *The Intersection of the Three Lenses*

In each scene, the plot event, scene flow, and actual content come together to form the equivalent of a short story. However, just as it's hard to see the forest because of the trees, it's difficult to know exactly where the three lenses intersect. To connect one short

story to the next, writers gather details and then determine how those story elements best fit together. The workbook steps guide the completion of important tasks. The actual story told occurs at the intersection of *plot event*, *scene flow*, and *actual content*.

1. **Story Genres Workbook.** Suggests the familiar patterns readers expect (i.e., key scenes, conventions, external theme).
2. **Story Premise Workbook.** Gives the writer a strategic guide to follow while writing the story.
3. **Story Characters Workbook.** Creates believable characters who react emotionally to conflicts caused by plot and subplot events.
4. **Story Plots Workbook.** Aids in the planning and writing of plot events that force characters into emotional conflicts.
5. **Story Themes Workbook.** Identifies the external, internal, and philosophical themes that resonate with readers.
6. **Story Spine, Body, and Beats Workbook.** The three tools make sure the story works from beginning to end *before* writing a story no one wants to read.
7. **Story Scenes Workbook.** This workbook encourages structuring a short story in every scene and making sure each connects to the next one for a page-turning narrative.



## *Writing Roadmap*

The three writing lenses help writers see and follow a writing roadmap of plot events, scene flows, and actual content. But a map is not reality. It merely guides your journey. When you encounter obstacles or prefer another route, reality takes over, and you make real-time decisions on how best to arrive at your desired destination, detouring as needed. The story belongs to the writer, and you're free to detour from the writing roadmap.

## *The Trellis Method Goal*

The goal is to help you complete that all-important first draft, but it's your invested time and effort that will determine your results.

## PART 2:

# The Plot Lens

### *What Is a Plot Lens?*

The **Plot Lens** focuses on arranging *plot events* (aka *Story Beats*) into storytelling patterns expected and appreciated by readers.

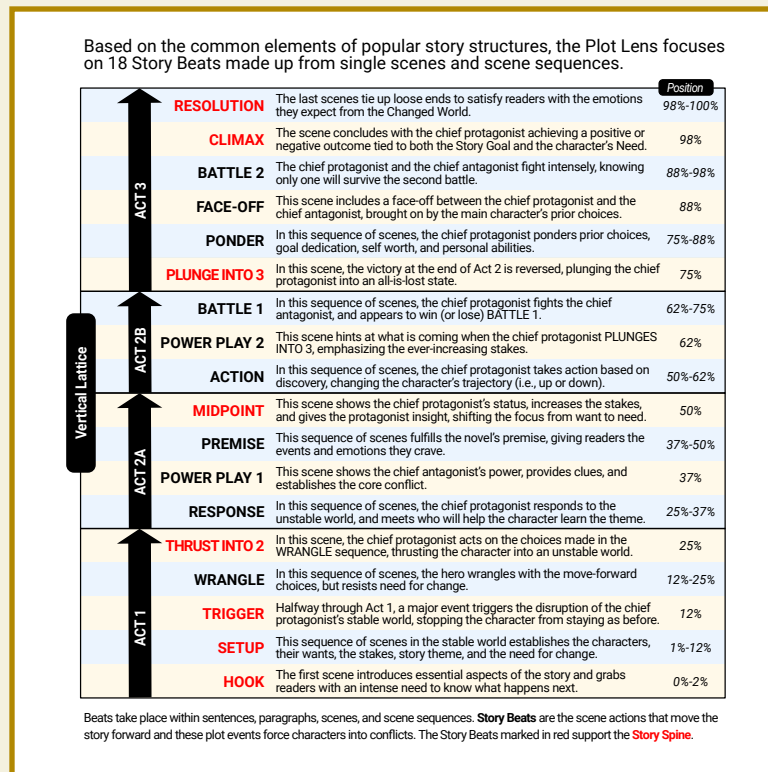


Figure 1 - Plot Lens

A *beat* refers to a unit of action, which can take place within sentences, paragraphs, scenes, and scene sequences. The **Story Beats** form the plot's structure. For example:

- A *Single Scene*, such as the **HOOK** (i.e., a scene designed to grab the audience's attention), or
- A *Sequence of Scenes*, such as the **SETUP** (i.e., a group of scenes designed to establish the *setting, primary characters*, and more).

The *Story Spine, Body, and Beats Workbook* explains the 18 Story Beats. For example:

1. **HOOK (0%-1% — Single Scene)**: This scene in the Stable World of Act 1 *introduces key aspects of the story and instills in readers a desire to know what happens next.*
2. **SETUP (1%-12% - Sequence of Scenes)**: This sequence of scenes in the Stable World sets up the *characters, their wants, the stakes, the story theme, and the need for change.*
3. **TRIGGER (12% — Single Scene)**: Halfway through Act 1, *a major event triggers the disruption of the chief protagonist's Stable World and stops the character from continuing as before.*
4. **WRANGLE (12%-25% — Sequence of Scenes)**: In this sequence of scenes, *the chief protagonist wrangles with the move-forward choices, but resists the need for change.*
5. **THRUST INTO 2 (25% — Single Scene)**: In this scene, *the chief protagonist acts on the choices made in the WRANGLE sequence, and that action thrusts the character into the Unstable World of Act 2.*

6. **RESPONSE (25%-37% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, *the chief protagonist responds to the Unstable World and often meets who will help the character learn the theme.*
7. **POWER PLAY 1 (37% — Single Scene):** This scene shows *the chief antagonist's power, provides clues, and establishes the core conflict.*
8. **PREMISE (37%-50% — Sequence of Scenes):** This sequence of scenes *fulfills the novel's premise and gives readers the events they expect and emotions they crave.*
9. **MIDPOINT (50% — Single Scene/brief Scene Sequence):** This scene *shows the chief protagonist's status (i.e., winning or losing), increases the stakes, and gives insight that shifts the protagonist's focus from want to need.*
10. **ACTION (50%-62% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, *the chief protagonist takes action based on a discovery that can change the character arc's trajectory (e.g., up to down, down to up, or it may stay flat).*
11. **POWER PLAY 2 (62% — Single Scene):** This scene *hints at what is coming when the chief protagonist PLUNGES INTO 3 and emphasizes the ever-increasing stakes.*

12. **BATTLE 1 (62%-75% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist fights the chief antagonist and appears to win (or lose) BATTLE 1.
13. **PLUNGE INTO 3 (75% — Single Scene):** In this scene, *the victory at the end of Act 2 is reversed, plunging the chief protagonist into an all-is-lost state (i.e., a dreaded sense of looming physical, professional, or psychological death).*
14. **PONDER (75%-88% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, *the chief protagonist ponders prior choices, goal dedication, self-worth, and personal abilities.*
15. **FACE-OFF (88% — Single Scene):** The scene includes *a face-off between the chief protagonist and the chief antagonist, and that encounter is the consequence of the main character's prior choices.*
16. **BATTLE 2 (88%-98% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, *the chief protagonist and the chief antagonist fight intensely (i.e., they know only one will survive). Note: In some stories, it serves as a false ending.*
17. **CLIMAX (98% — Single Scene):** The scene concludes with *the chief protagonist achieving a positive or negative outcome tied to both the Story Goal and the character's Need (e.g., for the Story Goal and character's need, it may conclude as a win/win, win/lose, lose/win, or lose/lose).*

**18.RESOLUTION (98%-100% — Sequence of Scenes):** The last scenes tie up loose ends to satisfy readers with the emotions they expect from the Changed World in Act 3.

For writers, especially those new to the craft of writing a full-length novel, the Story Beats serve as a solid foundation on which to build and organize plot events.

*Note: The names assigned to the Story Beats are merely convenient references that suggest the purpose of each. Also, the percentages of story progress assigned to where each beat falls within the narrative are only approximations based on storytelling patterns established by popular TV shows, films, and books.*

The Story Beats serve as the Trellis Method's *vertical lattice*, supporting the narrative and helping writers choose where to arrange plot events.

## *Plot Forces Characters into Conflict*

A story without conflict is boring. The Story Beats guide where to arrange plot events so that the conflicts between characters and the environment force emotions to the surface. For example:

- **Story Spine:** Like bridge piers, a well-constructed narrative relies on 8 of the 18 Story Beats to create the Story Spine, *the foundation for the entire narrative.*

- **Story Body:** Building on the Story Spine's foundation, the Story Body connects summaries of all Story Beats to create *a front-to-back synopsis*.
- **Story Beats:** The Story Beats prompt collection and organization of details useful for writing scenes, enhancing the connection of one scene to the next.

Completing the *Spine, Body, & Beats Workbook* gives writers the insight to decide whether they should continue developing the current story or search for an idea with more audience appeal.

## *One Lens Supported by Three Tools*

The *Story Spine, Body, & Beats Workbook* guides your steps.

1. **Story Spine:** First, you determine the Story Spine (i.e., the essential beats supporting your entire narrative).
2. **Story Body:** Next, you draft the Story Body (i.e., a one-page synopsis of your entire story).
3. **Story Beats:** Then you complete the prompts for each of the Story Beats to identify the details and outline the plot events.

Using the *Story Spine, Body, & Beats Workbook* produces benefits.

- The combination of the Story Spine, Story Body, and Story Beats helps you to arrange the placement of your genre's key scenes and conventions.

- You'll make an informed decision about whether your story's premise is worth pursuing, or if you should search for a fresh idea with greater audience appeal.
- The worksheet encourages gathering abundant details to write engaging scenes, and the overall exercise will enhance your creativity, often leading to twists you can use to surprise and delight readers.

The Plot Lens helps you decide whether to write the scenes or search for another story idea with more audience appeal.



## PART 3:

# The Scene Lens Focuses on Story Flow

## What Is a Scene Lens?

The *Scene Lens* focuses on how to structure the **scene flow** (i.e., *emotions*, *pacing*, and *intensity*), creating the equivalent of a short story designed to entice the audience to keep reading.

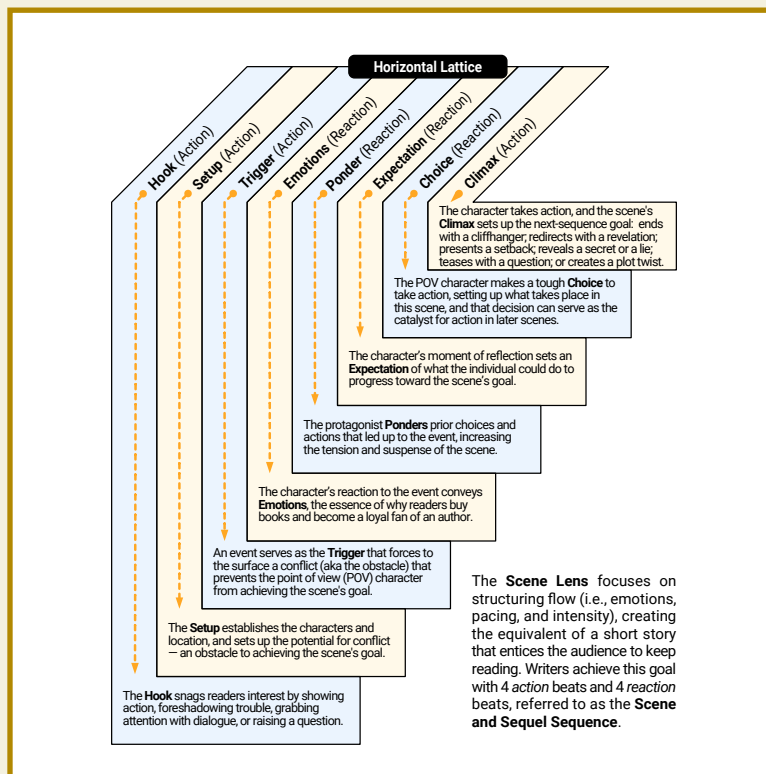


Figure 2 - Scene Lens

Within each scene are *Scene Beats*, creating the flow of a well-paced short story with emotional intensity. Each scene includes

an ending with a page-turning connection to the next. Writers achieve this goal with 4 *action beats* and 4 *reaction beats*, referred to as the *Scene and Sequel Sequence*.

1. **Hook (Action):** The **Hook** snags readers' interest by showing *action, foreshadowing trouble, engaging dialogue, or raising a question.*
2. **Setup (Action):** The **Setup** *establishes the characters and location, and sets up the potential for conflict* — an obstacle to achieving the scene's goal.
3. **Trigger (Action):** An event serves as the **Trigger** that *forces to the surface a conflict* (aka the obstacle) that prevents the point of view (POV) character from achieving the scene's goal.
4. **Emotions (Reaction):** The *character's reaction to the event conveys Emotions*, the essence of why readers buy books and become loyal fans of an author.
5. **Ponder (Reaction):** The *protagonist ponders prior choices and actions that led up to the event, and those inner thoughts or dialogue build up the tension and suspense.*
6. **Expectation (Reaction):** The *character's moment of reflection sets an Expectation* of what the individual could do to progress toward the scene's goal.

7. **Choice (Reaction):** The *POV character makes a tough Choice to take action*, setting up what takes place in this scene, and that decision can serve as the catalyst for action in later scenes.
8. **Climax (Action):** The *character takes action*, and at the end of the scene, *the Climax sets up the next-sequence goal* (e.g.; the scene ends with a cliffhanger; redirects with a revelation; presents a setback; reveals a secret or a lie; teases with a question; creates a plot twist).

The Scene and Sequel Sequence encourages readers to *care about your characters and keep reading to enjoy the emotions*.

*Note: All-caps titles are used to differentiate Story Beats (e.g., HOOK) from Scene Beats (e.g., Hook). When comparing the definitions of Story Beats to Scene Beats, you'll notice they share similar purposes. This makes sense when you consider that the Scene Beats are used to create the equivalent of a short story, and these narratives connect like pearls on a necklace of plot events called Story Beats.*

The Scene Beats serve as the Trellis Method's *horizontal lattice*, and they help writers move the story forward while giving readers the emotions they crave.

## *Emotions Are the Key*

Based on your genre, James Scott<sup>3</sup> emphasized that writers should include the right amount of emotion in the sequel. Bell explained writers err if they avoid showing feelings in hardboiled detective books or include too much emotion in romantic novels.

- **For low-intensity emotional sequels**, Bell recommended *telling* the emotion in a sentence or two (e.g., “A trickle of worry hit Pam. Usually, Steve would let her know if he was going to be late.”).
- **For high-intensity emotional sequels**, he suggested *showing* the physiological effects of worry on the body (e.g., “Hands trembling, she punched the number for his office. When the receptionist answered, Pam’s throat clenched like a fist clutching her vocal cords.”).

Writers “tell” by *describing the emotion*. In contrast, writers “show” the *emotion’s physical influence*. For instance, a sequel (i.e., an emotional reaction) encourages audiences to care about characters, and when that happens, authors increase their odds that they’ll write a book readers will love.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://killzoneblog.com/2022/05/sweet-emotion.html>

## *Use Action and Reaction to Pace*

It's easy to see in films how *action* (e.g., a car chase) speeds up the pacing, and *reaction* (e.g., a character's reflection on a prior choice) slows things down. To speed up or slow down the pacing in books, consider your chosen genre's conventions. For example, a thriller novel expands the action and shortens the reaction. In contrast, a romance book shortens the action and lengthens the reaction. Based on your chosen genre's conventions, use intensity and pacing to showcase the emotions readers crave.

## *Scene and Sequel Sequence Benefits*

Use the Scene and Sequel Sequence method to:

- Move readers from the first to the last scene with continuous *narrative drive* (i.e., page-turning momentum).
- Entice readers to keep reading based on the rhythm of the action and reaction beats.
- Create loyal fans by giving them the emotions they crave.
- Showcase the story's theme as the characters deal with conflicts.
- Build up the suspense as one scene links to the next until the story's climax.

- Satisfy readers' desire for emotional intensity and pacing by varying the mix of showing and telling.

The Scene and Sequel Sequence is a creative and intuitive method to stir the emotions of your readers so they care about your characters. The Scene Lens focuses on consistently using the Scene and Sequel Sequence method.

## PART 4:

# The Content Lens Focuses on Details

### *What is a Content Lens?*

The **Content Lens** focuses on how the story makes use of the *essential details* readers expect.

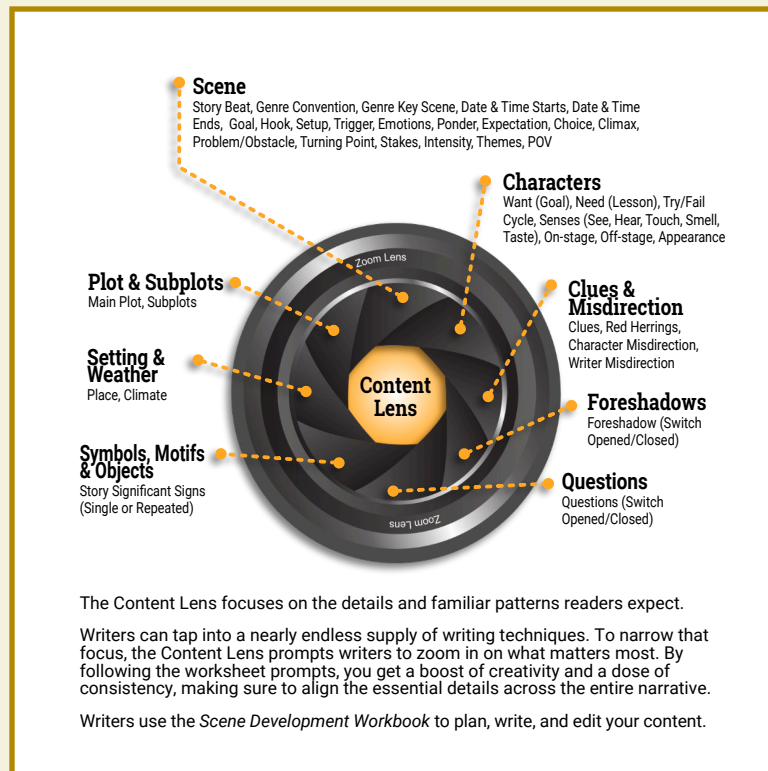


Figure 3 - Content Lens

Writers today soon discover an overwhelming array of writing techniques on the internet. To overcome this issue, the Content Lens helps writers narrow the focus and zoom in on what matters most to readers. The *Story Scenes Workbook* boosts creativity and increases consistency, helping you organize the critical details across your entire narrative.

## *Writing Term Definitions*

The workbooks educate you on key terms, and the step-by-step prompts encourage you to complete that all-important first draft:

- **Scene Details** (e.g., Story Beat, Genre Convention, Genre Key Scene, Date & Time Starts, Date & Time Ends, Goal, Hook, Setup, Trigger, Emotions, Ponder, Expectation, Choice, Climax, Problem/Obstacle, Turning Point, Stakes, Intensity, Themes, Point of View)
- **Character Details** (e.g., Want, Need, Try/Fail Cycle, Senses, Characters On-stage, Characters Off-stage)
- **Clues & Misdirection Details** (e.g., Fact-based Clues, Red Herrings, Character-initiated Misdirection, Writer-initiated Misdirection)
- **Foreshadowing Details** (e.g., Foreshadow Opened Switch/Closed Switch)



- **Key Question Details** (e.g., Questions Asked (Opened)/ Answered (Closed))
- **Symbol, Motif, & Object Details** (e.g., Signs (Onetime or Repeated))
- **Setting & Weather Details** (e.g., Place, Climate)
- **Plot & Subplot Details** (e.g., Main Plot, Subplots)

As needed, refer to the writing terms glossary.

## *The Intersection of the Three Lenses*

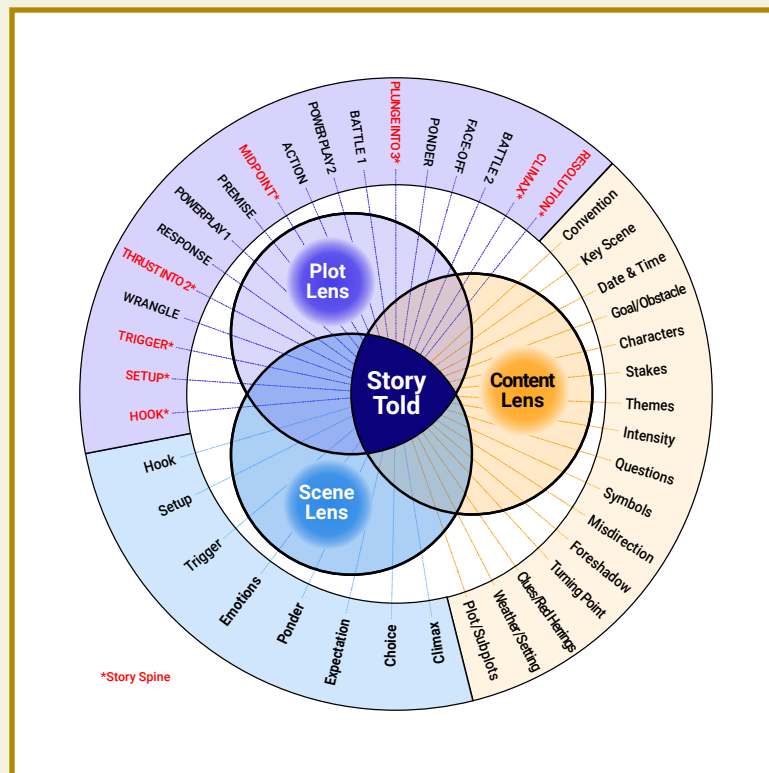


Figure 4 - Lens Intersection

The intersection of the three lenses focuses on moving the narrative forward while exceeding readers' expectations. Where the three lenses intersect focuses the writer's attention on what matters most to readers. For instance, each scene is equivalent to a short story. One scene links to the next. Because there are so many moving parts in a 50,000-to-100,000-word novel, it's hard to see the intersection of the three lenses unless you use writing tools like the Trellis Method's workbooks.

## *The Content Lens Brings It All Together*

The Content Lens combines with the Plot Lens and Scene Lens to help you plan, outline, and write stories. For example, the Content Lens helps you open and close questions in readers' minds. A question (i.e., *narrative drive*) opens a switch in the minds of readers, encouraging them to keep reading for an answer. The Content Lens also aids your efforts to track each question so you can close the switch and fulfill your implied promise to readers. The intersection of the three lenses targets what matters most from the audience's view. For example:

- The **Plot Lens** focuses your attention on familiar storytelling patterns (i.e., story structure).
- The **Scene Lens** helps you visualize the flow and link of one scene to the next, giving readers the emotions they crave.

- But it's the **Content Lens** that prompts you to *inspect for all the story details your target audience expects*.

A myopic focus on one lens (e.g., plot) over another (e.g., scene or content) limits the fulfillment of readers' expectations, so the Trellis Method heightens the writer's awareness of the intersection of the three lenses. The Content Lens serves as the Trellis Method's way of nurturing the outward growth (unfolding) of the story, helping writers to connect hundreds of details and move the narrative forward to exceed readers' expectations.

## PART 5:

# Create Your First Draft

### *Phase I: Plan*

The planning phase helps you gather the details that go into writing the first draft of your novel.

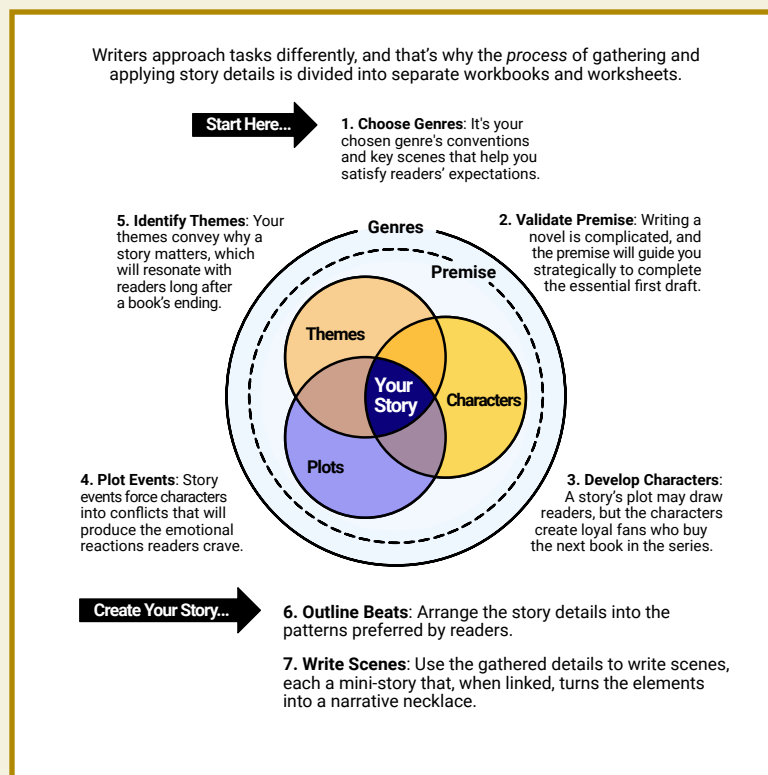


Figure 5 - Phase I: Plan

Use the workbooks to gather critical details for your novel.

1. ***Story Genres Workbook***: Your chosen genre's conventions and key scenes will help you satisfy readers' expectations. This workbook gathers the details tied to a genre's key scenes, conventions, and dramatic question.
2. ***Story Premise Workbook***: Writing a novel is complicated, and the story's premise guides you strategically and inspires you to complete the first draft. This workbook walks you through developing a premise.
3. ***Story Characters Workbook***: A story's plot may draw an audience, but it's the emotions of interesting characters that create loyal fans. Use this workbook to develop believable characters who react to conflicts with realistic emotions.
4. ***Story Plots Workbook***: Plot events force characters into conflicts that produce the emotional reactions readers crave. This workbook helps you define and connect the threads of plot events.
5. ***Story Themes Workbook***: Themes often resonate with readers long after a book's ending. Completing this workbook helps you evaluate and define why the story will matter to your target readers.

You'll put all the effort invested in these phases to good use as your writing project progresses. The process of gathering and using the story details is like an algebraic equation, which means you can work the tasks in a different order and still arrive at the same result (e.g., "a + b = c" is the same as "b + a = c").

## Phase II: Outline

The *Story Spine, Body & Beats Workbook* explains outlining.

- Organize the many details for the writing phase.
- Decide whether to move forward with your story idea or search for a new premise with greater audience appeal.

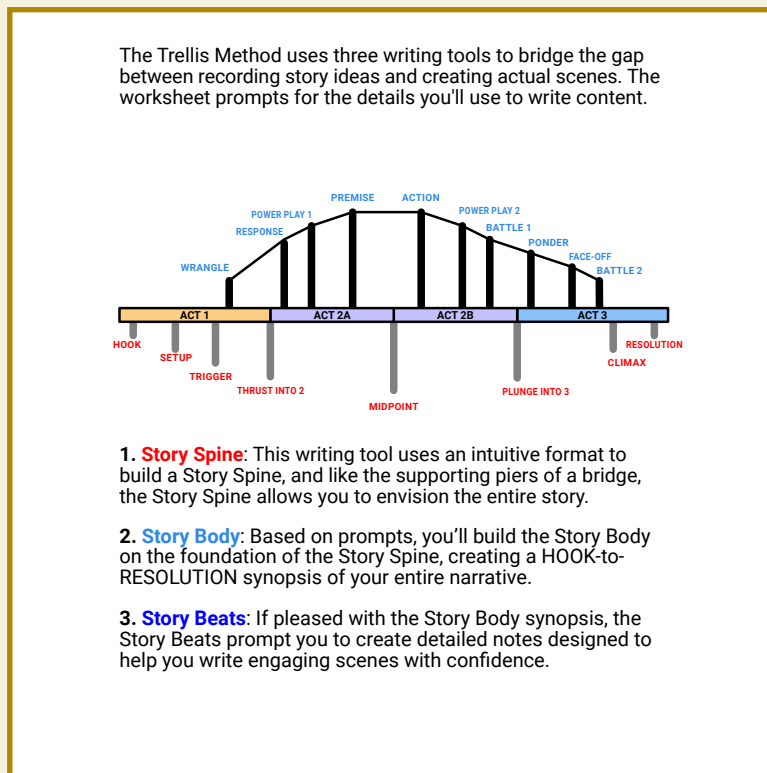


Figure 6 - Phase II: Outline

The *Story Spine, Body, & Beats Workbook* three tools help you to make informed decisions *before* you write scenes:

1. The **Story Spine** section creates a snapshot of the basic story. The worksheet's first section uses an intuitive format to build a Story Spine, and like the supporting piers of a bridge, it's the foundation of the entire narrative and helps you make an informed choice whether to continue developing the story.
2. If you're satisfied with the direction of the narrative after completing the Story Spine, the **Story Body** prompts help you create a beginning-to-end synopsis. You'll use this synopsis to assess the story and decide whether to continue or find a more appealing idea.
3. If you're pleased with the Story Body synopsis, the **Story Beats** prompt you to gather more details and order the plot events, empowering you to write engaging scenes with confidence. The Story Beats worksheet helps you identify and record details crucial to exceeding readers' expectations.

Use the *Story Spine, Body, and Beats Workbook* to evaluate the appeal of your story. If you lack passion or confidence in the story's premise, find one with more appeal.

## Phase III: Write

The writing phase leverages the details and insights gathered while completing Phases I and II.

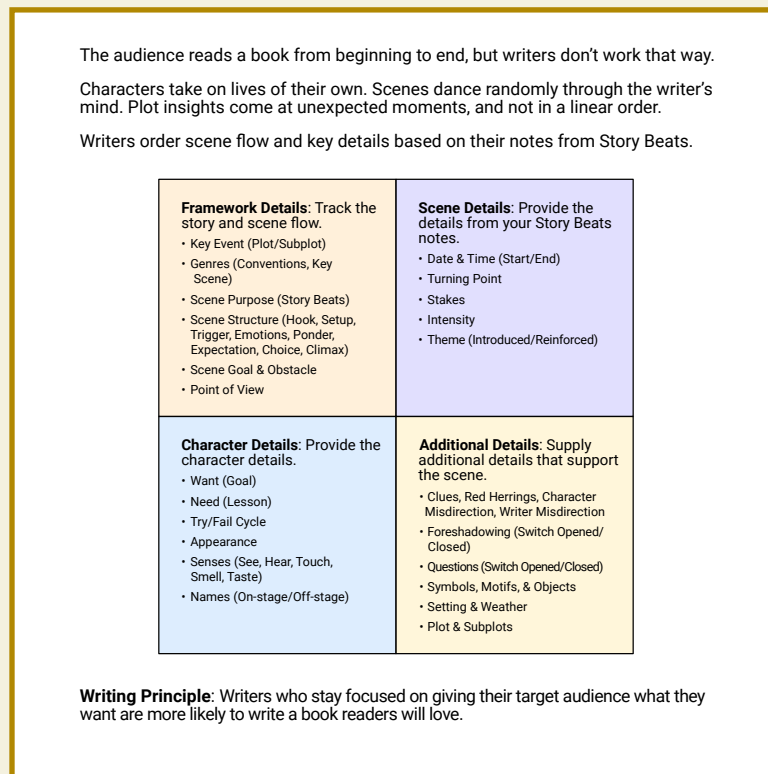


Figure 7 - Phase III: Write

The audience reads books from beginning to end, but writers don't write in linear order. Here's why:

- As you write scenes, characters have a tendency to take over, sending the story in unintended directions.
- Often, combinations of new and old scenes dance through the writer's mind, frequently in random order.



- New plot events can pop into the writer's mind and come in haphazard order, counter to readers' expectations.

The *Story Scenes Workbook* helps you write actual content using your prior responses (i.e., workbooks 1-6).

- Focus the power of the **Plot Lens**, **Scene Lens**, and **Content Lens** to write and connect the first to last scenes.
- Use your **Story Beats** responses to arrange the **plot event's details** into reader-expected patterns.
- Prompt you to write **actual content** that engages readers scene after scene.

## *Apply the Story Details*

In Phase III, as you write each scene, you're prompted to record and track important story details. For example:

- **Scene Framework:** Track the story and scene flow.
  - Genre (Key Scene/Convention)
  - Plot Event
  - Purpose
  - Structure
  - Goal & Obstacle
  - Point of View
- **Scene Details:** Provide the details from your notes recorded as you worked the Story Beats. For example:

- Date & Time
- Turning Point
- Stakes
- Intensity
- Theme
- **Character Details:** Provide the essential character details that influence this scene.
  - Want
  - Need
  - Try/Fail Cycle
  - Appearance
  - Senses
  - On/Off Stage Names/Roles
- **Support Details:** Supply additional details that influence the scene.
  - Clues, Red Herrings, Character Misdirection, Writer Misdirection
  - Foreshadowing
  - Questions
  - Symbols, Motifs, & Objects
  - Setting & Weather

The prompts in the *Story Scenes Workbook* remind you to include the details important for each scene, and your notes help you track and manage the quality.

## *Begin Your Writing Project*

Keep in mind that writing principles are your servants, not your masters. While it's a fact that top authors use story structure to their advantage, they differ in how they approach a writing project. Most would agree with these four principles:

- Balance your passion for a story with what readers want.
- Learn and practice your writing craft to please readers.
- Refine storytelling techniques based on readers' feedback.
- Enjoy your writing and share the joy with readers!

Start with the *Story Genres Workbook*, do the work, and enjoy the journey. By the work of your hands, you can master story structure and write a book readers will love!

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# INFOGRAPHICS:

## Visual Writing Aids

The infographics on the following pages are visual aids designed to reinforce the use of the Trellis Method. The images show the writing system parts. They're principles, not rules. Therefore, like a map, detour as needed to reach your desired story destination.



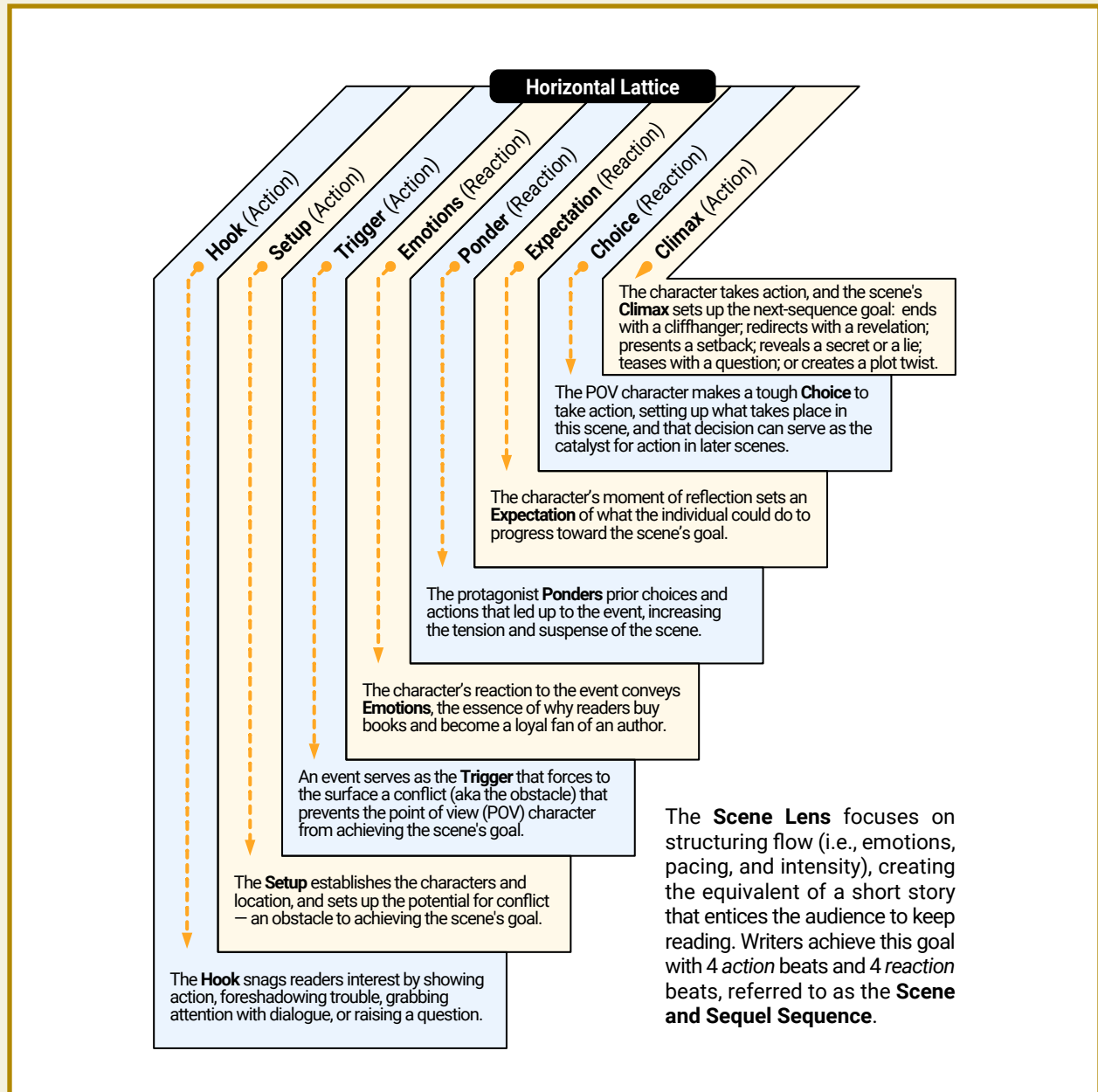
## Figure 1 - The Trellis Method Plot Lens

Based on the common elements of popular story structures, the Plot Lens focuses on 18 Story Beats made up from single scenes and scene sequences.

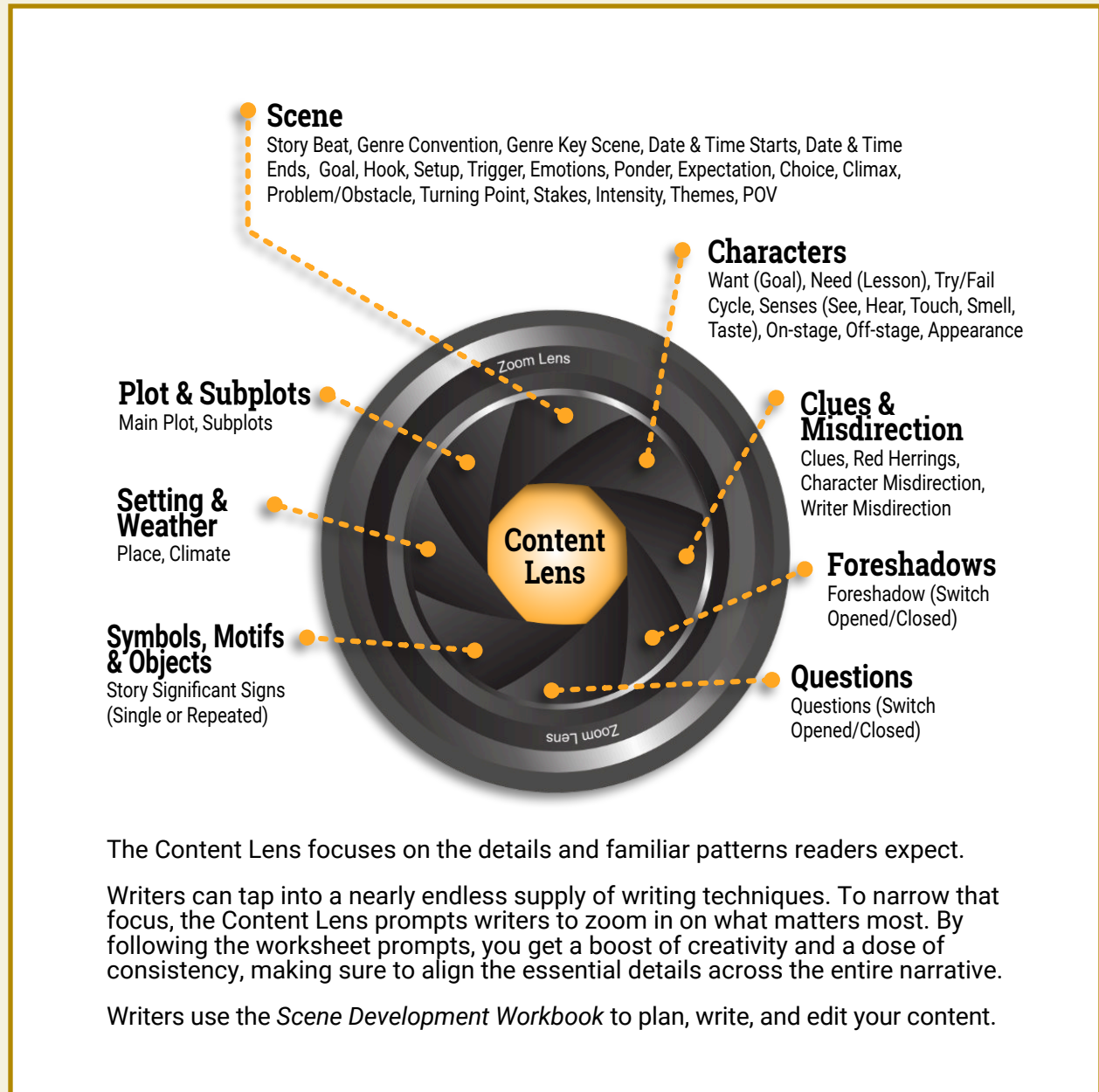
			Position
Vertical Lattice	ACT 3	<b>RESOLUTION</b>	The last scenes tie up loose ends to satisfy readers with the emotions they expect from the Changed World. 98%-100%
		<b>CLIMAX</b>	The scene concludes with the chief protagonist achieving a positive or negative outcome tied to both the Story Goal and the character's Need. 98%
		<b>BATTLE 2</b>	The chief protagonist and the chief antagonist fight intensely, knowing only one will survive the second battle. 88%-98%
		<b>FACE-OFF</b>	This scene includes a face-off between the chief protagonist and the chief antagonist, brought on by the main character's prior choices. 88%
		<b>PONDER</b>	In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist ponders prior choices, goal dedication, self worth, and personal abilities. 75%-88%
		<b>PLUNGE INTO 3</b>	In this scene, the victory at the end of Act 2 is reversed, plunging the chief protagonist into an all-is-lost state. 75%
	ACT 2B	<b>BATTLE 1</b>	In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist fights the chief antagonist, and appears to win (or lose) BATTLE 1. 62%-75%
		<b>POWER PLAY 2</b>	This scene hints at what is coming when the chief protagonist PLUNGES INTO 3, emphasizing the ever-increasing stakes. 62%
		<b>ACTION</b>	In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist takes action based on discovery, changing the character's trajectory (i.e., up or down). 50%-62%
	ACT 2A	<b>MIDPOINT</b>	This scene shows the chief protagonist's status, increases the stakes, and gives the protagonist insight, shifting the focus from want to need. 50%
		<b>PREMISE</b>	This sequence of scenes fulfills the novel's premise, giving readers the events and emotions they crave. 37%-50%
		<b>POWER PLAY 1</b>	This scene shows the chief antagonist's power, provides clues, and establishes the core conflict. 37%
		<b>RESPONSE</b>	In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist responds to the unstable world, and meets who will help the character learn the theme. 25%-37%
	ACT 1	<b>THRUST INTO 2</b>	In this scene, the chief protagonist acts on the choices made in the WRANGLE sequence, thrusting the character into an unstable world. 25%
		<b>WRANGLE</b>	In this sequence of scenes, the hero wrangles with the move-forward choices, but resists need for change. 12%-25%
		<b>TRIGGER</b>	Halfway through Act 1, a major event triggers the disruption of the chief protagonist's stable world, stopping the character from staying as before. 12%
		<b>SETUP</b>	This sequence of scenes in the stable world establishes the characters, their wants, the stakes, story theme, and the need for change. 1%-12%
		<b>HOOK</b>	The first scene introduces essential aspects of the story and grabs readers with an intense need to know what happens next. 0%-2%

Beats take place within sentences, paragraphs, scenes, and scene sequences. **Story Beats** are the scene actions that move the story forward and these plot events force characters into conflicts. The Story Beats marked in red support the **Story Spine**.

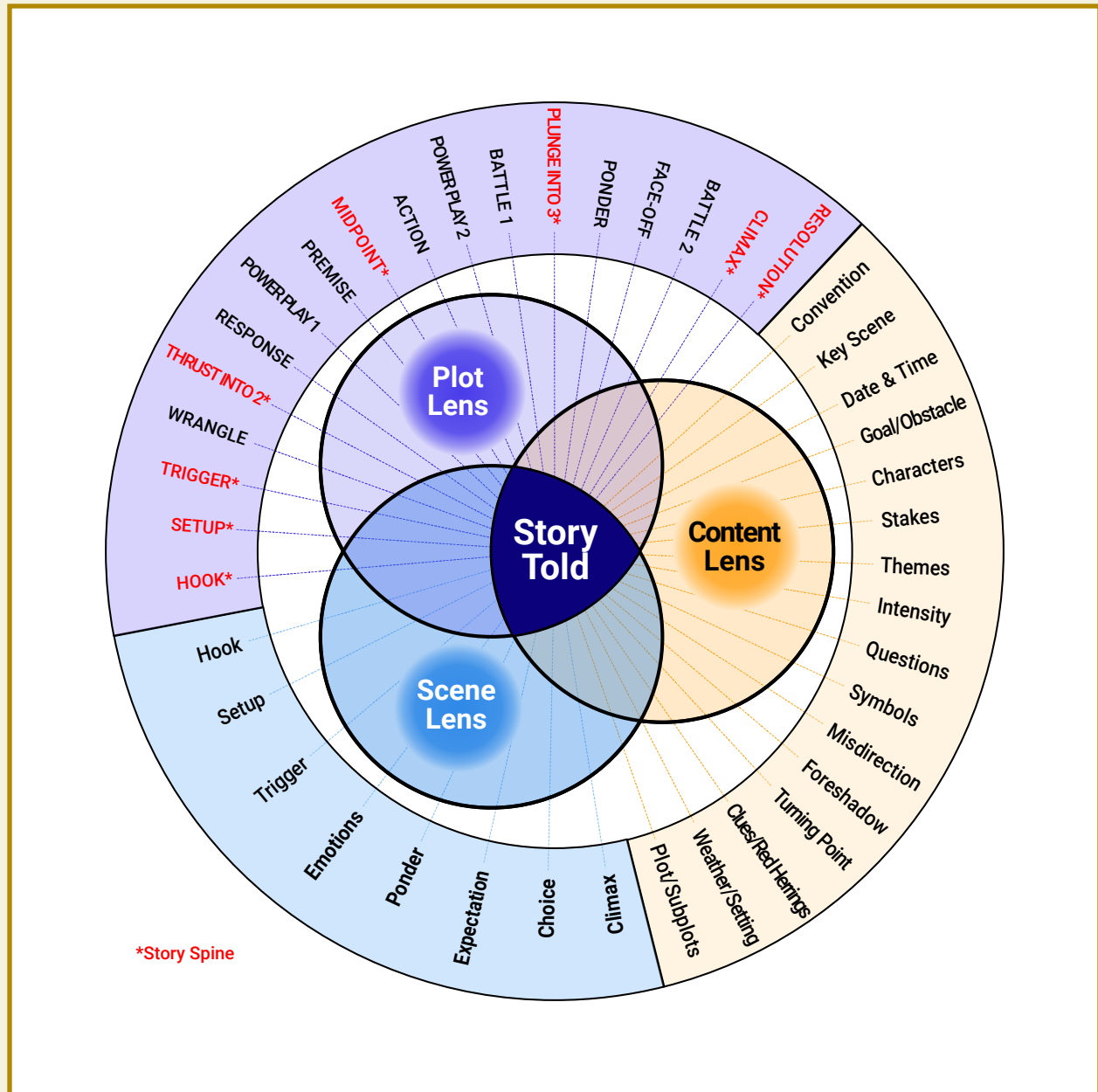
Figure 2 - The Trellis Method Scene Lens



**Figure 3 - The Trellis Method Content Lens**

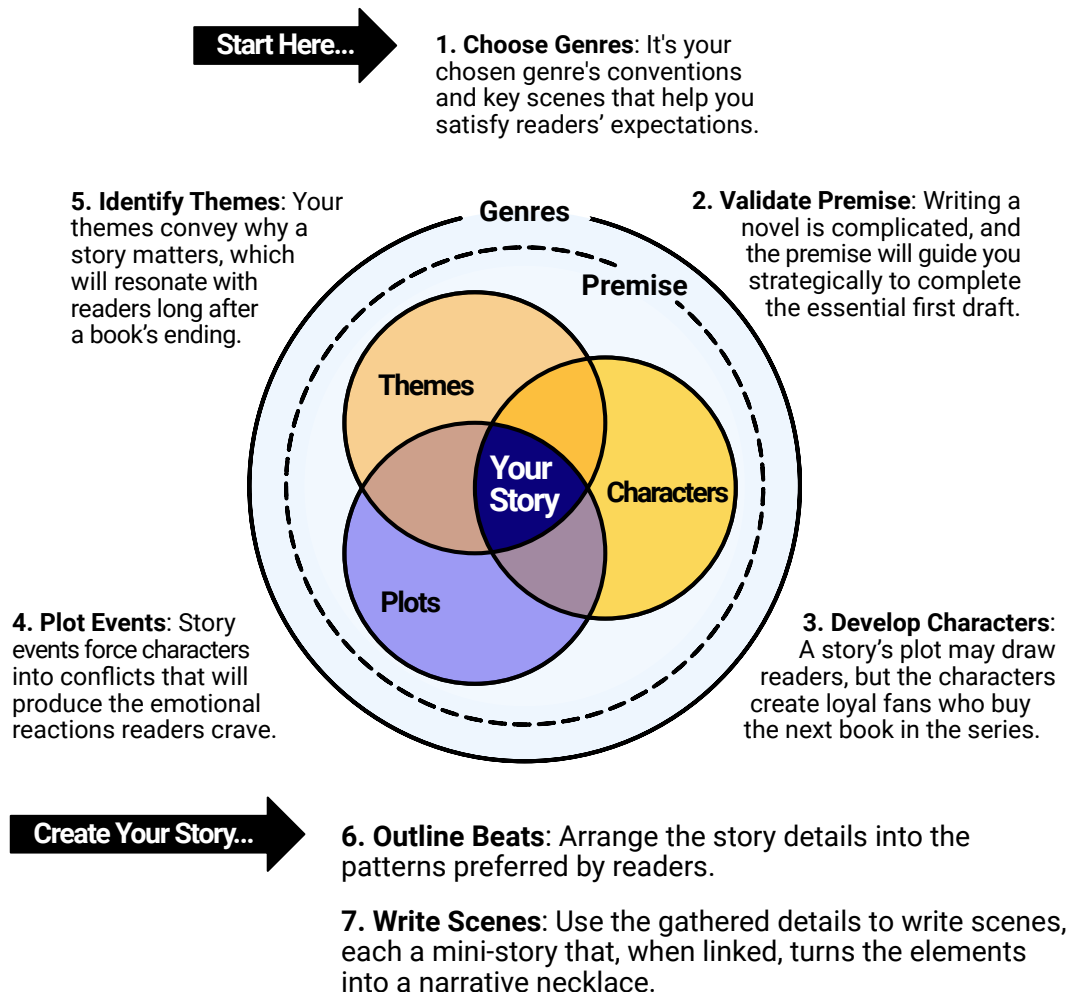


**Figure 4 - The Trellis Method Lens Intersection**



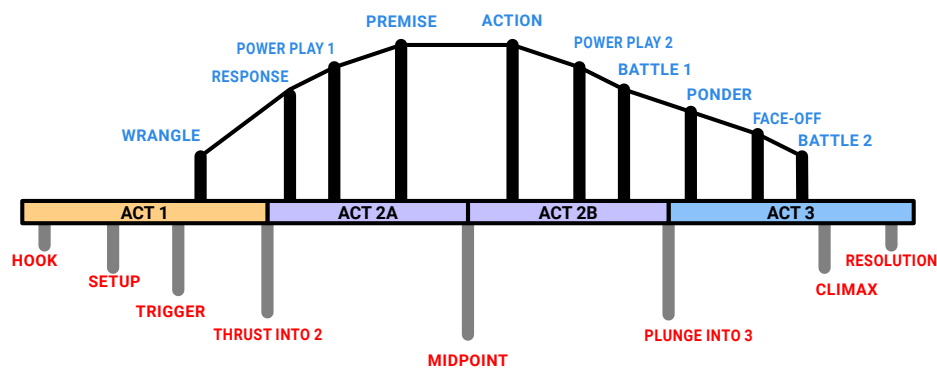
## Figure 5 - The Trellis Method Phase I: Plan

Writers approach tasks differently, and that's why the *process* of gathering and applying story details is divided into separate workbooks and worksheets.



## Figure 6 - The Trellis Method Phase II: Outline

The Trellis Method uses three writing tools to bridge the gap between recording story ideas and creating actual scenes. The worksheet prompts for the details you'll use to write content.



1. **Story Spine:** This writing tool uses an intuitive format to build a Story Spine, and like the supporting piers of a bridge, the Story Spine allows you to envision the entire story.
2. **Story Body:** Based on prompts, you'll build the Story Body on the foundation of the Story Spine, creating a HOOK-to-RESOLUTION synopsis of your entire narrative.
3. **Story Beats:** If pleased with the Story Body synopsis, the Story Beats prompt you to create detailed notes designed to help you write engaging scenes with confidence.

## Figure 7 - The Trellis Method Phase III: Write

The audience reads a book from beginning to end, but writers don't work that way.

Characters take on lives of their own. Scenes dance randomly through the writer's mind. Plot insights come at unexpected moments, and not in a linear order.

Writers order scene flow and key details based on their notes from Story Beats.

<p><b>Framework Details:</b> Track the story and scene flow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key Event (Plot/Subplot)</li> <li>• Genres (Conventions, Key Scene)</li> <li>• Scene Purpose (Story Beats)</li> <li>• Scene Structure (Hook, Setup, Trigger, Emotions, Ponder, Expectation, Choice, Climax)</li> <li>• Scene Goal &amp; Obstacle</li> <li>• Point of View</li> </ul>	<p><b>Scene Details:</b> Provide the details from your Story Beats notes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date &amp; Time (Start/End)</li> <li>• Turning Point</li> <li>• Stakes</li> <li>• Intensity</li> <li>• Theme (Introduced/Reinforced)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Character Details:</b> Provide the character details.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want (Goal)</li> <li>• Need (Lesson)</li> <li>• Try/Fail Cycle</li> <li>• Appearance</li> <li>• Senses (See, Hear, Touch, Smell, Taste)</li> <li>• Names (On-stage/Off-stage)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Additional Details:</b> Supply additional details that support the scene.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clues, Red Herrings, Character Misdirection, Writer Misdirection</li> <li>• Foreshadowing (Switch Opened/Closed)</li> <li>• Questions (Switch Opened/Closed)</li> <li>• Symbols, Motifs, &amp; Objects</li> <li>• Setting &amp; Weather</li> <li>• Plot &amp; Subplots</li> </ul>

**Writing Principle:** Writers who stay focused on giving their target audience what they want are more likely to write a book readers will love.

## Figure 8 - The Trellis Method Checklist

### Phase I: Plan.

- ☐ Choose your **genres**.
- ☐ Define conventions & key scenes for each **genre**.
- ☐ Create the story **premise** (GO/NO GO Decision #1)
- ☐ Validate your story **premise**.
- ☐ Develop dynamic **characters** for essential roles.
- ☐ Define beginning to end **character** transformation.
- ☐ Plan your main **plot**.
- ☐ Create supporting **subplots** & define cross-overs.

### Phase II: Outline.

- ☐ Complete the **Story Spine** worksheet.
- ☐ Make the **Story Spine** GO/NO GO decision #2.
- ☐ Complete the **Story Body** worksheet.
- ☐ Make the **Story Body** GO/NO GO decision #3.
- ☐ Complete the **Story Beats** worksheet.
- ☐ Revisit and update Phase I: Prepare as needed.
- ☐ Make the **Story Body** GO/NO GO decision #4.

### Phase III: Write.

- ☐ Complete the worksheet for each **scene**.
- ☐ Track **scene** details in spreadsheet or writing app.
- ☐ Compare **scenes** to Story Beats.
- ☐ Rewrite & rearrange **scenes** to achieve story flow.
- ☐ Evaluate each **scene** for details (e.g., senses).
- ☐ Assess & update **scenes** until satisfied with story.
- ☐ Read story to ensure **scenes** connect like a chain.
- ☐ Adjust **scenes** to speed up/slow down pacing.
- ☐ Adjust **scenes** to increase/decrease intensity.
- ☐ Rearrange **scenes** to tell the best story.
- ☐ Insert/delete **scenes** for the greatest impact.
- ☐ Inspect **scenes** for consistent point of view.

### Next Steps: After you finish your novel...

- ☐ Edit your work (e.g., ProWritingAid/Hired Editor).
- ☐ Arrange for beta readers to critique your work.
- ☐ Establish a return date for beta reader feedback.
- ☐ Determine which suggestions to accept.
- ☐ Update the manuscript.
- ☐ Repeat the edits (e.g., ProWritingAid /Hired Editor).
- ☐ Choose publishing method (e.g., self; traditional).
- ☐ Make sure your book is ready for release!
- ☐ Follow a book-launch process & schedule.
- ☐ Promote your book (e.g., guest posts; ads).
- ☐ Write your next book, repeating Phases I-III.

**Note:** The Trellis Method guides like a roadmap, but feel free to detour as needed.