


**Writing
Terms**



Glossary



Grant P. Ferguson
WritingForEternity.com

The Trellis Method

Writing Terms Glossary

Grant P. Ferguson



Published by Writing For Eternity Media, 2026

WritingForEternity.com

Copyright © 2026 by Grant P. Ferguson.

While every precaution has been taken in preparing this book, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information in this book. Links in the book that lead to referenced websites may change without notice, and the publisher assumes no responsibility for the content, errors, or omissions, or for damages that may result if you visit those sites.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any form whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations in critical articles or reviews.

Created and produced in the United States of America.

For more information, visit: <https://writingforeternity.com/>

Book design by Grant P. Ferguson

Cover design by Grant P. Ferguson

Writing for Eternity Edition: April 2026

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Writing Terms Glossary.....	ii
◆ Plus Minus Signs ◆	1
◆ A ◆	1
◆ B ◆	3
◆ C ◆	6
◆ D ◆	12
◆ E ◆	12
◆ F ◆	15
◆ G ◆	18
◆ H ◆	18
◆ I ◆	20
◆ J ◆	22
◆ K ◆	22
◆ L ◆	23
◆ M ◆	25
◆ N ◆	28
◆ O ◆	29
◆ P ◆	31
◆ Q ◆	38
◆ R ◆	39
◆ S ◆	40
◆ T ◆	57
◆ U ◆	62
◆ V ◆	63
◆ W ◆	64
◆ X ◆	65
◆ Y ◆	65
◆ Z ◆	65

INTRODUCTION:

Writing Terms Glossary

Glossary Purpose

Writers benefit from the principles found in this glossary of writing terms. For example:

- Commercially viable novels share common traits that fulfill reader expectations, but there are many ways to write a story.
- Structure supports fully developed characters, properly designed plots, and inspirational themes.
- A story structure adopted and adapted for your chosen genre is more important than what others recommend.
- Genres help you identify and fulfill key scenes, conventions, and tropes.
- Structures and literary devices that work for one writer may not work for you; thus, adopt and adapt a creative process that aligns with your goals.
- The terms and definitions used by writers and teachers vary; therefore, focus on common principles of writing, not rules.
- The Trellis Method is a writing system that helps you use these principles to write a book readers will love.

Glossary Use

This glossary is provided for your use under these conditions:

- The notes were inspired by many sources, and unfortunately, many of the attributions to the originals were lost over time.
- You may disagree with these notes, and that's okay. Do what's right for you and your work of fiction.
- If you find something is missing, a note contains an error, or copyrighted material was inadvertently included, please let us know.

◆ *Plus Minus Signs* ◆

(+/-):

Popularized by Robert McKee (the author of *Story*), the paired plus or minus signs before and after the slash represent the change in emotional value (positive or negative) by the end of a scene.

(><):

The opposed greater-than and lesser-than signs represent the core point of conflict of who opposes whom (or what) within a scene. This requires knowing who will be in each scene and what each person wants.

◆ *A* ◆

All-Is-Lost:

The chief protagonist's lowest point in the story (aka Moment of Despair), typically occurring at the point of no return in the plunge from Act 2 into Act 3. The chief protagonist feels a

profound sense of looming physical, professional, or psychological death (i.e., Whiff of Death).

Alpha Reader:

This individual is aware that the novel's draft contains errors and may require more development, but agrees to review 'as is' and provide feedback to the author.

Anxiety:

The worry about something that may not present a real risk, but creates a sense of dread that also causes the body to prepare for action. In contrast, fear is the emotional reaction to danger, leading to the physical response of "fight" or "flight."

ARC:

An acronym for Advance Review Copy, a final copy that goes to reviewers before publishing the book.

Arc (Character or Plot):

The arc most often refers to the main character's change (transformation) from the beginning of the story to the end.

Likewise, arc can refer to the change of plot events from the story's start to finish.

ASIN:

The acronym for Amazon Standard Identification Number, which is shown within the book and also on the book's description on the Amazon sales page. This is a proprietary number assigned by Amazon when the writer does not provide an ISBN. (See: ISBN)

Audience:

(See: Target Readers)

◆ *B* ◆

Backstory:

The chief protagonist's past, including whoever and whatever, that shaped the character's positive and negative traits.

Bag of Troubles:

A list of challenges and complications the main character faces, such as personal flaws, bad guys, and competitors. The list complicates the lives of not only the main character but also those around him or her. The SETUP interweaves the list into the scenes, and as the story unfolds, complicates lives and raises the stakes. (See: Story Beats)

Beats (Scene and Sequel Sequence):

A beat is the action within a scene that moves the story forward and makes the reader wonder what will happen next. Note: Beats take place within sentences, paragraphs, scenes, and scene sequences. (See: Scene Beats)

Beats (Story Beats Sequence of Scenes):

Scenes connected into a sequence to support one of the Story Beats (e.g., SETUP in the Story Beats). (See: Story Beats)

Beats (Story): The order the narrative unfolds within a defined framework (e.g., Story Beats), which advances the story and satisfies reader expectations. (See: Story Beats)

Best Hero:

(See: Hero)

Best Villain:

(See: Villain)

Beta Reader:

An individual who reads an edited manuscript to evaluate the story and provides feedback to the author.

Betrayer:

This is a trusted person in the story who betrays the main character at the worst time. For example, this individual might befriend and help the main character for selfish reasons, but when that support no longer provides benefits, he or she becomes the betrayer. The betrayer is also a character who may give one side of the philosophical theme while the main character takes the other. In Star Wars, Han Solo presented reasons for pursuing a selfish goal while Luke Skywalker engaged in a selfless act.

Board (Storyboard):

Refers to the digital and hand-written index cards or sticky notes used to outline your story, typically formatted into Act 1, Act 2A, Act 2B, and Act 3 based on structured beats. (See: Story Beats)

Button:

This is the line at the end of a scene or chapter. It's often an ironic comment, a humorous vent, or something of deep meaning. This clever line keeps readers turning pages. (See: Narrative Drive)



Career:

(See: Job)

Case within a Case:

In a murder mystery (aka Whydunit or Whodunit), a long-buried crime, yet unresolved case comes to light. While pursuing the current murder, details of the original crime emerge, and the chief protagonist solves both crimes.

Change:

The transformation (i.e., change) arc of a character from the outset to the end of a story. (See: Transformation)

Changed World:

Act 3's Changed World is a derivation of Act 1's Stable World and Act 2's Unstable World. (See: Stable World; Unstable World)

Character Arc:

(See: Arc (Character or Plot))

Characters:

The universe of people populating novels ranges from realistic to fantasy characters, and they show an array of traits and behaviors. In The Trellis Method's Phase I: Plan, writers select the best characters to tell the story and create backstories that shape their thoughts, choices, words, and actions.

CLIMAX:

The scene concludes with the chief protagonist achieving positive or negative results tied to both the Story Goal and the individual's Need: win/win, win/lose, lose/win, or lose/lose. The CLIMAX often begins with the chief protagonist's improvised plan, taking on the villain one last time with renewed strength. After the TRIGGER event in Act 1, the chief protagonist resisted engagement. But at the CLIMAX in Act 3, the chief protagonist commits to doing whatever it takes to defeat the chief antagonist. (See: Story Beats)

Complication:

This term refers to the range of things that trouble the characters and hinder the story's problem resolution. (See: Bag of Troubles)

Concept:

A concept often refers to the basic idea for a novel. In contrast to the concept, a story's premise is the writer's development strategy that states the story in one sentence and combines the chief protagonist, plot, theme, symbol, event (i.e., the Story Problem) with a sense of the chief protagonist and story outcome (i.e., the

chief protagonist's change). Writers often phrase the concept as a what-if question (e.g., what if an innocent man died in a prison riot and the arresting officer died of grief because he couldn't overturn the conviction?). (See: Premise)

Concept with a Kicker:

By definition, the story's premise incorporates character, plot, theme, symbol, event, and the chief protagonist's change. Those elements include conflict and high stakes, plus the chief protagonist's want and need. It's the mix of these elements that turns the initial idea into a concept with a kicker. The long-format logline supports the concept with a kicker. (See: Logline)

Content Lens:

Refers to how The Trellis Method helps writers focus on all the story elements and details included in scenes. (See: The Trellis Method; Plot Lens; Scene Lens)

Conflict Purpose:

Stories engage readers at the intersection of four story elements:

1. **Conflict:** An opposing force that blocks the chief protagonist's attainment of the goal. Opposing forces include:
 - Character versus Character
 - Character versus Nature
 - Character versus Self
 - Character versus Society
 - Character versus Supernatural
 - Character versus Technology
2. **Stakes:** What's at stake spurs the chief protagonist's pursuit of a goal despite conflict.
3. **Want:** The chief protagonist's misbeliefs drive desire and behavior.
4. **Need:** The chief protagonist's past lies, fears, and misbeliefs block change.

Conventions:

Readers expect certain content within each genre. For example, in a cozy mystery, readers expect an amateur sleuth as the chief protagonist. (See: Key Scenes.)

Core Conflict:

The core conflict is the primary obstacle to resolving the Story Problem and achieving the Story Goal. The opposing force that blocks resolution varies based on genre and author's preferences (e.g., an individual, a group, a community, a set culture, the chief protagonist's Fatal Flaw).

Creative Fiction:

A true story well told exemplifies creative fiction, using the fiction writer's array of techniques, style, and elements to engage readers' emotions. For example:

- Conflict in your story could be an opposing force that frustrates the chief protagonist's efforts to accomplish the story goal, scene goal, or both. As the story unfolds, this conflict increases the chief protagonist's awareness of what he or she must learn (i.e., the "Need") before embracing change (i.e., the "transformation").
- Conflict influences tension, which occurs as readers expect more conflict.
- Suspense grows as the conflict remains unresolved, and readers wonder (e.g., what will happen next to the lead character?).
- Bottom line, a story without conflict is boring.

◆ *D* ◆

Date & Time:

Refers to the period referenced within a scene.

Deep Point of View:

To give readers a deeper experience, consider using Third-Person Limited, which is when an author sticks closely to one character but remains in the third person. This style, often referred to as deep point of view (aka deep POV), puts readers inside a character's thoughts, feelings, and sensations, deepening the experience. (See: Point of View (POV) > Third-Person Limited)

Dialogue:

The verbal communication between characters, influenced by the individuals' actions, body language, and thoughts.

◆ *E* ◆

Edits (Self-edits):

The self-editing process corrects content based on the standards of the chosen genre and the level of audience expectations. A professional edit can fix many issues, but unless you've hired a ghostwriter, the editor will not rewrite the story. A self-edit tightens loose structure, fleshes out underdeveloped characters, fills plot holes, clarifies themes, and corrects errors. Also, a self-edit can lower the potential cost of a professional edit.

Elevator Pitch:

An attention-grabbing summary used to gain support for your story. The term comes from the thirty seconds you have to talk on the ride up in an elevator.

Emotional Wound:

A past event that influences characters' thoughts, choices, speech, and actions. (See: Fatal Flaw)

Empathy:

Readers engage their emotions and change beliefs when they empathize with one or more characters in a story. Empathy

allows them to grasp and agree why they need to change an inner belief to get what they want. (See: Story Theme (External), Story Theme (Internal), and Story Theme (Philosophical))

Enneagram (Enneagram of Personality):

Describes personalities and behaviors based on nine types, serving as excellent resources to draw realistic reactions to events that drive emotions, choices, thoughts, speech, and actions. These personality types serve as foundations for creating characters who react in realistic ways, especially the devolving from healthy to unhealthy behaviors when faced with conflict and stress. (See: Characters)

ePub (File):

The acronym stands for electronic publication, an open format for eBooks that works on a wide range of digital devices.

Essay:

A non-fictional essay presents an idea, proposes an argument, expresses emotion, or starts debate, reflecting the author's observations and criticisms.

Experiential Learning:

Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience and is more narrowly defined as “learning through reflection on doing”. (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiential_learning)

Exposition (Expository):

These are the facts of the story shown entertainingly instead of as an information dump. Too much exposition can bore readers.

External Theme:

(See: Story Theme (External))

◆ F ◆

FACE-OFF (Single Scene):

The scene includes a face-off between the chief protagonist and primary opposing force, brought on by the main character’s prior choices. This turning point in the story forces the protagonist and antagonist to re-engage. This is not a fight, but sets up the upcoming BATTLE 2. (See: Story Beats)

False Defeat:

The sense of a false defeat, as the chief protagonist tries to resolve the Story Problem, typically set at the story's MIDPOINT, raises stakes and forces the chief protagonist to continue toward change (i.e., the story's Internal Theme). (See: Story Beats; Story Theme (Internal))

False Victory:

The sense of a false victory as the chief protagonist tries to resolve the Story Problem, typically set at the story's MIDPOINT, raising stakes and forcing the chief protagonist to continue toward change (i.e., the story's Internal Theme). (See: Story Beats; Story Theme (Internal))

Fatal Flaw:

The behaviors that result from the chief protagonist's emotional wound, serving as the internal obstacle that blocks the chief protagonist from resolving the Story Problem and fulfilling his or her want. (See: Emotional Wound; Want; Need)

Fear:

The emotional reaction to danger, leading to the physical response of “fight” or “flight.” In contrast, anxiety is worrying about something that may not present a real risk, but creates a sense of dread that also causes the body to prepare for action.

(See: Anxiety)

Flashback:

A flashback can show backstory while in the present, but if misused or too frequent, can interfere with the story’s continuity.

Foil Character:

The foil character’s traits differ from the chief protagonist’s, and because of these differences, this person highlights the chief protagonist’s positive and negative qualities. Because their traits are opposite, they clash, create conflicts, and build tension. As to the origin of the term “foil character,” think of how tin foil placed behind a gemstone reflects both perfections and imperfections.

(See: Characters; Hero Character; Villain Character)

Foreshadowing:

The writer provides “hints” of what may happen later in the scene, chapter, or novel. If readers care about what may happen to someone or something, that results in tension. Not releasing that tension for longer periods (i.e., stretching out that tension) holds readers in suspense. (See: Suspense)



Genre (Genre Tone):

Refers to a category of a story understood by readers (e.g., mystery), and can also refer to a subcategory of a story (e.g., cozy mystery).

Genre Themes:

The genre theme serves to satisfy readers’ pre-established expectations tied to plot. For example, in a murder mystery, the genre theme revolves around justice and injustice. (See: Story Theme (External))



Head Hopping:

This term refers to a writer using two or more points of view within a single scene. In principle, only one point of view should take place in a scene because head-hopping can cause confusion and frustrate readers. (See: Point of View (POV))

Helper Character:

The person who helps the chief protagonist learn the Story Theme (Internal), often serving in the role of love interest, sidekick, or mentor. (See: Characters)

Hero Character (Chief Protagonist):

The fully developed character with a backstory, whom the writer perceives is the best individual for the role of the chief protagonist. Not perfect by any measure, but just the right person to solve the Story Problem and achieve the Story Goal. (See: Characters; Foil Character; Villain Character)

Hitchcock Formula:

Alfred Hitchcock's goal was to put a character the audience cares about in an uncertain situation that has the power to change

something essential to the character's goals or desires, and that character cannot opt out of the situation. Then the famous director would delay the expected result, creating a decided combination of tension and suspense.



Iconic Scene:

(See: Touchstone Scene)

Idea (Story Idea):

(See: Concept)

Infographics (Graphics, Visuals):

Visual aids that reinforce essential writing lessons.

Internal Theme:

(See: Story Theme (Internal))

Irony:

The term describes situations that are strange or funny because things happen that seem to be the opposite of what you expected. (See: Sarcasm; Satire) *Note: The emphasis is on “opposite” because if an expectation is black, then an ironic outcome would be white, not off-white or gray.*

- **Verbal irony** is when a character says something that differs from what they really mean or how they really feel. If the intent of the irony is to mock, we know it as sarcasm. Socratic irony is a type of verbal irony where a person feigns ignorance in order to entice someone else to make claims that can then be argued.
- **Situational irony** occurs when there is a difference between what we expect to happen and what actually happens. For example, a fire station burning down is a case of situational irony.
- **Dramatic irony** is when the audience knows more than the characters. The characters’ actions have a different meaning for them than they do for the audience, which creates tension and suspense. When used in tragedies, dramatic irony becomes “tragic irony.”

ISBN:

The acronym stands for the International Standard Book Number, a 10 or 13 digit number used to identify a book. (See: ASIN)

◆ *J* ◆

Job:

A paid position of employment that often influences story events. A character may hold a job and not consider it either a career (i.e., long-term employment) or a vocation (i.e., a calling).

◆ *K* ◆

KDP:

The abbreviation for Kindle Direct Publishing, Amazon's method of self-publishing books.

Key Question:

The core question raised by the genre. For example, in a mystery, will the sleuth bring the criminal to justice? (See: Open Switch; Narrative Drive)

Key Scenes (aka Obligatory Scenes):

A key scene is the specific function fulfilled by certain scenes expected by readers, typically based on their chosen genres and a lifetime of consuming TV shows, films, and books. For example, a key scene in the murder mystery genre is when someone discovers the victim. (See: Genres; Scene and Sequel Sequence; Story Beats)



Lemon Seed:

A term coined in the movie industry, a lemon seed refers to something new introduced at the midpoint that suggests a faster pace for the last half of the story. According to Blake Snyder, picture a slippery lemon seed between your thumb and index

finger being slowly squeezed until it squirts out at the CLIMAX.
(See: Story Beats)

Lie:

Within the context of story structure, the lie is a closely held belief that runs counter to the truth. The Internal Theme of a story based on a universal life lesson is the assumed truth. The opposite of truth is the lie (i.e., false belief), which influences a character's perspective, leading to the adoption of misbeliefs that guide that person's thoughts, choices, speech, and actions. (See: Truth; Story Theme (External, Internal, Philosophical))

Lightbulb Moment:

The point in the PONDER sequence of scenes when the main character reflects on and then recognizes what the character must do to overcome the Fatal Flaw. (See: Story Beats; Fatal Flaw)

Literary Devices:

An array of literary devices helps readers to appreciate, interpret, and analyze a work, and includes all the techniques, styles, and strategies an author uses to enhance their writing. Writers use

literary devices in their stories to convey messages in ways that encourage readers to understand and engage with the narrative.

Logline:

A one-to-two-sentence logline enables someone to envision the entire story, providing the emotional wording that grabs attention and makes people want to know more. The Logline builds on the Premise, which incorporates character, plot, theme, symbol, event, and the chief protagonist's change. Those elements include conflict and high stakes, plus the chief protagonist's want and need. (See: Premise; Character, Plot (Main and Sub); Story Theme (External, Internal, Philosophical); Elevator Pitch)

◆ *M* ◆

MacGuffin:

The item or person the villain wants. For example, the MacGuffin in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is the Ark of the Covenant.

Major Turns:

The THRUST INTO 2, the MIDPOINT, and the PLUNGE INTO 3 are major turns in a novel essential to satisfying readers. (See: Story Beats; Story Spine; Elevator Pitch)

Metaphor:

A figure of speech that compares one thing to another by saying “thing #1 is thing #2.” In contrast, a simile compares by saying “thing #1 is like thing #2.” (See: Simile)

MIDPOINT:

In the middle of most novels and movies, there is a scene that shows the chief protagonist’s status (winning or losing), higher stakes, focus switch (Want to Need), and a dilemma decision (emphasizes the story’s External Theme, Internal Theme, or Philosophical Theme). (See: Story Beats: Story Theme (External, Internal, Philosophical))

Mirror Moment:

In James Scott Bell’s books, *Write Your Novel from the Middle*, and *Plotman to the Rescue*, he refers to how in the middle of

novels, the lead character looks inward at self, as if he or she is looking into a mirror. That mirror can reflect a moral failing that raises doubt whether the chief protagonist can overcome it . The protagonist may think the odds are too great to avoid his or her imminent physical, professional, or psychological death. The Mirror Moment is the chief protagonist's tipping point, emphasizing the change that's taking place between Act 1 and 2. (See: Story Beats; MIDPOINT)

Misbelief:

Past events that create an Emotional Wound within a character also lead to adopting a Lie, and developing a viewpoint based on an untruth. That “misbelief” influences a person's thoughts, choices, speech, and actions. (See: Emotional Wound; Lie; Truth)

Misdirection:

The intentional deflection of attention for the purpose of disguise and misdirection is a vital literary device. To plant and disguise a clue so the reader doesn't realize its importance takes time and finesse. The writer, a character, or both can create misdirection.

Moral Choice Question:

This question places an open switch in the reader's mind: "How far will the chief protagonist go to defeat the villain and achieve a goal?" (See: Narrative Drive; Open Switch)

mobi (File):

A prior eBook format (now deprecated), proprietary to Amazon and used with Kindle devices and apps. (See: KDP)

Motif:

Motifs are recurring symbols that appear throughout the story. Symbols can include animals, people, plants, settings, themes, and more. Specific things within a setting (e.g., a plant or a landscape feature) are often used to symbolize the theme. (See: Symbol; Objects)

Motive:

The reason someone uses to justify an action. For example, justifying a crime based on lust, loathing, loot, or love.



Narrative Drive (aka Profluence in Writing):

A line within a scene or chapter deposits a question in the minds of readers: what happens next? That question encourages the audience to keep turning pages for the answer. (See: Button; Open Switch)

Need (Character):

The Need is what the chief protagonist must learn (e.g., Story Theme (Internal)) to resolve the Story Problem and achieve Story Goal. In the first half of the story, the chief protagonist's focus is on Want, but from MIDPOINT on, the chief protagonist's focus switches to Need (i.e., change required). (See: Story Theme (Internal); Story Beats; MIDPOINT)



Objects:

An object is any physical thing that, when emphasized within a story, adds depth. For example, in the James Bond films, the character Q emphasizes to 007 the importance of a specialized weapon (i.e., an object). Later in the story, that object makes the differences between life and death. (See: Q-Factor)

Obligatory Scenes:

(See: Key Scene)

Occupation:

(See: Job.)

odt (File):

The acronym represents the OpenDocument text file used with the OpenOffice program.

On the Nose:

In films and books, “on the nose” refers to dialogue and scenes perceived as unimaginative, overly literal, or lacking nuance.

Open Switch:

Also known as a dramatic or key question, early in Act 1, the events and characters create a question in the reader's mind that compels them to keep turning pages until answered by the story's end. (See: Narrative Drive)

◆ *P* ◆

Pacing:

The perceived speed at which the story unfolds, typically increasing until the CLIMAX and slowing down for the RESOLUTION at the end. (See: Story Beats; Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Paradox:

A paradox is a statement that contradicts itself, but may also contain a kernel of truth. Paradox is closely related to oxymoron, in which two words seem contradictory but are somehow true. A literary paradox is a contradiction that resolves to reveal a deeper meaning behind the contradiction, and is a common literary device.

PDF (PDF File):

The Portable Document Format for files, used for publishing and exchanging a wide range of texts.

Pet-the-dog Moment:

Something happens within an early SETUP scene that shows the chief protagonist's human side and endears this character to readers. A save-the-cat moment fulfills a similar purpose. (See: Genre; Story Beats)

Philosophical Theme:

(See: Story Theme (Philosophical))

Plot (Main and Sub):

The main plot is a thread of crucial events that comprise the narrative of what occurs within the story, forcing characters into conflict. Likewise, a subplot interjects more events and characters, amplifying the main plot. (See: Genre; Story Beats)

Note: As per Jami Gold (jamigold.com):

- **Plot-Focused:** A balanced plot-focused story still includes a major character arc, but the character's internal change doesn't determine the direction or essence of the story as much as the plot does. In a heavily plot-focused story, the character's internal/emotional journey (if it exists at all) is minor and might be triggered by a subplot rather than be tied to the main plot.

- **Character-Focused:** A balanced character-focused story still has a strong plot arc, but the essence of the story lies more in the character's choices with those events and dilemmas. In a heavily character-focused story, plot events might exist just enough to help reveal the character's issues and/or force them to change.
- **Plot Drivers:** Do you think more about the cool plot events... or about the character's emotional struggles? Do you write about what happens... or how events affect the characters? Which could you change more easily without affecting the essence of your story: the character's choices and growth... or the plot events that cause your character's struggle?

Plot Device:

It is any technique in a narrative used to move the plot forward. For example, in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the hero hunts for the Holy Grail, and that search moves the plot forward. A poorly executed or clichéd plot device, such as a misplaced plot twist, can confuse and frustrate readers.

Plot Events:

Refers to what happens in the story that forces characters into conflict, generating the emotions readers crave.

Plot Genre:

The chosen genre sets up reader expectations for key scenes, conventions, and tropes within the plot. (See: Genre)

Plot Lens:

Refers to how the Trellis Method writing system helps writers focus on, enhance, and track critical plot events.

PLUNGE INTO 3:

The point of no return where the chief protagonist plunges into Act 3. (See: Story Beats)

POD (Print on Demand):

The acronym stands for Print on Demand, which produces a printed book only when someone orders a copy, eliminating inventories.

Point of View (POV):

The perspective of the story's narrative voice. To some extent, genres and reader expectations influence the choice of POV.

First Person Singular: Refers to the narrator as “I” and is the most common form of first-person POV, where a single person is the storyteller.

- **First Person Plural:** Refers to the narrator as “we” and a group of people narrate as if they were one person.
- **Second Person:** Refers to the narrator as “you” and shows your actions or who you are, typically used in short stories where the reader becomes the main character.
- **Third-Person Limited:** Refers to the narrator as “he” or “she” or by the “character’s name.” The view is over the character’s shoulder or through the person’s thoughts, especially useful in mysteries and thrillers. Note: To give readers a deeper experience (aka Deep POV), the Third-Person Limited POV allows the author to put readers inside a character’s thoughts, feelings, and sensations. (See: Deep Point of View)
- **Third-Person Omniscient:** Refers to the narrator as “he” or “she” and having the powers of God, enabling the point of view to comment on what has, is, or will happen in the story and delve into any character’s perspective or thoughts, time,

place, or setting and information unavailable to other characters.

PONDER (Sequence of Scenes):

In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist ponders his prior choices, goal dedication, self-worth, and personal abilities. The scenes show the chief protagonist processing everything that has happened so far. At the end of the sequence, the chief protagonist knows how (but has not acted) to overcome the personal flaw and the villain's obstacles. (See: Story Beats; Fatal Flaw)

Poster:

Within the story structure, the PREMISE scene sequence gives readers what they expect—it's what the story is about—much like a colorful poster pinpoints what viewers can expect from a film. A poster gets their attention, conveys intrigue, and registers at a primal level (e.g., life, death, hunger, love, family). The story's title and logline should serve as the poster for a novel. (See: Story Beats; Logline; Premise)

POWER PLAY 1 (Single Scene):

This scene shows the bad guy's power, provides clues, and establishes the core conflict, and it represents a small but important turning point in the story that reminds readers of the villain's ability to thwart the chief protagonist's goal. (See: Story Beats)

POWER PLAY 2 (Single Scene):

This scene hints at what is coming when the chief protagonist plunges into Act 3, emphasizing the ever-increasing stakes. This scene focuses on the Moral Choice question: How far will the chief protagonist go to defeat the villain and achieve a goal? (See: Story Beats; PLUNGE INTO 3; Moral Choice Question)

Premise (Story Premise):

The premise gives a story's big picture and the writer's development strategy. The premise is your story stated in one sentence, combining character, plot, theme, symbol, event (i.e., the Story Problem), and a sense of the chief protagonist's and story's outcome (i.e., the chief protagonist's change). (See: Logline; Poster)

PREMISE (Sequence of Scenes):

Sometimes referred to as the “Promise of the Premise,” as one of the Story Beats, this sequence of scenes fulfills the novel’s story premise, giving readers the events and emotions they crave. The PREMISE beat delivers on the book cover’s promise and increases the intensity of events until the MIDPOINT. In the thick of things, the chief protagonist either loves or hates the action. (See: Story Beats; Premise)

Profluence in Writing (Narrative Drive):

A line within a scene or chapter deposits a question in the minds of readers: what happens next? That question encourages the audience to keep turning pages for the answer. (See: Button; Open Switch)

Publishing (Traditional):

Often referred to as “traditional publishing,” the industry has shrunk as self-publishing continues to expand. (See: Self-publishing)



Q-Factor:

The “Q-Factor” is a term coined by James Scott Bell, and it refers to a person, place, or thing mentioned within a scene that will become essential to the chief protagonist’s outcome in the CLIMAX. Imagine the character Q in a James Bond film giving 007 an invention that he’ll use later to defeat the villain. That device serves as an example of the Q-Factor. The Q-Factor can be a person, a place, or an invention.



Relationships:

The interactions between characters serve as the primary source of conflict, and readers often cite these relationships as the most interesting aspect of a story. The relationships draw in readers and hold their attention.

RESPONSE (Sequence of Scenes):

In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist responds to the Unstable World, and meets the character who will help the chief protagonist learn the Story Theme (Internal). The new character

can be a co-protagonist, a love interest, a nemesis, a mentor, a family member, or a friend. Whoever fills this role has a story that will provide a departure from the chief protagonist's story. (See: Story Beats; Story Theme (Internal))

Road Apple:

The road apple is a story event that throws a wrench into the chief protagonist's plans, making it harder for the lead to fulfill their want, and it can occur anywhere in the narrative. (See: Conflict)

Role:

The parts characters play within the story.

◆ S ◆

Sarcasm:

As with satire, sarcasm depends on the listener or reader to be in on the joke. Sarcasm is insincere speech. For example, your mom asks if you're excited to clean the kitchen and you say, "Yeah, right," when you mean "Heck no." To distinguish irony from satire and sarcasm, keep in mind that irony pertains to situations

and satire and sarcasm are forms of expression. People make satire and sarcasm happen, but irony is just there. (See: Irony; Satire)

Satire:

The term means making fun of people by imitating them in ways that expose their stupidity or flaws. (See: Sarcasm; Irony)

Save the Cat Moment:

Something happens within an early SETUP scene that shows the chief protagonist's human side and endears this character to readers. A Pet the Dog moment fulfills a similar purpose. (See: Pet the Dog)

Scene:

A single scene groups the action and people into a logical order to advance the story. (See: Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Scene Beats:

These beats create the flow of a well-paced short story with just the right amount of emotional intensity, and each one ending

with a page-turning connection to the next scene. (See: Scene and Sequel Sequence; Story Beats)

Scene Framework:

(See: Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Scene Lens:

Refers to how a writing system like The Trellis Method helps writers focus on what happens within a scene. (See: Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Scene and Sequel Sequence:

Within each scene are Scene Beats. The Scene Beats create the flow of a well-paced short story with just the right amount of emotional intensity, and each one ending with a page-turning connection to the next scene. Writers attain this goal with 4 action beats and 4 reaction beats, referred to as the Scene and Sequel Sequence. Note: Story Beats are labeled in CAPS (e.g., HOOK) to differentiate from Scene Beats (e.g., Hook).

- **Hook (Action):** The Hook snags readers' interest by showing action, foreshadowing trouble, grabbing attention with dialogue, or raising a question.

- **Setup (Action):** The Setup establishes the characters and location, and sets up the potential for conflict — an obstacle to achieving the scene's goal.
- **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.
- **Emotions (Reaction):** The character's reaction to the event conveys Emotions, the essence of why readers buy books and become a loyal fan of an author.
- **Ponder (Reaction):** The protagonist Ponders prior choices and actions that led up to the event, increasing the tension and suspense of the scene.
- **Expectations (Reaction):** The character's moment of reflection sets an Expectation of what the individual could do to progress toward the scene's goal.
- **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.
- **Climax (Action):** The character takes action, and the scene's Climax sets up the next-sequence goal: ends with a cliffhanger; redirects with a revelation; presents a setback;

reveals a secret or a lie; teases with a question; or creates a plot twist.

Scene Sequence:

A scene sequence is a logical grouping of scenes to form one of the Story Beats. For example, a sequence of scenes that form the SETUP beat. (See: Story Beats)

Scene Sequencing:

The ordering of scenes to enhance a story's pacing and ending. (See: Story Beats; Genre)

Seed of Tension:

A denial of an expected or desired action in the POWER PLAY 1 scene embeds a detail worth growing into significant tension in a later scene. (See: Tension; Suspense)

Secrets:

Hidden truths often generate dramatic turns in stories, resulting in unique plot twists. (See: Lie; Truth; Open Switch; Twists)

Self-edits:

(See: Edits)

Senses:

Refers to what the point of view character can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. Some authors include intuition.

Set Pieces:

A term coined by the film industry, the expression refers to the stand-alone action scenes that help fulfill the premise of the movie. In a novel, set pieces satisfy readers' expectations established by the book's back-cover synopsis.

Settings (Setting & Weather):

The right locations in a story enhance the mood and tone, taking on qualities akin to essential characters. Like several cast members, you can have many settings and each fulfills a vital role in the story. These settings can deepen every scene, help portray the story's cast, deliver and enrich the backstory, convey emotions, build tension, and provide a unique reader experience. Weather is often used to influence the mood of the scene.

SETUP:

The main character's world needs to be established in Act 1. The scene sequence reveals what is or has been happening at home, at work, and at play. What goes into individual scenes varies based on the story's premise and genre. (See: Story Beats; Genre)

Shard of Glass:

The psychological irritant (real or imagined blind spot or flaw) embedded in the chief protagonist's emotional wound that prevents healing. Writers decide what will remove the shard of glass to promote psychological healing, making way for the character to accept change (i.e., the transformation). (See: Character; Fatal Flaw; Lie; Need; Truth; Want)

Simile:

A figure of speech that compares one thing to another by saying "thing #1 is like thing #2" (e.g., brave as a lion, crazy like a fox). In contrast, a metaphor compares by saying, "thing #1 is thing #2." (See: Metaphor)

Stable World:

The chief protagonist's status quo environment in Act 1. (See: Unstable World; Changed World)

Stakes:

The term refers to whatever motivates the chief protagonist to continue pursuing a goal despite insurmountable external, internal, and psychological obstacles. The term “stakes are raised” refers to how the complications in the story continue to drive the main character forward while increasing the tension. At MIDPOINT, the rising stakes give the main character a new challenge that drives the plot to the CLIMAX. (See: Story Beats)

Stasis:

Denotes stability or inactivity without noteworthy change. Typically used to describe people and worlds before a significant event. (See: Stable World)

Story:

The definition varies for a story. For example:

- According to Lisa Cron, “Stories are about how readers navigate the difference between what they think will happen, and what actually happens.”

- Jessica Brody’s description of story: “Every character in every great story—regardless of length, medium, or genre—has not one journey to complete but two. An external journey and an internal journey. And those journeys must be intricately linked. The external journey is the one that the character physically takes, while the internal journey is the transformation (i.e., change) that occurs because of that physical journey. And it’s that internal journey that so much of us forget about or neglect or simply don’t put enough effort into developing. But it’s also the journey that matters and makes your story matter.”

Story Beats:

Based on the common elements of popular structures, the Story Beats divide the narrative into eighteen beats comprising single scenes and scene sequences. The Story Beats (labeled in CAPS) are suitable for use with several genres, including fantasies, mysteries, romances, and thrillers:

- **HOOK (0%-1% — Single Scene):** The first scene introduces essential aspects of the story and grabs readers with an intense need to know what happens next.

- **SETUP (1%-12% — Sequence of Scenes):** This sequence of scenes in the stable world establishes the characters, their wants, the stakes, story theme, and the need for change.
- **TRIGGER (12% — Single Scene):** Halfway through Act 1, a major event triggers the disruption of the chief protagonist's stable world, stopping the character from continuing as before.
- **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.
- **THRUST INTO 2 (25% — Single Scene):** In this scene, the chief protagonist acts on the choices made in the WRANGLE sequence, thrusting the character into an unstable world.
- **RESPONSE (25%-37% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist responds to the unstable world, and meets who will help him learn the theme.
- **POWER PLAY 1 (37% — Single Scene):** This scene shows the chief antagonist's power, provides clues, and establishes the core conflict.

- **PREMISE (37%-50% — Sequence of Scenes):** This sequence of scenes fulfills the novel's premise, giving readers the events and emotions they crave.
- **MIDPOINT (50% — Single Scene/Short Scene Sequence):** This scene shows the chief protagonist's status (i.e., winning or losing), increases the stakes, and gives the protagonist insight, shifting the focus from want to need.
- **ACTION (50%-62% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist takes action based on discovery, changing the character's trajectory (i.e., up or down).
- **POWER PLAY 2 (62% — Single Scene):** This scene hints at what is coming when the chief protagonist PLUNGES INTO 3, emphasizing the ever-increasing stakes.
- **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.
- **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 looming sense of physical, professional, or psychological death). It's this character's lowest point in the story. It's like that moment when a caterpillar wraps itself in a cocoon.

- **PONDER (75%-88% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist ponders prior choices, goal dedication, self-worth, and personal abilities.
- **FACE-OFF (88% — Single Scene):** The scene includes a face-off between the chief protagonist and the chief antagonist, brought on by the main character's prior choices.
- **BATTLE 2 (88%-98% — Sequence of Scenes):** In this sequence of scenes, the chief protagonist and the chief antagonist fight intensely, knowing only one will survive the second battle. It's this battle that the chief protagonist must go through, just like a butterfly must struggle to emerge from the cocoon.
- **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, resulting in a win/win, win/lose, lose/win, or lose/lose.
- **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.

Note: The percentages shown represent an approximation of where the Story Beats fall within popular novels.

Story Body:

Based on the Story Spine, this writing tool is used to tell the short version of the entire story in a fairy-tale format, preparing the initial contents for completion of the Story Beats. (See: Story Spine; Story Beats)

Story Goal:

The chief protagonist's goal is to resolve the Story Problem. The chief protagonist's Want and Need can directly and indirectly hinder achieving the Story Goal. (See: Story Problem; Want; Need)

Story Problem:

About halfway through Act 1, a major event (aka, Story Problem) triggers the disruption of the chief protagonist's Stable World, stopping the chief protagonist from continuing as before. The event is so disruptive, it will eventually thrust the chief protagonist into Act 2's Unstable World. (See: Story Goal; Stable World; Unstable World)

Story Spine:

Based on your premise, this writing tool is used to tell the core story in a fairy-tale format that names the chief protagonist, defines the problem, gives beginning and ending, hints at external, internal, and philosophical goals and themes. (See: Story Body; Story Beats)

Story Theme (External):

The Story Theme (External) is about the universal truth conveyed by the story. To resolve the Story Problem, the Story Goal influences the external theme. A positive example in the Crime genre: Justice prevails when the chief protagonist overpowers or outwits her antagonists. A negative example: Injustice reigns when the perpetrator outwits the chief protagonist. In many stories, the chief protagonist must first overcome a Need (e.g., the chief protagonist must overcome the fear of getting involved with a murder) that directly and indirectly hinders the attainment of the Story Goal (e.g., bring the killer to justice). To overcome that hinderance, the chief protagonist must learn a universal life lesson (i.e., the Story Theme (Internal)) before fulfilling the external theme and achieving the Story Goal. Often the writer's chosen genre (e.g., Murder Mystery) influences the External

Theme. (See: Story Theme (Internal); Story Theme (Philosophical))

Story Theme (Internal):

The Story Theme (Internal) is conveyed through the lesson learned as the chief protagonist progresses through the character arc. When the lesson is learned, it satisfies the chief protagonist's Need. Recognizing and applying the universal life lesson to overcome the chief protagonist's Fatal Flaw highlights the Internal Theme. Here's a positive example: Good triumphs when the protagonist sacrifices a worldly value in favor of the needs of others. And here's a negative example: Evil reigns when the protagonist pursues selfish wants ahead of others. Conflicts arise as the chief protagonist strives to overcome a need that directly and indirectly hinders the attainment of the Story Goal. To overcome those hinderances, the chief protagonist must first learn a universal life lesson, and that typically serves as the basis for the internal theme. A novel with an emotional-based internal theme told from the perspective of a universal life lesson has a greater chance of standing the test of time. (See: Story Theme (External); Story Theme (Philosophical); Fatal Flaw)

Story Theme (Philosophical):

Every popular story is about something, and the philosophical aspect is about both sides of a debate over differing views as understood by the audience. For example, a story thread for the main character could raise the question: “Is it better to be selfish or selfless?” A secondary character (e.g., a foil character) raising a philosophical question puts the chief protagonist on a quest to prove the argument for one value over the other. (See: Story Theme (External); Story Theme (Internal); Foil Character)

Structure:

The story’s structure serves as the framework for writers to organize the scenes and overall manuscript. (See: Story Beats; Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Subtext:

Using subtext is like the unseen portion of an iceberg. It has significant weight and impact on audiences, but remains hidden from sight. Subtext is never on the nose like an argument, but it’s the subtle yet unsaid reason for the disagreement. For example, it’s not what’s said, but what they don’t say. Also, if a character

says one thing, “He seems okay,” but through actions or thought means something else, it’s subtly implied to the reader the words were not entirely honest.

Supporting Cast:

The array of characters supporting the protagonist and antagonist. (See: Characters)

Suspense:

Suspense is the emotional response resulting from unresolved conflict. Suspense grows as the conflict remains unresolved, and readers wonder, What happens next to the lead character? The anticipation of what will happen builds tension. (See: Conflict, Tension)

Symbols:

Symbols within a story convey common meaning, enabling readers to grasp the significance. Symbols do this with minimum words. Because symbols also convey shades of meaning, they influence the mood and tone when used. A symbol can be universal and used to influence the overall story, or it can convey meaning tied to the chief protagonist. Symbols can include

animals, people, plants, settings, themes, and more. A recurring symbol, referred to as a motif, can represent the story's theme.
(See: Motifs; Objects)

◆ T ◆

Target Readers:

The intended audience for the novel researched using market-validation methods. Writers often base their genre and content decisions on the expectations of these target readers.

Tension:

The anticipation of an action produces tension. Denying an action also creates tension. Tension fuels the plot engine.

Foreshadowing is used to create the tension about what will happen to a person or thing that the writer has already given readers a reason to care. (See: Conflict, Suspense)

Theme (External):

(See: Story Theme (External))

Theme (Internal):

(See: Story Theme (Internal))

Theme (Philosophical):

(See: Story Theme (Philosophical))

Ticking Clock:

Around the story's MIDPOINT, something happens that increases the sense of urgency, emphasizing that time is running out. (See: Story Beats; MIDPOINT)

The Trellis Method:

A comprehensive writing system that's different from typical how-to write guides because it helps the writer concurrently focus through the intersection of the Plot Lens, Scene Lens, and Content Lens to include in the story what matters most to readers. (See: Plot Lens; Scene Lens; Content Lens)

THRUST INTO 2:

The big event that compels the chief protagonist to accept the Call to Action (i.e., the chief protagonist chooses to pursue the Story Goal to resolve the Story Problem), leaving the Stable World (Act 1) for Unstable World (Act 2). (See: Story Beats; Stable World; Unstable World)

Touchstone Scene:

This is a single scene where readers find it easy to grasp what the novel is all about, and like a movie poster, it's an iconic image and scene that conveys the story idea and something unexpected (e.g., for the movie *Rear Window*, the love interest, Grace Kelly, looks on as the hero, Jimmy Stewart, gazes past his binoculars at the apartment courtyard). After identifying and refining a scene (usually within the PREMISE sequence of scenes), the Touchstone Scene sets the benchmark to compare the quality of all other scenes. (See: Genre; Story Beats; Poster; Premise; Logline)

Transformation (Change):

The main character travels along an arc of traits, emotions, and behaviors, recognizing a Need to change that shows some difference in thought, speech, and action as compared to the story's outset. (See: Change; Need)

Traits:

The emotional, physical, and behavioral characteristics that capture the essence of cast members. (See: Characters)

TRIGGER:

The central life-changing event that forces the chief protagonist to recognize the Story Problem. The challenge is so significant, the chief protagonist cannot retreat but has yet to accept the Call to Action (i.e., this character resists the Story Goal to resolve the Story Problem). (See: Story Beats; Fatal Flaw; Lie)

Truth:

An accepted (i.e., universal) belief. For example, the sun rises in the east. (See Lie.)

Try/Fail Cycle:

Refers to the action where the chief protagonist tries to achieve a goal but fails, typically raising the stakes.

Turning Point (Scene):

A significant shift within a scene or scene sequence reverses the emotional or action trend from one value to another. For example, from positive to negative emotions, from winning to losing a battle. Typically, writers represent these value shifts with notations. For example, a negative to positive shift in value: (-/+). From bad to worse: (-/- -). (See: Scene and Sequel Sequence)

Turning Over the Cards:

In a mystery, it is the revelation of a series of clues that lead the sleuth to figure out the true criminal.

Twists:

A surprise turn of events and change in behaviors. For example, what if:

- **Past:** A historical event shifted the plot?
- **Relatives:** Two characters are secretly related?

- **Masquerade:** The chief protagonist is secretly the villain?
- **Foil Character:** A fake-ally is secretly the villain?
- **Personality Disorder:** The chief protagonist has a personality disorder?
- **Reality Check:** The events were all an illusion?
- **Faked Death:** The victim never died?
- **Unreal Setting:** The setting is not what it seems?
- **Alternate Time:** The timeline is not what it seems?
- **Identity Reversal:** The villain turns out to be the good one?
- **Skewed Motive:** Villain's goal differs from what the chief protagonist thought it was?
- **Rule Change:** What if some horrific event changed the rules for what's going on in the story?

Note: As shown in the simplified examples above, these twists require freshening up to eliminate the perception of clichés.



Universal Theme:

These are topics common to most humans and include:

- Acceptance vs. Rejection
- Faith vs. Unbelief
- Fear vs. Courage

- Forgiveness vs. Unforgiveness
- Love vs. Hate
- Redemption vs. Damnation
- Duty vs. Unreliability
- Selflessness vs. Selfishness
- Survival vs. Demise
- Trust vs. Mistrust

Unstable World:

Act 2 reflects the mirror opposite of the chief protagonist's status quo (i.e., Stable World) environment in Act 1. (See: Stable World; Changed World)



Villain Character (Chief Antagonist):

A chief antagonist opposes the chief protagonist, and this villain strives to thwart the chief protagonist's attempts to achieve his or her goal. (See: Hero Character; Foil Character)

◆ W ◆

Want:

The chief protagonist's object of desire (i.e., what the character wants), which may differ from the chief protagonist's Story Goal to solve the Story Problem. Fear, lies, and misbelief often motivate what the character wants. In the first half of the story, the chief protagonist's focus is on the want, but from the story's MIDPOINT on, the chief protagonist's focus switches to the need. (See: Genre; Fatal Flaw; MacGuffin; Need; Story Beats)

WRANGLE:

A sequence of scenes where the chief protagonist wrangles with the move-forward choices but still resists the need for change. The debates that take place in these scenes leverage the chief protagonist's doubt and resistance established in the TRIGGER scene. (See: Story Beats; Need; TRIGGER)

Whiff of Death:

The main character senses the potential for physical, professional, or psychological death. (See: All-Is-Lost)

◆ X ◆

(No Entry — Blank)

◆ Y ◆

(No Entry — Blank)

◆ Z ◆

Zip File:

A file that serves as a ‘shell’ that contains compressed content, such as images, spreadsheets, Scrivener app files. When you receive a zip file, most Apple and Windows PCs allow you to double click, which unpacks that contents for your use.