

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH'S YOUNG NOVELIST WORKBOOK

Middle & High School



Created by
NaNoWriMo

100%
Awesome,
NON-BORING
workbooks.
We promise!

National Novel Writing Month's Young Novelist Workbook

Middle & High School

Created by NaNoWriMo, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit



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Hello, Novelist!

We see you've decided to join the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who are brave and determined enough to write a novel in a month. Welcome and congratulations! Please accept this epic high five from us.

Maybe you're feeling excited, or maybe you're feeling nervous, slightly overwhelmed, thinking to yourself, "Wait a second, self, what did I just sign up for? Don't you need to be a famous author to write novels?"

The answer, our friend, is no! Anyone can write a novel. You don't even have to know how to write a novel to write a novel. You just need a few ideas, time, and something to write with. It's as simple as that.

Think of it like baking a cake. In the beginning, you've got nothing but a wish (to eat cake!). You figure out a recipe, gather ingredients, start mixing... Maybe you make some mistakes, have to re-measure, or improvise a new frosting. But as long as you keep working, you'll eventually go from having nothing, to having a bowl of batter (yum), to having a cake of your very own. The trick is to break down a big job into smaller pieces, and to not get discouraged along the way.

If you don't have any ideas about what to write, don't worry. We've put together this workbook to help you! We've got activities to spark your imagination, create characters, build conflict, outline your plot, and write dialogue that shouts right off the page, plus advice on how to keep writing throughout the month.

Before you embark on your noveling adventure, we want you to know that whatever your word count at the end, you are extraordinary just for giving this a shot.

Good luck, from all of us here at NaNoWriMo. May your words be many, your imagination be awakened, and your adventure be out of this world!

Planning Your Novel

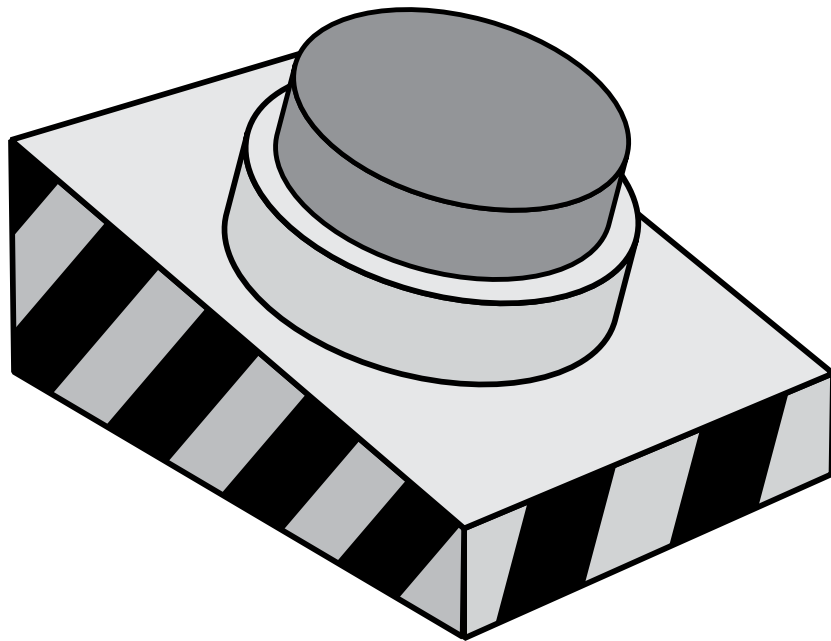
Inner Editor Containment Button

Before you begin your month-long noveling adventure, you've got to get rid of your Inner Editor. An Inner Editor is the negative, no-fun beast we bring along with us on all our creative endeavors. It sits on our shoulder and points out misspellings and every awkward sentence. When it's in a particularly nasty mood, it tells us we're awful writers and shouldn't be allowed to say anything at all.

Sometimes an Inner Editor is helpful, like when we're taking tests or revising things we've already written—any time we're aiming for perfect. But writing a first draft takes courage, and the ability to be creative and make mistakes. Your Inner Editor will slow you down in the worst way if you let it write with you. It might even stop you entirely!

So, no matter how ridiculous this might sound, close your eyes and imagine your Inner Editor. When does it pop up? What does it look like (three-headed dictionary monster breathing red ink fire, perhaps)? What kinds of things does it say?

Then, open your eyes and push the button below. Draw an X on it! Scribble over the entire thing with your pencil! Get out of here, Inner Editor, we've got big, beautiful messes to create!



Congratulations, your Inner Editor has been successfully contained! It's been sent to an Inner Editor Containment Cell, where we've put it to use proofreading our Young Writers Program website. We have lots for it to do! And we promise that when you're done, we'll give it back to you so it can help with your novel rewrites. Now, on to the fun stuff...

What Makes a Novel a Novel?

Okay, so you're about to write a novel—what does that even mean? You may know that a novel is a book with a story in it. But what makes a novel different from, say, that picture book you loved as a kindergartener? Or an unauthorized biography of the tallest person on Earth?

A **novel** is a long book that tells a story of fictional (made-up) characters and events. It contains a conflict, or problem, that the characters try to solve.



Think of books you've read recently. Which were novels? Which weren't? **Choose one of those books, preferably one that you really like a lot or just know inside and out. Write the name of that book and its author here:**

My Model Novel:

by _____

For the rest of your novel-writing adventure, think of that book as a model you can use when you get stuck. You don't have to imitate it—and you never want to copy it, of course—but you can always look at it for ideas. Just think of that novel's author as your own personal novel-writing coach.

Light up the noveling part of your brain! Jot down a few sentences about what you loved or remember the most about your Model Novel.

Now, fill in the blanks below. (This is easier if you have your Model Novel with you.)

1. Who are the most important characters in your Model Novel?

2. Which character do you think is the most important? Why?

3. What is the book mostly about? What is the central conflict, or major problem?

4. Whose perspective is the novel written from (as in, who is telling the story)? How do you know?

5. This means that the novel is written in (check one of the following):

- 1st person (The person telling the story is a character in the story, using "I.")
- 3rd person. (The story is told by an outside narrator, not a person in the story.)
- 2nd person. (The story is addressed to "you." This is very rare!)
- Multiple perspectives. (More than one of the above is used.)

6. How does the novel begin?

7. Where and when does it take place, generally?

8. What is your favorite thing about this novel?

Now that you've explored how and why your novel makes a good model, you're ready to present it to a person or group with a book talk. Don't worry: a book talk is not a book report. You don't have to describe everything that happens in the book in excruciating detail. Instead, a book talk is like an advertisement for the book, or a movie trailer.

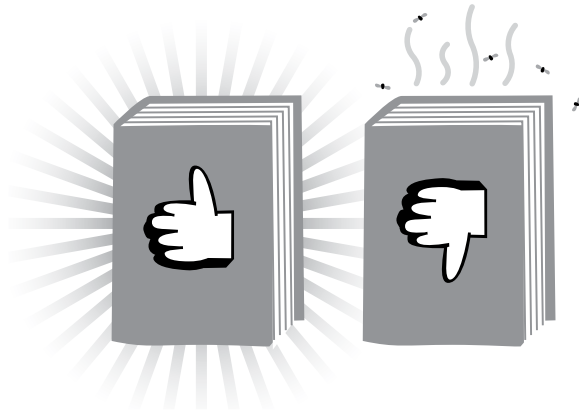
Your job is to give your audience just enough information to want to wrestle that book out of your hands and read it themselves. Take a look at this book talk, for example, about the real novel *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to know what's going to happen in the future? Well, what if somebody else could tell you, but only communicated by sending mysterious messages? In *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead, 12-year-old Miranda starts finding notes about events in her future—that end up coming true! All of a sudden Miranda's life is turned upside down: her mom's apartment key is stolen, her best friend Sal will no longer talk to her, and the anonymous notes start hinting that something dangerous is about to happen. Miranda realizes that she may be the only one able to prevent a tragedy, and maybe even change the future.

After reading this book talk, you know the basics of *When You Reach Me*: its title, its author, its main character, and some important things happening in the main character's life. But you probably have a bunch of questions, too. How is Miranda getting the messages? Are they really warnings from the future, or is something else going on? Why did her best friend stop talking to her? Perhaps you are curious enough to check out this book for yourself!

As you can see, a book talk simply gives the audience a "taste" of the book.

Below, prepare your own book talk about your Model Novel. Think of structuring it like this: a hook to grab attention; a topic sentence to introduce the title, author, main character and set-up of the book; and a few more sentences to describe important events or details. And remember, if you sound excited about the book, your audience will be excited too!



Love It or Leave It

Of all the books you've read so far in your life, there were probably some that were ridiculously fun to read, and some that were just about as fun as visiting the dentist on your birthday. Before you start thinking about the novel you'll be writing, it's helpful to write down what makes you, personally, love a book and what makes you want to leave a book.

Love It

Let's start by making a list of books you love. Think about all the novels you've read that you couldn't put down no matter how tired you were or how much unfinished homework was piling up all around you. **In the spaces below, write down the title and author of three books you love:**

1. Title _____

Author _____

2. Title _____

Author _____

3. Title _____

Author _____

Now, make a list of everything that made those books so amazing. Why were the characters so fascinating? What made you so excited to keep turning the page? You can be as general or as detailed as you like; include anything from “adventurous characters” to “high school drama” to “hilarious and realistic dialogue.”

Once you've finished this list, keep it with you at all times as you write your novel. Why is this list so important? Because, as you might imagine, the things you like as a reader are going to be things you also love writing. As you work on your story, refer to this list of ingredients, and consider adding them to your novel when you're stuck for ideas or directions.

Leave It

Now, think about all those books you’ve read or started to read that put you to sleep by the end of Page One. You know, the ones that you’d rather eat a mayonnaise, peanut butter, and onion sandwich than have to read again. **In the spaces below, list the title and author of three books you really did *not* like reading.**

1. Title _____

Author _____

2. Title _____

Author _____

3. Title _____

Author _____

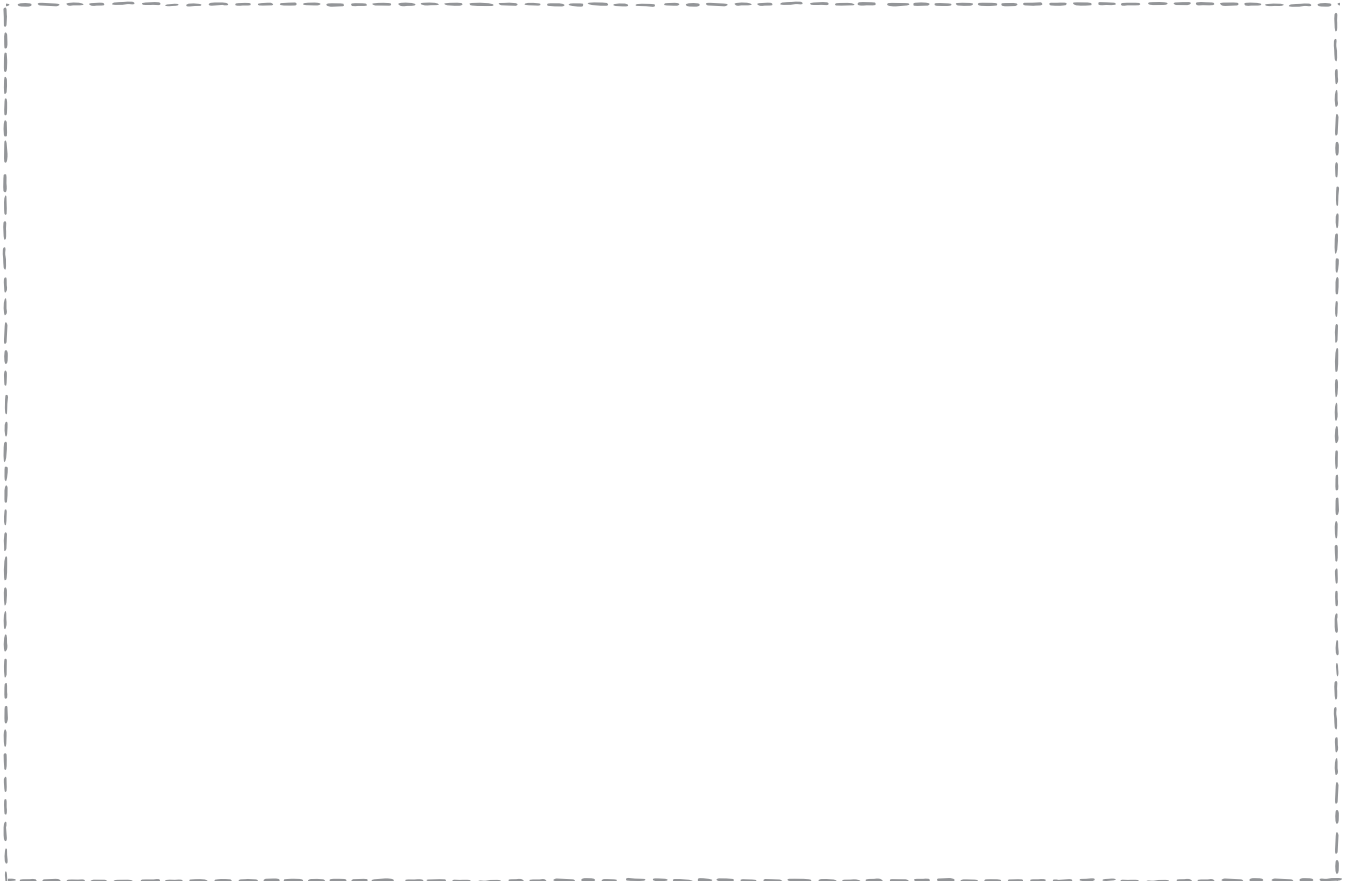
Now, write a list of things that made those books so awful for you. Were the characters unlikeable or unrealistic? Did the story events move too slowly, or not make sense? Did you think to yourself "I could *totally* have done a better job than these authors"? Again, you can be as general or as detailed as you like; include anything from "cheesy endings" to "painfully boring dialogue."

Just like the list of things you love in a book, keep this list with you as you write. It might seem strange that you would have to remind yourself of the things you dislike in novels, but these items are experts in the art of ending up in your story without you even realizing it.

Sparking an Idea

Maybe you know exactly the story you want to tell, or maybe you have no clue. We can help! Let's get this rollicking, wild, totally-out-there brainstorm session started:

First, make a list of places and things that make you feel excited, inspired, or curious. Some of our examples are: dreams, ghosts, 1920s Japan, sibling relationships, road trips, dogs, elephants, mysteries, princesses, reality TV shows, bicycles, and cooking. Try to fill the whole box!



What you're drawn to in life is probably what you'll enjoy writing about. **So, circle nine things above you'd be excited to include in your novel. Then, write each thing you circled on one of the lines below.** To make it random, you can put them on scraps of paper and pull from a hat.

NOVEL IDEA 1

NOVEL IDEA 2

NOVEL IDEA 3

Time to let your imagination go wild! Pick one of the "Novel Ideas" from the previous page, set a timer for 5 minutes, and freewrite to explore the idea and help it grow. Use sentences like "I wonder..." and "What if..." and "It would interesting/cool/super weird if..." For example, an idea that included "Ghosts, mysteries, and dogs" could lead to something like: "What if the ghost of a detective teamed up with a dog to solve a mystery? I wonder if the mystery is about how the detective ended up being a ghost. Can the dog talk? Or maybe it's psychic? That would be cool!"

If you get bored with an idea, try a different one! If you don't like the ones you wrote, try something else! This is your chance to experiment before you pick a direction for your novel.

Creating Interesting Characters

Now that you've got an idea, let's move on to one of the most important parts of any novel: interesting, complex characters.

Flat Characters vs. Complex Characters

Flat Character: Luna is a teenage girl who lives in Philadelphia. She goes to school, hangs out with her best friend, and likes clothes.

Complex Character: 15-year-old Luna just moved from her childhood home in California to Philadelphia. She is having a really hard time making friends at school. Her strange name and the beat-up, rainbow-colored van her dad drives her to school in every morning have not made it easy on her.

She's only made one friend so far: Ollie, who lives down the block and has a pet snake also named Ollie. Everyone else thinks Luna's too weird, and besides, they're jealous of her shoes.

She has every kind of shoe. Cute sandals, hip skate shoes, high heels, wedges, boots, and bright white sneakers—she wears a new pair each day. Little do her classmates know, she makes them all herself.

Flat characters are boring and general. There's nothing specific or unique about them. Complex characters have hidden depths and surprises. They're fully developed people, and feel so real you could imagine meeting them in school or on the street.

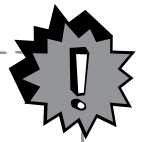
The characters you'll write about will fall into one of three categories: **the protagonist**, **the supporting characters**, and **the antagonist**.

The Protagonist

The protagonist is the character with the starring role in your book. In most novels, the protagonist is on a journey to get what they want more than anything else in the world, whether it's fame, revenge, something simple like joining the high school soccer team, or something much more difficult, like overcoming injustice.

The Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are characters who have an important role in your protagonist's life. Some may be around for the protagonist's entire journey, others for only part of it. They can be friends, family members, love interests, wizards... you name it. These characters also have dreams of their own, and their adventures will add even more excitement to your novel.



The Antagonist

The antagonist is the character who stands in the way of the protagonist getting what they want. This doesn't mean all antagonists are evil monsters, though! Some antagonists get in the way because they're jealous, or confused, or have a set of different goals than the protagonist.

For example, if Nia tries out for a role in the school play but Maddy gets it instead, it doesn't mean Maddy is bad. She just wants the same thing! Some antagonists do terrible things without realizing it. Others, like the Count Dracula the vampire, are just plain evil. It's up to you to figure out what your antagonist's deal is.

You: "But what if my protagonist crashes on an island and is just trying to survive? Who's the antagonist then, hmm?"

Us: "Great question. Unless the island is ruled by an evil bear, you don't have a living, breathing **physical antagonist** for your hero to fight. You have an **abstract antagonist**. In this case, it's *nature*. Your hero's struggle will be against things like storms and starvation (unless you rethink that whole evil bear idea)."

Other **abstract antagonist** examples are things like illness, grief, a corrupt government, or racism. They make things hard for the protagonist—but they don't have a physical form, so the protagonist can't just kick 'em in the knee to make them go away.

Physical Antagonist	Abstract Antagonist
A racist or intolerant character	Racism/intolerance in a community or in general
A character who is working to make sure your protagonist lives a poverty-stricken life	Poverty or the economy in a community or in general
A character who is forcing your character to struggle against nature (e.g. someone who has left your character stranded in Antarctica)	Nature as an entity (e.g. a natural disaster or an extreme climate)
A character whose religious beliefs oppress your protagonist	A religion or all religions
A government official such as a dictator who has it in for your protagonist	A corrupt government
Your protagonist's evil boss	A corporation/company
A character whose sole mission is to make sure your protagonist becomes ill (e.g. though poisoning or exposure to a deadly disease)	Disease/illness in general

It's a great idea for you, the author, to try and get to know your characters a little before you begin writing. One way to do this is by filling out Character Questionnaires. You can use all the ideas on the following pages, pick and choose just the ones that feel helpful, or even add some of your own questions to answer. Keep going until your characters start feeling like real people!

Character Questionnaires

Section One: Complete this section for all your important characters, starting with the protagonist. There's not enough space to write down all their answers here, so you might want to use a separate piece of paper or notebook.

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Eye, hair, and skin color:
4. Physical appearance:
5. Ethnicity/ cultural background:
6. What are they good at? Any special skills/abilities?
7. What do they love to do?
8. Describe their family. How does everyone get along?
9. Where do they live? What's it like there?
10. Describe their house:
11. Describe their bedroom (including anything they're hiding...):
12. What do they keep in their pockets, purse, backback, or bag?
13. Any favorites? Music, movies, TV shows, books, food, etc:
14. What kinds of things make them happy?
15. What kinds of things annoy or upset them?
16. What's a secret they don't want anyone to know?
17. What are they most proud of?

Bonus: Draw or tape pictures of your characters on a separate sheet.

Section Two: Complete this just for your supporting characters. Write on a separate sheet of paper if you need more space.

1. How do they know the protagonist?
2. What do they love about the protagonist?
3. Do they disagree with the protagonist about anything?
4. Similarities to protagonist:
5. Differences from protagonist:

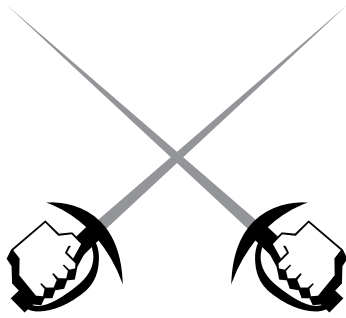
Section Three: Complete this just for your antagonist. If you don't have a physical antagonist, make up four other questions to answer about the challenge your hero is facing.

1. Why are they getting in the way of your protagonist?
2. How do they feel about the protagonist? Why?
3. Do they have any likeable qualities, or are they just plain evil?
4. Do they have any secret weaknesses?

Section Four: Bonus Questions! Complete this section if you want to get to know any or all of your characters even better. The more you know about your characters, the easier it is to bring them to life on the page! They might have different ideas about who they want to be once you start writing, though...

1. Favorite clothing style/outfit:
2. Special gestures/movements (i.e., curling their lip when speaking, always keeping their eyes on the ground, etc.):
3. Things about their appearance they would most like to change:
4. Speaking style (fast, talkative, monotone, etc.):

5. Happiest memory:
6. Insecurities:
7. Quirks or strange habits:
8. Temperament or mood (laid back, easily angered, etc.):
9. Negative traits:
10. This character really cares about:
11. Things that embarrass them:
12. Things that make them nervous:
13. Their biggest fear:
14. Other people's opinions of this character (What do people like about this character? What do they dislike about this character?):
15. Dream vacation:
16. Any pets?
17. Best thing that has ever happened to this character:
18. Worst thing that has ever happened to this character:
19. Superstitions:
20. Three words to describe this character:
21. If a song played every time this character walked into the room, what song would it be?
22. How do they act at parties?
23. If you met this character in real life, how would you two get along?
24. Anything else you want to ask them?



Building Conflict

Okay, so you know who your characters are. Excellent. Now let's figure out what those characters are going to do in your novel. **Most stories are ultimately about the same thing: the journey a protagonist goes on to get what they want.** Whether the goal is to become a movie star or to uncover a hidden treasure, their journey is never easy, and your character will encounter many setbacks along the way. They're no fun for your protagonist, but these obstacles are what make your story exciting to read.

Imagine a story about someone named Jay who wants a sandwich more than anything in the world. How boring would the story be if all Jay had to do was walk from their bedroom to the kitchen and eat a sandwich? That story is so uneventful it can be told in one sentence. But what if Jay is seriously afraid of the dark, the power is out in their house, and they have to walk down a dark hallway to get to the kitchen? And once there, they have to fight their cruel older sister, Helga, for the last two pieces of bread?

That story has both **external conflict** and **internal conflict**.

External Conflict

The external conflict is the one between a protagonist and antagonist. In the above story, the protagonist (Jay) has a goal (to eat a sandwich), but the antagonist (Helga) has her own agenda (to also eat a sandwich). The struggle between Jay and Helga over the last two pieces of bread is the external conflict in this story.

Internal Conflict

The internal conflicts are the fears and insecurities that a protagonist has to overcome in order to get what they want. In the story above, Jay has to overcome their fear of the dark in order to get the sandwich. When you read a book and feel like a character really grew or changed by the end, that's usually because they overcame an internal conflict.



If you completed your character questionnaires, you already know a good amount about the major players in your novel. Now it's time to answer some deeper questions about your characters' hopes and fears in order to create the conflicts that will make your novel interesting.

Your Protagonist

What does your protagonist want more than anything in the world?

What are all the things that might block your character from getting what they want?

Do they have any weaknesses, fears, or faults that will also get in the way of their goal?

Not to mention that no-good antagonist . . .

Your Antagonist (Physical)

What does your antagonist want more than anything in the world? This can be as simple as defeating the protagonist, or something more ambitious like world domination.

What is your antagonist's issue or problem with the protagonist?

What is your antagonist afraid of? (Kittens? Fire?) Why?

Does your antagonist have a hidden weakness or flaw? What is it?

Your Antagonist (Abstract)

The antagonist in my novel is not a living, breathing thing. It is

How does this antagonist get in the way of your protagonist's goals and desires? How does it affect them?

How will your protagonist struggle against and/or battle this antagonist?

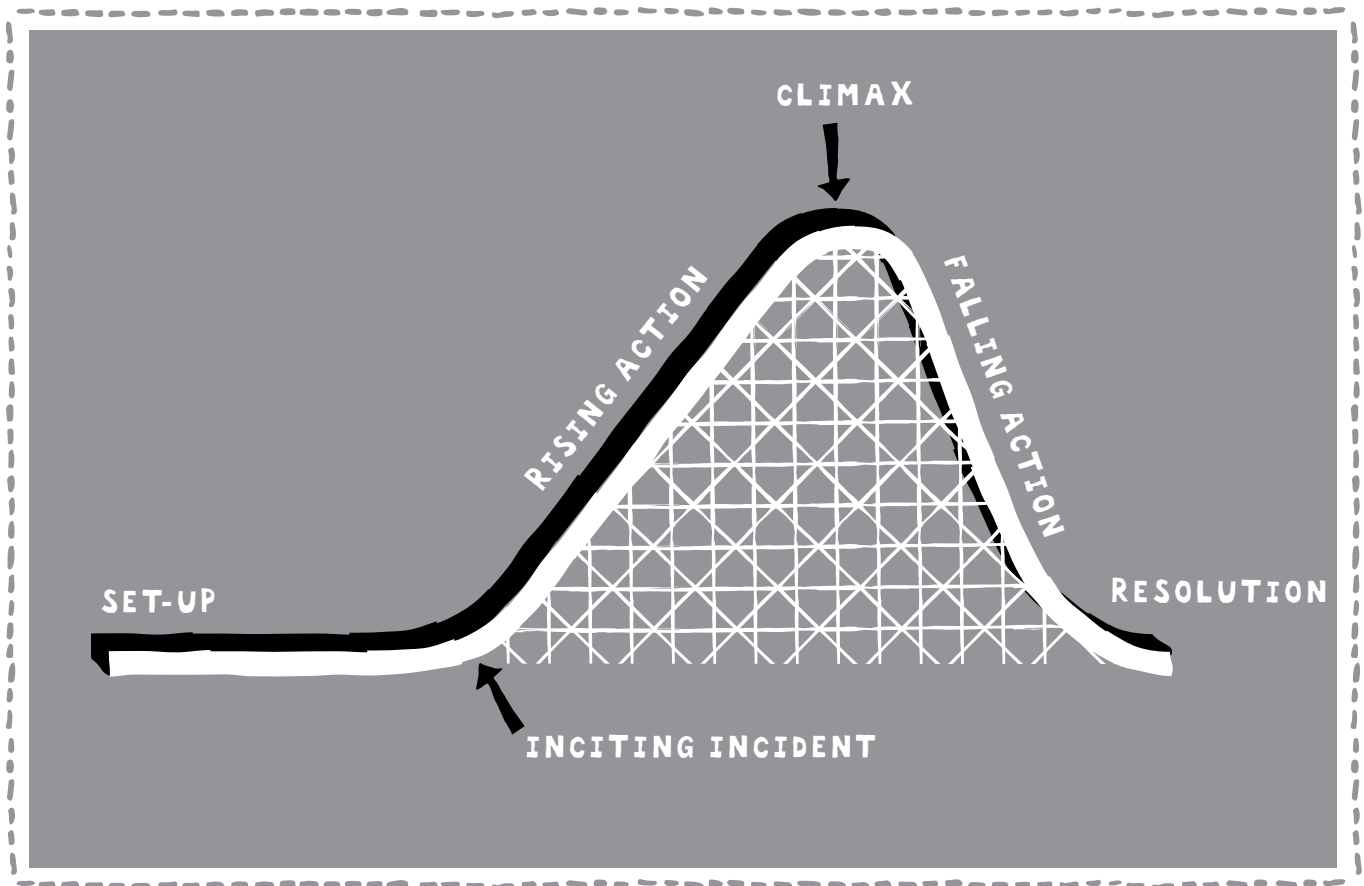
Congratulations! You now have the basic ingredients for a juicy story: **external conflict and internal conflict.**

These conflicts will overlap throughout your novel. You'll hint at them in the beginning, and really ramp up the drama by the end. Once your characters find out about each others' fears and weaknesses, you better believe they'll use them against each other as they fight to make their dreams come true.

Outlining Your Plot

Idea? Check. Characters? Check. Internal and external conflict? Double check. Congratulations, you're almost ready to write your novel! Now it's time to take the next step and map out all the events that will happen in your story, also known as **outlining your plot**.

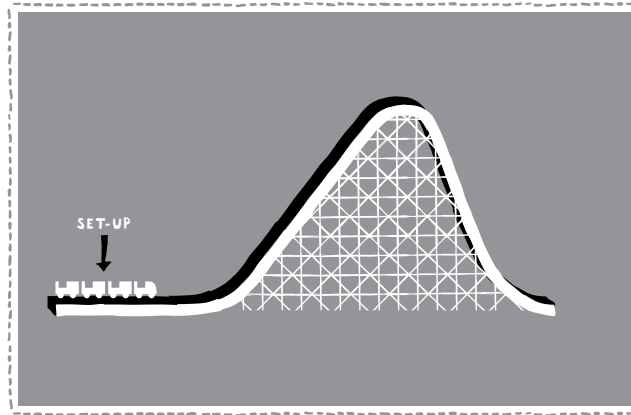
Writing a whole book may seem impossible, but trust us: once you have a plan, it's not as hard as you think. Most stories have the same structure, and break down into the same six sections. So even though the events that happen change from book to book, the way they happen (and the order they happen in) stays pretty similar. Check out the diagram below.



Even if this is stuff you already know from English class, read all the sections below before you move on to map out your own plot. You might discover something new!

Now, are you ready to get on the **plot rollercoaster**?

Section 1: Set-Up



Getting on the Rollercoaster

Most novels begin by showing a little bit about the characters, the setting, and the conflict before jumping fully into the action. The **set-up** of a story is like the start of a rollercoaster: you get hints of the exciting, scary stuff coming up ahead, but for the most part, you're just looking around and getting to know the people on the ride with you.

Example of a story's SET-UP:

Anthony Lovato leaned close to the kitchen counter and carefully swirled purple frosting onto the peanut butter cupcake he'd just baked, then plopped a single juicy blueberry on top. The perfect finishing touches to a perfect dessert.

Too bad no one else would ever see it.

"Tony? Where are you?" His mom was home early! Without thinking, Anthony crammed the whole cupcake into his mouth. His mom popped her head into the kitchen. "Oh, there you are. What're you eating?"

Anthony shrugged, trying to look casual. "Microwave burrito." He did his best to swallow and licked frosting off his lip.

She frowned. "Well, just don't ruin your appetite. David's team won, so they're having a pizza party. David scored five goals! Can you believe it? Five!"

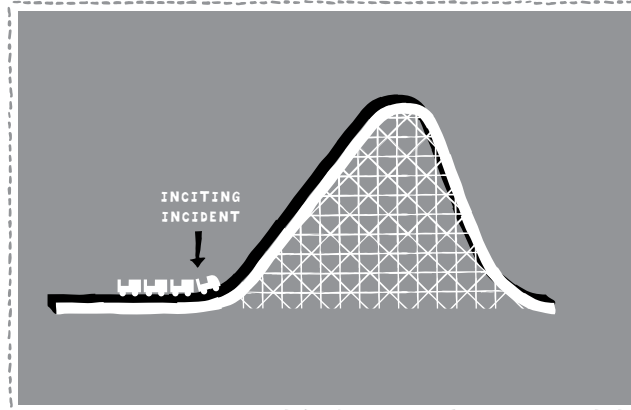
"Wow." Anthony tried not to sound sarcastic, but his mother gave him a look anyway. "I mean, yay, good for him." His older brother was a soccer star. Well, really, he was an any sport star: basketball, baseball, track...David was great at all of them, just like their mom was when she was younger. She went to college on a softball scholarship, something she never quit telling her sons about. Anthony knew she expected him to play sports, too.

The problem was, Anthony didn't care about sports. Like, at all. Ever since

he was little, he'd loved to bake. He followed famous bakers online, drooling over their photos of cakes. He made up recipes of his own and tried them out when no one was home, or said he had to work on homework with his best friend, Annalise, and instead just baked in her kitchen. He dreamed of being a famous baker someday, but knew it would never happen. He cared about his mom too much to disappoint her, and besides, their family didn't have the money for classes or fancy ingredients. He would never be good enough.

Okay, that was a good **set-up**. We were introduced to the protagonist and story's main conflicts: Anthony wants to be a baker, but his mother wants him to play sports, and the family doesn't have the money for ingredients or classes (external conflict). Plus, it seems like he lacks some confidence, both in his baking skills and in his ability to talk to his mother about his real dreams (internal conflict).

Section 2: Inciting Incident



Starting the Climb

The **inciting incident** launches your protagonist into the adventure whether they're ready or not. It can be a pretty exciting moment for your main character. Once it happens, there's no turning back...

Example of a story's INCITING INCIDENT:

Anthony's best friend Annalise was waiting for him after school by their usual spot at the flagpole. They'd been friends since second grade, when his mom forgot to pack him a lunch and Annalise divided her entire lunch in half with him, even the cookies split right down the middle. "What's up, Lise?" he asked when he saw her shifting from foot to foot.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you've got that freaky look in your eye like you're barely holding back a secret. And not a good one, either. An evil one."

She blinked innocently behind her neon pink glasses. "Me? Evil? Whatever do you mean? Tell me how that cupcake turned out last night." Anthony barely opened his mouth before Annalise waved her hands, interrupting him. "Nevermind, stop talking, I can't hold it in anymore. Look." She pushed her phone to his face.

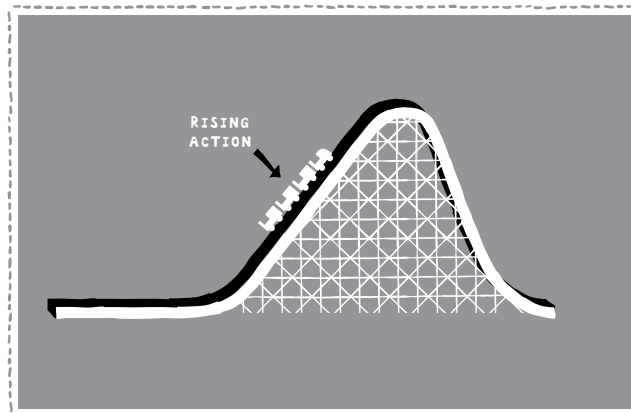
Anthony read the message out loud. "Congratulations, Mr. Lovato, you've passed the first round of casting. Please send your audition materials by this coming Friday. Best of luck from the *Teen Baker* team." He glanced up from the phone. "What's *Teen Baker*? I didn't enter any first round of casting."

Annalise grinned. "No, but I entered for you. It's a baking show for teenagers. There's a cash prize, plus when the show airs, you'll be famous. You're a great baker, Tony. This is your chance."

Anthony read the message again, and again. His stomach flipped each time he read his name. "I can't, though. My mom wants me to join the swim team, and that's gonna take up all my time." He bit his lower lip. "But I guess it's just an audition tape, right?" Annalise could barely stop from jumping up and down beside him. He sighed. "Lise, your evil must be rubbing off on me. Let's do it!"

If an **inciting incident** never happened, Anthony would probably just keep baking things in secret, pretending to his mom and brother that he likes sports. The **inciting incident** is what kicks the story into action.

Section 3: Rising Action



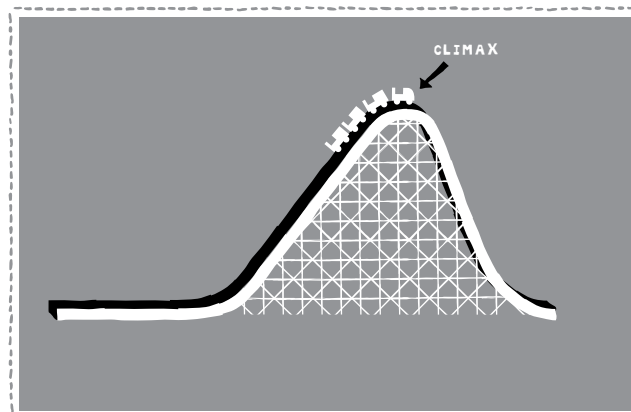
Climbing the Big Hill

The **rising action** is the longest section of a novel. It's made up of many events, each of them building up to the most exciting part of your story: the **climax**. It's where you develop your characters, deepen their relationships with one another, and lay out everything that happens to them before that big finish. Think of the **rising action** as the biggest hill on the rollercoaster—the higher you go, the more suspenseful it gets.

Summary of a story's RISING ACTION:

1. Anthony and Annalise film his audition tape in her kitchen. He uses a cake pop recipe that he invented. He's nervous, but forgets about it once he starts baking. The cake pops turn out great and they submit his materials to the show.
2. One week later, he gets the news: he's been cast on the *Teen Baker* show! They'll film each weekend for ten weeks, and then the whole show will air over the summer. He's too scared to ask his mom for permission, so he lies and says he joined the swim team, and he'll have to practice each day after school and on the weekend.
3. His first day on the set, he gets nervous all over again. Most of the bakers have taken classes, including Miranda Pierce, whose family owns Pierce Cakes and Breads. Anthony is the only one who's learned all on his own. At first, he does everything wrong, and he thinks he's going to get kicked off, but he pulls it together and barely makes it to the next round.
4. Each round, he gets better and better, but he still doesn't tell his family what he's doing. Eventually, he makes it to the final round. There are only two people left: him and Miranda Pierce. There's no way he can beat her!
5. Uh oh! Someone finds out about the competition and shares the news that he's one of the finalists all over social media. His mother confronts him and they fight about how he lied. She grounds him and says he can't go to the finals, but with Annalise's help, he sneaks out.

Section 4: Climax



The Top of the Rollercoaster

The **climax** is the “gasp” moment. It's the moment at the very top of the rollercoaster, right before the high-speed drop. This moment doesn't last long, and neither does the **climax** in your novel. It can be as short as one paragraph—just enough to make your readers hold their breath in suspense and ask, “What's going to happen next?!”

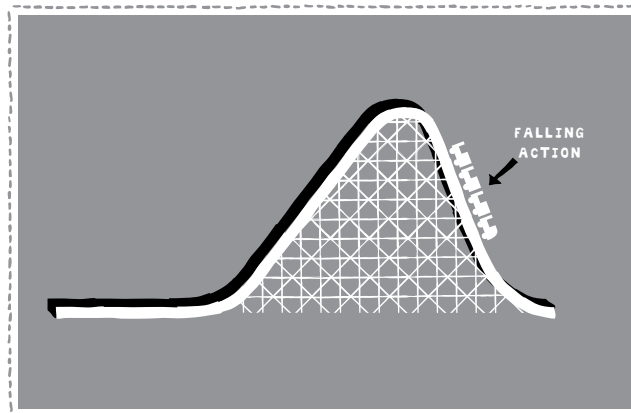
Example of a story's CLIMAX:

"Action!" called the director. Miranda Pierce waved and smiled as she strolled on stage. Anthony tried to breathe and lifted his arm to wave, but lowered it when he realized how sweaty he was. *Calm down*, he thought. *You can do this*.

Both contestants stood beside their cakes. Anthony's was seven layers, each a different flavor, and shaped like the skull of a massive Triceratops. He'd spent the past three hours pouring his heart and soul into it (along with a ton of eggs, sugar, butter, and flour). The judges stabbed their forks into the top and lifted bites to their lips. Anthony couldn't stand it. He looked away, and there, in the audience next to Annalise with a huge smile on her face, was his mother. His mother came to the show! And she didn't look angry at all! He smiled.

The judges finished tasting. They huddled together, then nodded. The lead judge leaned over the microphone. "The winner is..."

Section 5: Falling Action



The High-Speed Drop

The **falling action** is what happens next. It is the fast-paced, action-packed part of your novel. You're finally speeding down the tracks of the rollercoaster with your hands in the air! Does the antagonist get defeated? Do the protagonist's dreams finally come true? If so, how?

Example of a story's FALLING ACTION:

"The winner is... Miranda Pierce."

Anthony didn't lose his smile. He shook Miranda's hand and congratulated her, but when the cameras rolled away, all he wanted was a dark place to cry in. Suddenly, warm arms wrapped around him, squeezing him into a hug.

"You were amazing up there," his mother said, holding him tight.

"I'm sorry I lied to you." Her shoulder muffled his words.

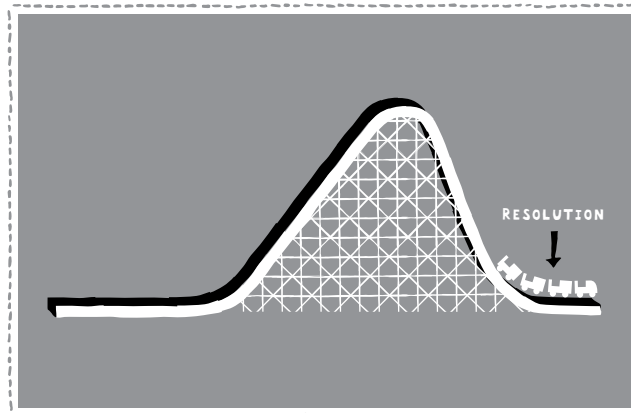
"No, sweetie. You're such a talented baker. I should've seen that from the beginning. Whatever you need, we'll find a way to make it work."

"Sorry to interrupt the family reunion, but I like what you did up there, kid." A woman peered down at them over the rims of her diamond-studded sunglasses. "I'm Moxy Ramone, I'm sure you've heard of me. Miranda's talented, but you've got guts and imagination. You bake things like no one else. I think you'd make a great host for my new TV show. What do you say?"

"I say, why are you wearing sunglasses inside?" asked Annalise.

Anthony elbowed her in the ribs. "Yes," he said. "I say yes."

Section 6: Resolution



Getting Off the Rollercoaster

The **resolution** is how things work out in the very end, after your protagonist gets (or doesn't get) what they want. It's also a place to show how your character and their life have changed. This change happens little by little as your protagonist faces their fears, defeats villains, and builds relationships with a cast of amazing characters. All these adventures will end up changing the way your main character sees the world and their place in it. Try to use the final scenes of your book to highlight those changes.

Example of a story's RESOLUTION:

"Shh, everybody. It's on!" Anthony's mom turned off the lights and squeezed next to him on the couch. Their living room was crammed with friends and family, all gathered to watch the debut of his Anthony's baking show, *Creative Creations*. They snacked on the peanut butter and blueberry cupcakes he'd baked for the occasion—enough to share this time.

Anthony smiled, took a delicious bite, and settled in to watch his show.

Now it's your turn to outline your plot. You don't have to describe everything that will happen in your novel—some things you won't discover until you start writing! This is just to help you get an idea about what will happen in the beginning, middle, and end of your book. Follow the directions below to get started.

(If it helps you structure your plot, you can fill in the blank "Plot Rollercoaster" on Page 31. To get an idea of how to use the blank rollercoaster, check out the example we've created on the next page.)

1. Describe your set-up.

In one or two paragraphs, describe a few scenes that will happen at the beginning of your book to introduce your characters, setting, and main conflicts of your story. Think about showing your protagonist in their ordinary life, before everything changes.

2. Describe your inciting incident.

In one paragraph, describe the event that causes your protagonist to begin their adventure. Think: "The moment everything changed was when..."

3. List events in your rising action.

Write a list of five events that build up to the climax of your novel. These are the steps that take your protagonist farther and farther away from their ordinary life, on the journey to get what they want. Keep increasing the conflict little by little. Throw obstacles in their way! Give them some hard choices to make! Add supporting characters to help!

4. Describe your climax.

In one paragraph, describe what will happen in the climax of your novel. This is the "Oh my gosh, what will happen next?!" moment.

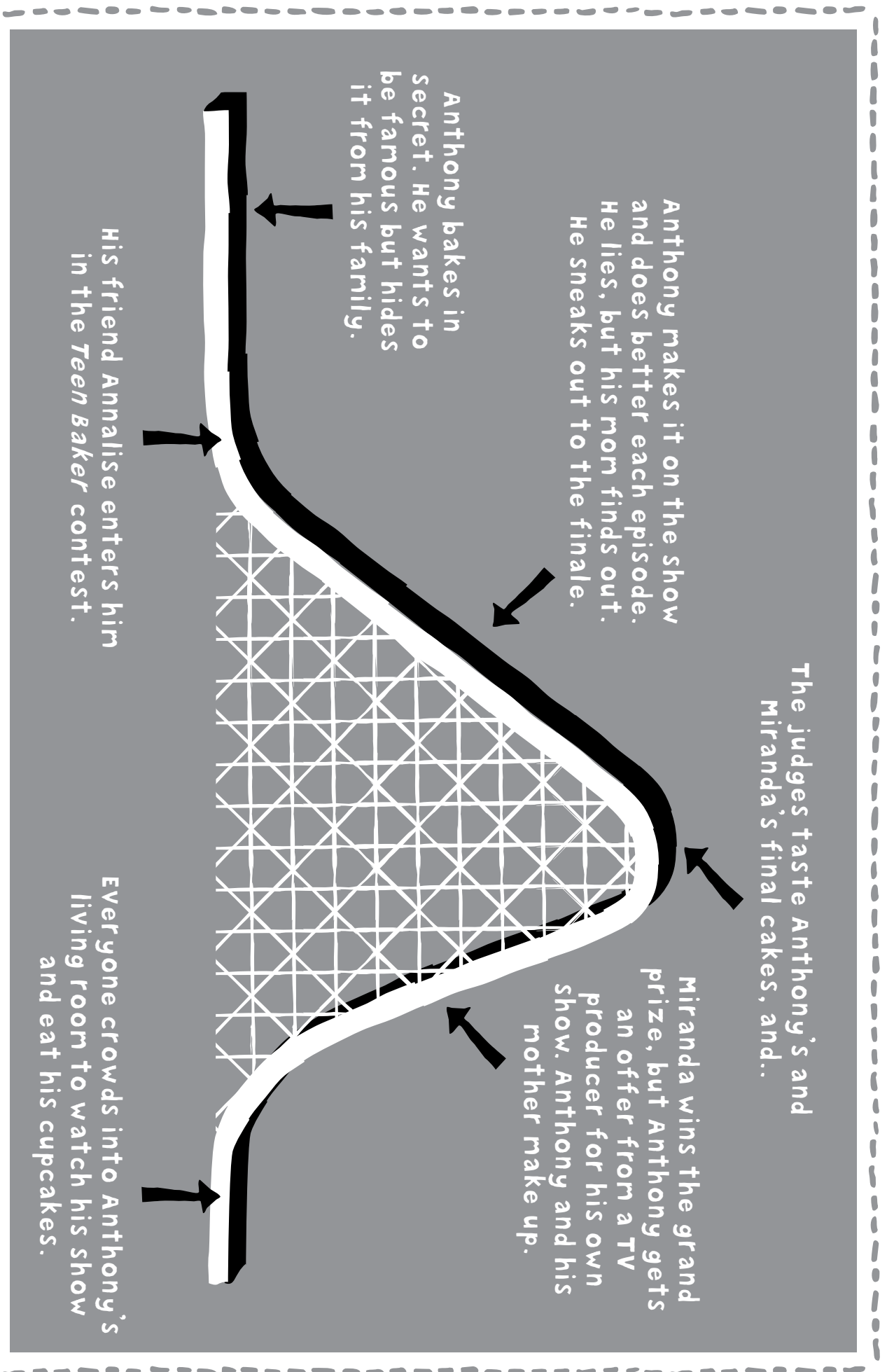
5. Describe your falling action:

In one to two paragraphs, describe a few scenes that happen after the climax. Does your protagonist get what they want? Does the antagonist get defeated? How?

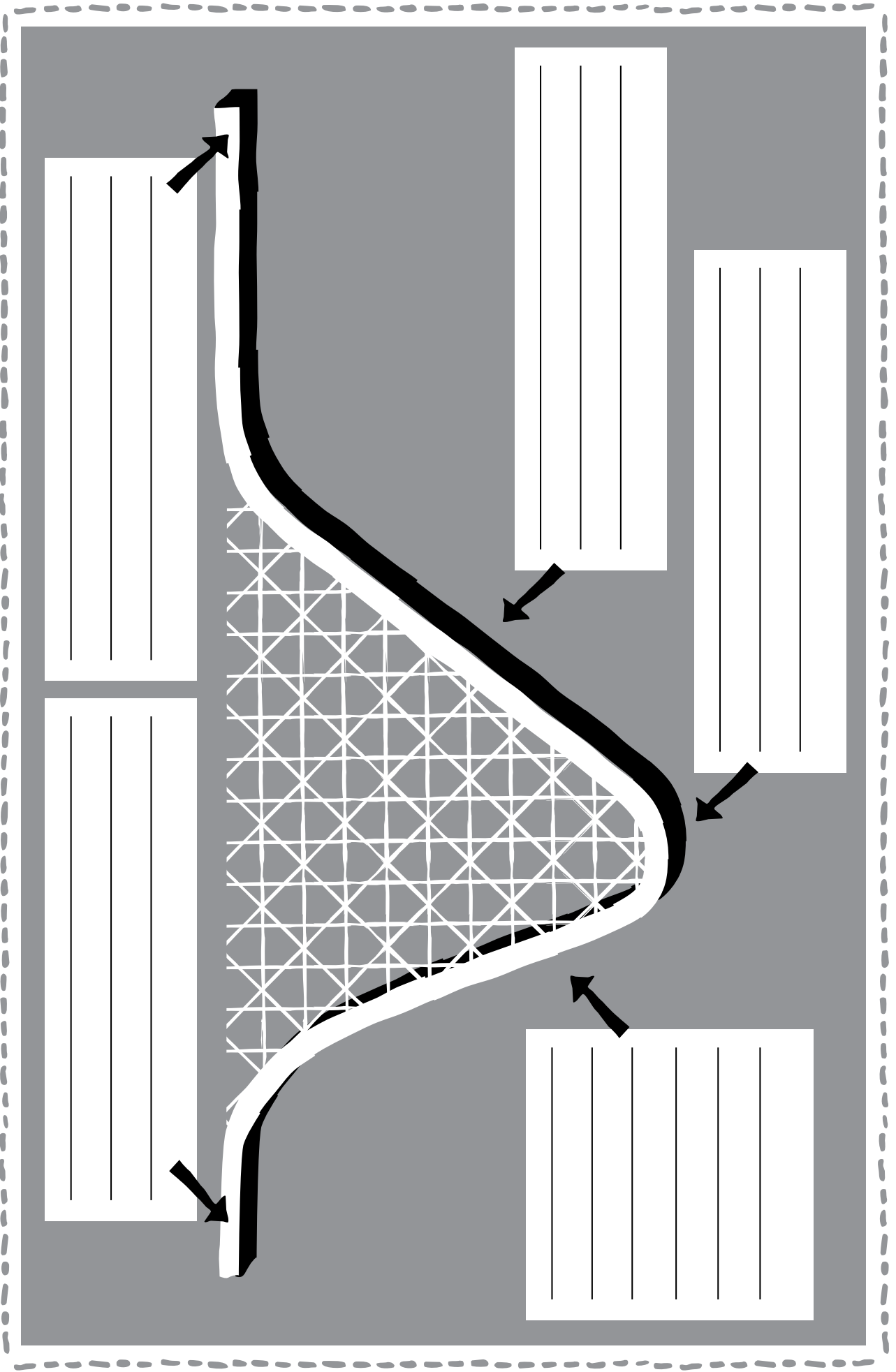
6. Describe your resolution:

In one to two paragraphs, describe the scenes that happen at the very end of your novel. Try to show off how your character and their world have changed. What is normal life like for them now?

Example Plot Rollercoaster



Your Plot Rollercoaster

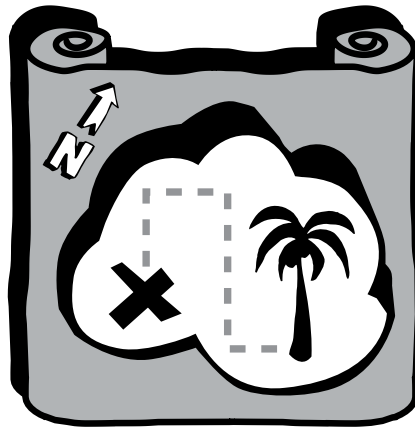


FINAL NOTE ON PLOT

As you probably know, not all rollercoasters have the same track. They all have different hills and drops, different speeds, different twists and turns, and loops and tunnels. The same goes for novels. That is what makes them different and exciting. Sometimes they begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. And novels don't have to have happy endings either. Just like life, sometimes things don't work out exactly the way you planned them to.

Not all novelists use the plot rollercoaster method to plan their novels. Some novelists don't plan at all—they just start writing and figure it out as they go—while others like to outline every single detail in their story before they write the very first sentence. The more you write, the more you'll understand what works for you and what doesn't. In the meantime, if you want to explore other plot methods, check out the ones we've listed below:

- ***Jot, Bin, Pants*** (bit.ly/JotBinPants)
- ***9-Step Plot Dot*** (bit.ly/PlotDot)
- ***“Save the Cat!” Beat Sheet*** (bit.ly/BeatSheet)
- ***Katytastic's 3 Act/ 9 Block/ 27 Chapter Outline*** (bit.ly/27ChapterOutline)



Exploring Your Setting

Part 1: Settings That Create Moods

Now that you have an outline of your plot, it's time to explore some of the **settings** for your novel. The **setting** of a novel is where and when the story takes place. As you know, most novels have more than one setting. Usually, the author decides to have one large setting (like Los Angeles in 1995), and then many smaller settings (like the laundromat where the characters hang out on the weekends, or the classroom where they get in a fight).

Settings do more than serve as a backdrop to the action in your novel. They can also create or enhance the **mood** of your novel.

Mood means the feeling of your novel; its emotional quality. You can also think of the mood as how you want someone to feel while reading your novel.

Examples: playful, serious, mysterious, tense, warm, dangerous, joyous



If you wanted to create a creepy mood for a scene in your novel, you could start with something like:

"A dead tree stood alone in a dark field, lit by just a sliver of moonlight. In the distance, something howled."



These images remind us of dark, disturbing things, and show the reader that the scene of the novel is "creepy" without having to tell them directly.

Describe the settings that would help create each of the moods listed below. Try to write two or three sentences for each mood. Include specific details about the sights, sounds, sensations (and maybe even smells) of the settings you choose!

Creepy (something different than the example we gave on the previous page):

Joyous:

Suspenseful/tense:

Now make up 2-3 of your own moods and describe a setting that would go along with each one.

Mood #1: _____

Mood #2: _____

Mood #3: _____

The last step is to apply your new skills to your upcoming novel. Think of a scene from each section of your novel (it may help to look at your plan from the previous activity). Then, write or list details to describe a setting that will help create the right mood for each scene. For example, you might set your climax on the edge of a crumbling cliff at sunset in the middle of a thunderstorm.

A setting from your set-up:

A setting from your inciting incident:

A setting from your rising action:

A setting from your climax:

A setting from your falling action:

A setting from your resolution:

Great! Now you have settings to enhance the different moods that will be in your novel. You may want to keep this page handy and use it as you write your novel.

Part 2: Settings That Reinforce Characters

Another advanced writing trick is to show things about your characters just by putting them in specific settings. If you were writing about a mysterious person, you might place them in a dark mansion on a hill outside of town; if you were writing about a musician, you might place them in a messy room filled with instruments, speakers, and microphones.

Here's us just telling you about Jasmine:

Jasmine was having a hard time. She felt sad and lonely. Her older sister had just left for college and she missed her every day.

And here's us showing all that about Jasmine through the setting we put her in:

Jasmine used to think her bedroom was small, but ever since her sister left for college, it felt too big, like she could get lost inside it. She bounced on the bottom bunk, then climbed the ladder and stretched out on the top. No one told her to move.

She rolled to her side and looked around. "You're my room now," she said to nobody in particular, and the sound echoed around the walls. Her sister had taken the poster of their favorite band with her, and the space where it had hung looked sad and blank. Everything looked sad and blank. Her sister's dresser was swept clean: no necklaces or curling iron or teddy bears cluttered the wood. The closet was half empty.

"Good," said Jasmine. "I'm glad to finally have my own room. It's about time." She pulled the blanket up to her chin. It still smelled like her sister's vanilla perfume. She curled up into a ball and tried to fall asleep, but the room was too quiet, and it took a long time.

Jasmine doesn't even have to speak for herself; her room speaks for her!

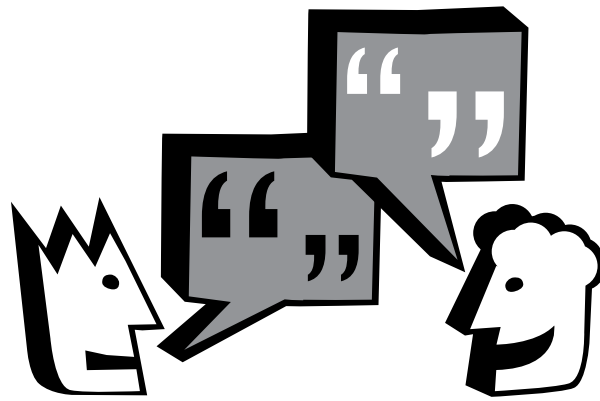
For each of the following characters, try to come up with a setting that will reflect or reinforce what you imagine about them. As you write, try to be as detailed as possible. Don't forget colors, sounds, and even smells. Focus on *where* the character is.

The shy new kid in town:

A secret scientist superhero:

A character from your novel:

Another character from your novel:



Writing Great Dialogue

Dialogue is what happens when two or more characters speak to one another. We experience dialogue all the time in our everyday lives, but we usually call it a conversation.

Here's some dialogue you might have heard today:

"Hey. How are you?" I asked a friend.
"I'm really good. Thanks for asking," she said.
"Cool, cool." We high-fived and walked away.

You'll notice that the exact words the two characters said were set off from the rest of the sentence using **quotation marks** (") and end punctuation like a question mark or a comma.

You also may have noticed that the dialogue was, well, boring. In real life, this kind of dialogue is important. If we didn't say hello and ask people how they were doing, we might lose a lot of friends, fast! But in a novel, long scenes with this kind of daily talk get dull.

As writers, we want to try to fill our stories with voices, and make sure those voices have interesting, surprising, funny, dramatic, and powerful things to say.

Dialogue in a novel should do one (or all!) of the following:

1. Move the story forward.
2. Reveal things about the characters.
3. Increase the tension.



Here are some examples of dialogue to illustrate each:

Dialogue that moves a story forward:

The phone rang, and Terrell picked it up. "Hello?"
There was a moment of silence on the other end, then a woman's voice asked, "Is this Terrell Simmons?"
"Yeah. Who's this?"
"Terrell..." The woman paused. Terrell could hear her take a deep breath.
"My name is Alexis. I'm your sister."
"I don't have any sisters," said Terrell, losing his patience.
"None from this dimension," said Alexis. "But I'm not from here. I'm from... somewhere else."

Right away, we want to know who this Alexis person is, if she's telling the truth, and how she found Terrell. Basically, we want to know what will happen next. In fact, this is a great inciting incident. The discovery of a long-lost sibling is certain to move your story forward in interesting ways.

Dialogue that reveals things about the characters:

Terrell slid into the restaurant booth. "So, what up, Sis?"
"I'm so sorry to surprise you like this," Alexis said. "It wasn't my intention, believe me." She played with the edge of her napkin.
A waiter appeared dressed in a white suit and tie. "Welcome," he said. "Will you young people be dining with us this splendid evening?"
"Nah, I'm good," said Terrell. "Unless you got any nachos?"
Alexis shot Terrell an angry look. "We'll start with two waters, thank you."

Obviously, Terrell, Alexis, and the waiter are different people. Terrell seems young, informal, maybe even a little rude (but he's had a shock, can you blame him?). Alexis seems nervous and a bit upset. The waiter himself is very formal. Who uses words like splendid? We can discover a lot about these characters in just a few lines of dialogue.

"Dude, totally!"

In your own novel, you might think about the ways an accent, some slang, or funny quirks of speech can really work to enhance and define your characters. A character that says "Shiver me timbers!" all the time is certainly a different person than a character that says "Dude, totally!" or "Well, according to my research..."



Dialogue that increases the tension:

"Alexis!" Terrell shouted. "I can't find the crystal. It's not here!"

"Look harder." She frowned, trying to turn off the beeping security alarms.

"We've got to go now! C'mon, we can keep looking tomorrow."

"No, we can't." Alexis sighed. "Without that crystal, your whole universe will collapse in under twelve hours."

Talk about tense! Are Alexis and Terrell going to find the crystal? It's a matter of life and death here, and this little exchange of dialogue has us wanting more.



A note about *Said*:

At some point in your writing life, you may have gotten advice that sounded something like this: "*Said* is dead! Use other dialogue tags instead, like *exclaimed*, *gasp*, *cried*, *growled*, *hissed*." The list went on and on.

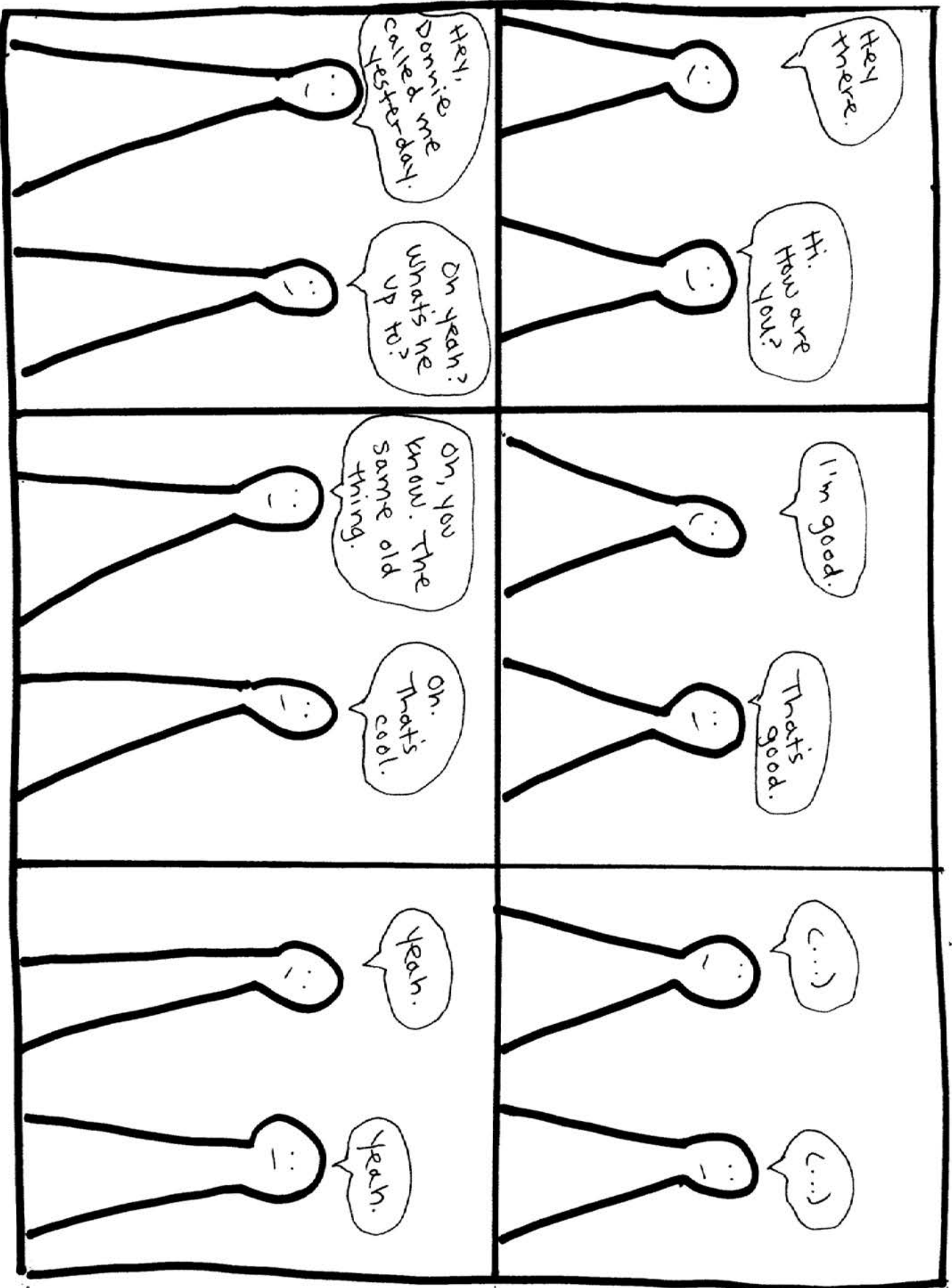
Well, lucky for *said*, it's definitely not dead. In fact, when you're writing dialogue in your novel, you should basically only use "said" as the tag to show which character is speaking. Sure, sometimes you can use *asked* or *shouted* or maybe *replied*, but most of the time, good ol' *said* works best.

Why? All those other words distract the reader from what actually matters: what your characters say and do. For example, check this out:

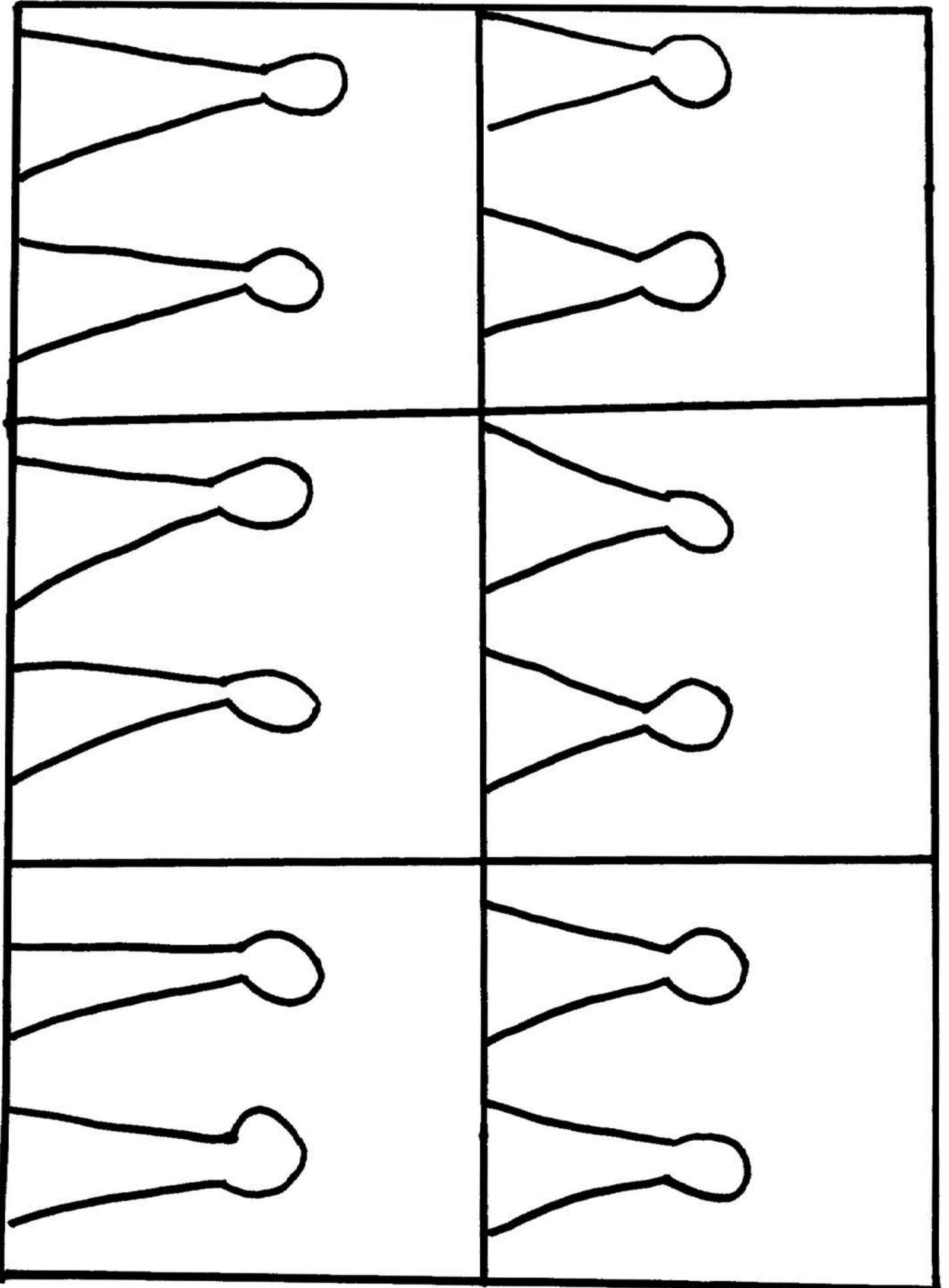
"I'm bored and hungry and I hate this car," said Charlie. He slid down low and kicked the back of his mom's seat.

We don't have to use the word *whined* or *complained*. You know Charlie's whining because of the words he's saying and how he's acting in the back seat! *Said* works just fine.

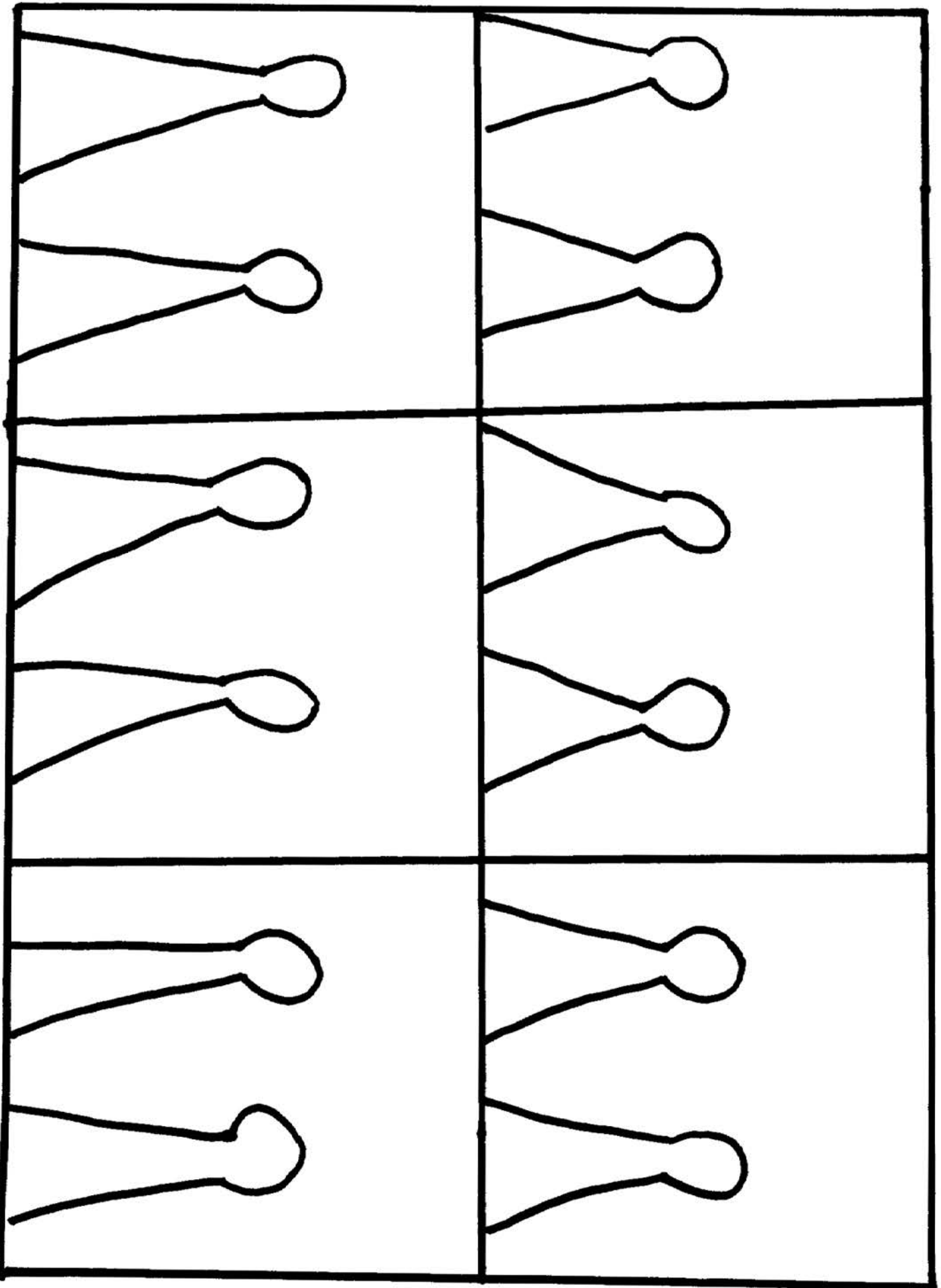
Boring Dialogue Handout



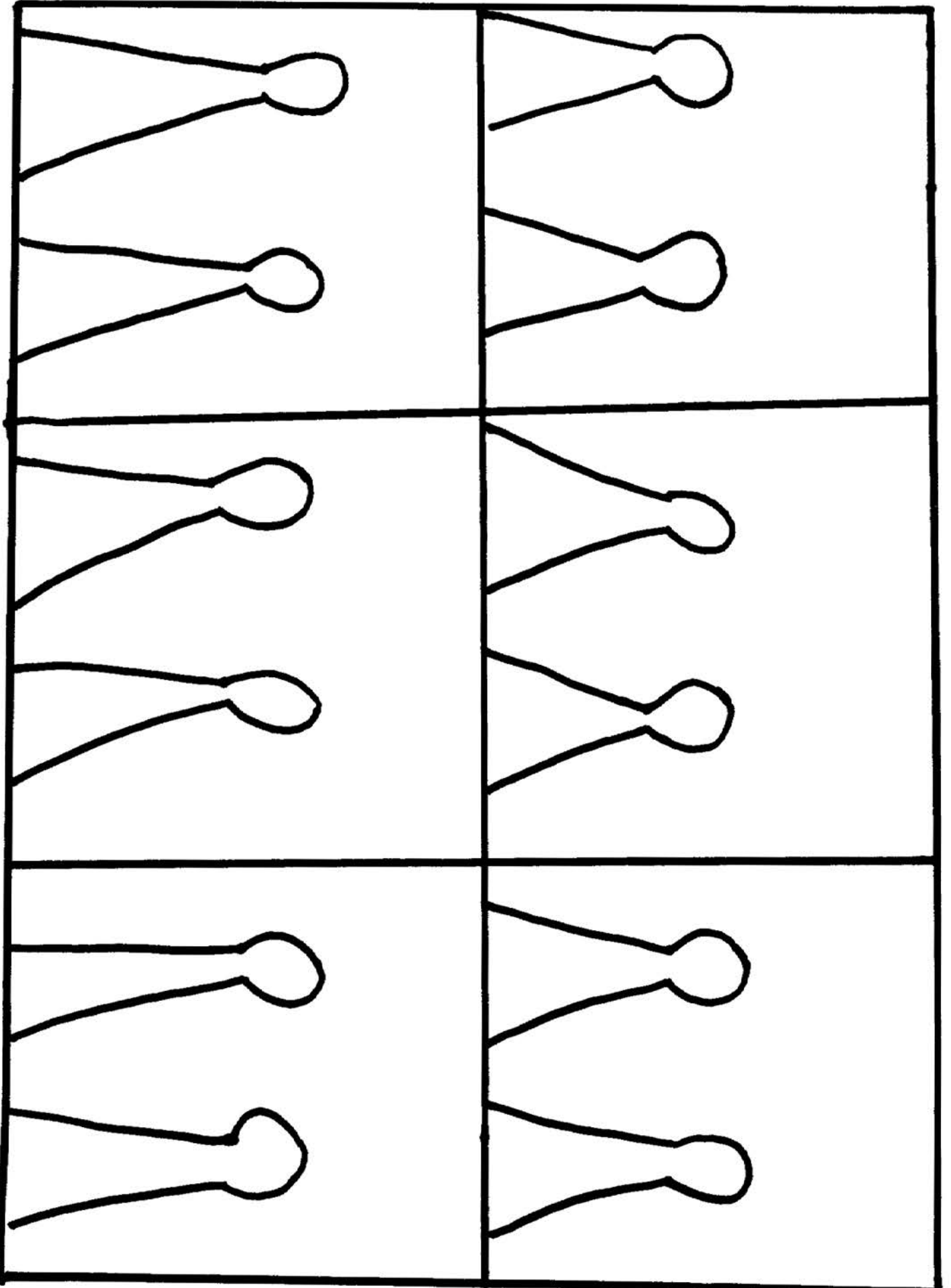
Story-Moving Dialogue



Character-Enhancing Dialogue



Tension-Increasing Dialogue



Getting Ready for NaNoWriMo

NaNoWriMo Survival Tips

Now that you've planned out your novel, you may be wondering how the heck you're going to be able to write it all in just one month. We've put together a few ideas to help you get ready for your noveling adventure.

First, we'd like to introduce our **Top Five NaNoWriMo Survival Tips**:

Five! **Celebrate small wins.** Your big word-count goal might feel very far away, so it's important to set small goals and reward yourself for meeting them. Like, maybe you try to write every day before dinner for a week, or try to write 100 words on Saturday morning. If you do it, give yourself a treat!

Four! **Get plenty of sleep.** Sleep helps your brain stay at its sharpest and most creative, exactly how you want it during a month of novel-writing. Also, you can use your dreams as inspiration!

Three! **Borrow from everyday life.** Write a scene set in your favorite spot. Give a few of your friend's habits or sayings to a character (ask permission from your friend, first!). Take a story from your life and retell it in your novel. Professional authors do this all the time!

Two! **Find a creative champion.** This is someone who will listen when you tell them how hard it is. They'll send you supportive text messages and remind you that you're awesome just for trying this thing. Imagine them cheering behind you every time you sit down to write (but not too loudly, because that might be distracting!).

One! **Never say "I can't."** This is the most important thing to remember next month! There are no *I can't*'s in month-long novel writing. There are plenty of *This is hard*'s and *I'm not sure what to do*'s, but as long as you keep writing, you'll finish your novel.


You can do it.

Remember that tens of thousands of people just like you write a novel in a month every year. No matter how busy you are, or how little you might know about writing a novel, you can finish! If you begin the month thinking you *can*, you are already way ahead of the game.

Your Word-Count Goal

You want your word-count goal to be challenging, but still achievable. It should inspire you to write as much as you can, not be so easy you can ignore it or so hard you just feel frustrated. Be sure to consider your age, level of experience, and schedule when you're setting it. Also, it's okay to adjust your goal during the month if you realize it's not working for you.


Here's one way to set an initial word-count goal:

- 
1. Write at a normal pace for the same amount of time you plan on writing each day. If you're writing at home, that might be several hours. If you're only writing in class, that might be just 20 minutes. Don't try to write super fast; go at a normal pace.
 2. When time is up, check your word count for that session.
 3. Multiply that word count by how many days you're going to write this month. So, if you're going to write at home every day, that might be 30 days. If you're only writing in a classroom for several weeks, that might be just 10-15 days. That number is your initial word-count goal!

NaNoWriMo Calendar

Your word-count goal for the month may seem impossible from where you're sitting now. That's totally okay. Big creative projects like novel writing are daunting even for professional writers, but we're here to tell you a secret: **If you break big goals into a series of smaller goals, the impossible becomes doable. Easy, even.** To help make next month's challenge a piece of cake, we've come up with this NaNoWriMo Calendar.

It is best to set aside time each day to write, but be realistic. If you can only write three days a week because you have soccer practice, be make sure to take that into consideration when filling in this calendar. Jot down the number of hours and words you plan on writing each day.



To find out just how many words you will need to write each day, divide your total word-count by the number of days you've set aside for writing during the month. For example, if your word-count goal is 5,000, and you can make time to write on 20 days, you will need to write 250 words each day you've scheduled. (You may know this number already from the previous exercise.)

National Novel Writing Month Contract

This is an agreement that lays out your rights and responsibilities as a novelist. Make sure both you and a trusted adult or friend sign this contract. Once this affidavit is signed, the contract will broadcast your novel-writing intentions throughout the universe. Really.

NATIONAL NOVEL WRITING MONTH



I, _____, hereby pledge my intent to write a
_____ -word novel in one month.

By taking on this absurd month-long deadline, I understand that notions of craft, brilliance, grammar, and spelling are to be chucked right out the window, where they will remain, ignored, until they are retrieved for the editing process. I understand that I am a talented person, capable of heroic acts of creativity, and I will give myself enough time over the course of the next month to allow my innate gifts to come to the surface, untouched by self-doubt, self-criticism, and other acts of self-bullying.

During the month ahead, I realize I will produce clunky dialogue, clichéd characters, and deeply flawed plots. I agree that all of these things will be left in my rough draft, to be corrected at a later point. I understand my right to withhold my manuscript from all readers (except possibly my teacher) until I deem it complete. I also acknowledge my right as an author to brag about the quality of the rough draft and the rigors of the writing process, should such bragging prove useful in garnering me respect, attention, or freedom from household chores.

I acknowledge that the month-long, _____ -word goal I set for myself is both wildly challenging and totally achievable, as long as I let no Evil Inner Editors, outside distractions, or normal bedtime hours stand in my way. I also acknowledge that, upon successful completion of the stated writing objective, I am entitled to a period of gleeful celebration lasting days, if not weeks, afterward, and moreover, should I fail to reach my goal, I am entitled to a well-earned break after which I will try again.

YOUR SIGNATURE

DATE

TRUSTED ADULT/FRIEND'S SIGNATURE

DATE

Word-Count Cheer and Chore Coupons

Below, you'll find ten Cheer and Chore Coupons, one for each milestone from your Triumphant Chart of Noveling Progress on page 55. These coupons are great if you feel like you need more motivation to meet your word-count goal. Ask your friends and family to fill out Cheer Coupons with fun things they'll do with you once you reach certain word counts (Trips for ice cream? Afternoon binge-watch of your favorite show?). Or, if you prefer more nefarious methods, use the Chore Coupons to promise to do unpleasant chores for others if you don't reach certain word counts. Trust us, having to clean out your sister's rat cage can be very motivating...

<p>NANOWRIMO YWP CHEER COUPONS</p> <p>I _____ CHEERER'S NAME hereby promise to celebrate by _____ SOMETHING GOOD! _____ with _____ WRITER'S NAME should they write _____ AMOUNT words of their novel by _____ DATE</p> <p>X SIGNED _____ DATE _____</p>	<p>NANOWRIMO YWP CHORE COUPONS</p> <p>I _____ WRITER'S NAME hereby promise to render _____ CHORE _____ unto _____ RECIPIENT'S NAME should I fail to write _____ AMOUNT words of my novel by _____ DATE</p> <p>X SIGNED _____ DATE _____</p>
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NANOWRIMO YWP

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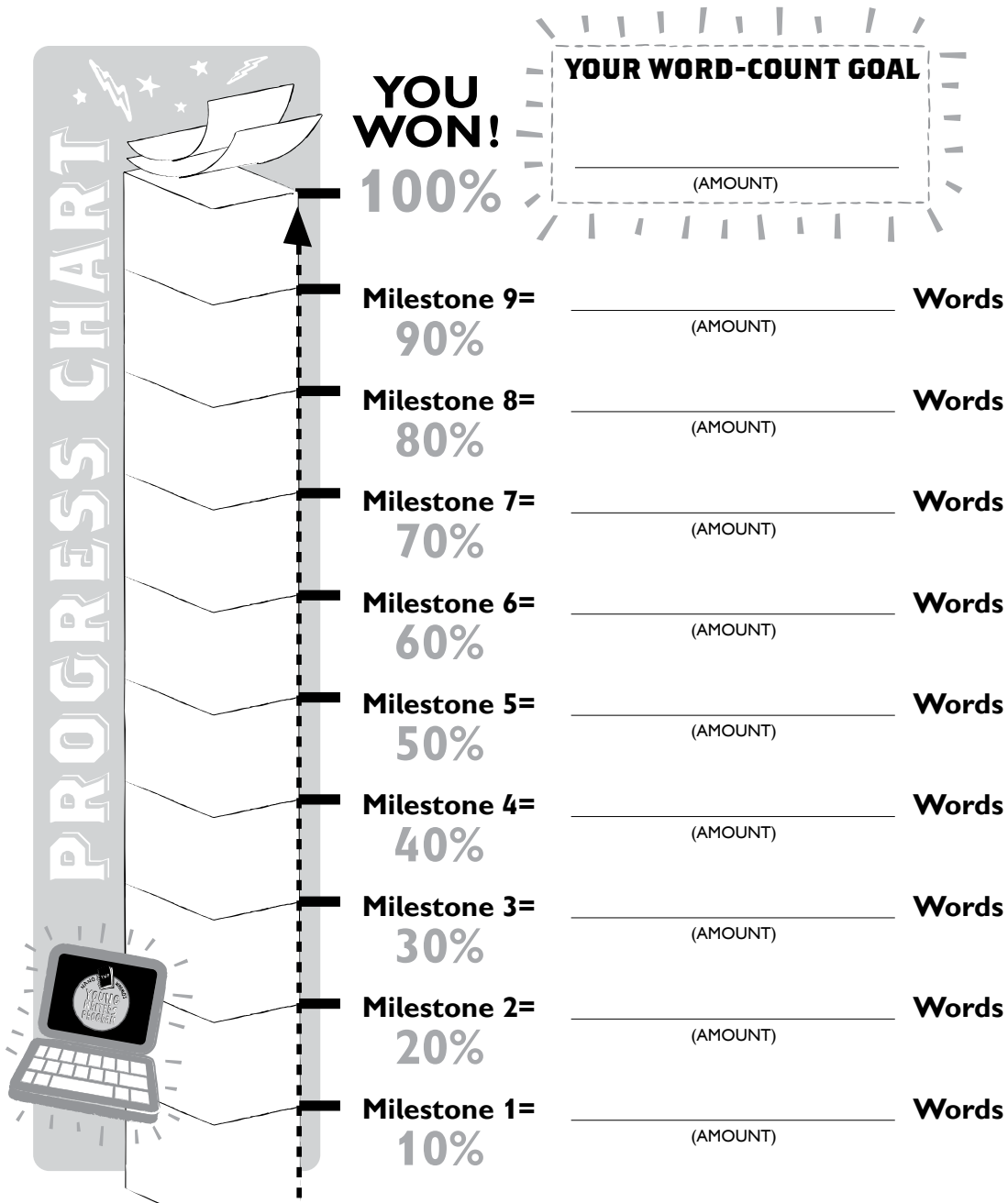
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DATE

NaNoWriMo's Personal Chart of Noveling Progress

Write your word-count goal at the top of this page, and color this chart in as you make progress on your novel. To find out what each milestone should be, divide your total word-count goal by 10. This number will be the amount of words you have to write to reach the next milestone.

If your word-count goal is 5,000, you'll need to write 500 to reach the first milestone, then another 500 (or 1,000 total words) to reach the second milestone, and so on.



**Ready, Set,
Write . . .
And Keep Writing!**

Back to the Beginning!

Here you are, ready to start your novel! We know what you're thinking. "*Okay, I've got my paper, my pencil, my lucky pencil sharpener, 15 packs of gum, a month's supply of energy drinks, and my noveling playlist to get me pumped and ready to go. So now what?*"

If you're feeling a little nervous, like you and the blank page are having a staring contest, don't worry! It's perfectly natural. Many novelists will tell you that figuring out the first few lines of a novel is the hardest part. Lucky for you, you're about a million steps ahead of most novelists—you've already got your characters, your plot, your setting, *and* you know how to write some seriously awesome dialogue!

Plus, it doesn't really matter how you start, since you'll probably go back and revise this part later, once you've finished your first draft. So really, the only important thing about starting... is to start! Here are a few ways authors begin their novels:



You can:

- start at the beginning by describing the setting or characters.
- start with the inciting incident (i.e. "The moment everything changed was...").
- start *in medias res* (in the middle of things), then go back and fill things in.
- start at the end, then jump backwards to the beginning.

Start at the Beginning by Describing the Setting or Characters

As you learned in the "Outlining Your Plot" worksheet, the beginning or set-up of your novel needs to introduce your story. Starting a novel at the very beginning is a great way to ease your readers in. Here's an example that begins by describing the setting, and how the character feels there.

Natalie took one step inside her auntie's house and knew instantly that she would hate living there. For one thing, it smelled like cat litter and mildew. The ceilings were low, especially in the tiny kitchen. In the room upstairs, the room she and her mother would have to share, faded pink wallpaper peeled off the walls and one window looked out at the vacant, weed-filled lot next door. And there was something else she couldn't quite name, some feeling she got when she looked into the shadows of the upstairs hallway, like something was waiting there just out of sight.

Try starting your novel at the beginning. Take out your plot worksheet and review your set-up. Think about describing your character, the setting they're in, and how they're feeling about the situation.

Start with the Inciting Incident

The **inciting incident**, as you know, is the moment that changes your protagonist's life and launches them into their adventure. Starting with this moment sucks your readers into your story, and leaves them wondering what will happen next.

Two days after moving into her Aunt Jen's house, Natalie saw the ghost for the first time. Midnight. She woke up from a noise in the hallway, and when she stepped out the door, there he was, a dark-haired boy grinning back at her. Also, he was floating and see-through. Definitely a ghost. Definitely cute. "I'm so sorry to wake you up," he said. That was the moment everything changed.

Now try and begin with the inciting incident. Go back and review your inciting incident and then write a beginning to your novel that starts with this event.

Start *In Medias Res*

In medias res (pronounced *en med-ee-ya rez*) is Latin for "in the middle of things." It literally means starting your story right smack in the middle of the action, and then filling in the holes—explaining who the characters are and what got them into the mess they're in. A lot of suspense, mystery, and action novels begin *in medias res*. It's a great way to draw readers in and to make sure they stick around for all the details.

"You don't have to do this if you don't want to, Nat," said Theo. He smiled his crooked grin, and he'd have been pretty cute if he wasn't dead. But he was dead, and had been for over one hundred years. Tonight, it was up to me to save him.

"Are you serious?" I asked. "You're not going to ditch me that easily." Before he could stop me, I jumped through the portal back into the past.

Start *in medias res*. Check out your rising action, falling action, and climax to see if there are any moments you might want to start with.

Start at the End

This one is a bit tricky, but well worth a try! You basically tell the ending to your readers, but leave just enough mystery to keep them reading. Then, you can either work backwards to reveal just how that ending came about or jump to any other point of your novel and continue.

Looking back on my time with Theo, I don't regret anything. Well, I guess I regret the fact that he was a ghost, and lived more than a hundred years before I was born. But the adventure we had together was something I'll always remember, even if he won't. It all began when I moved in with my Aunt Jen...

Start at the end. Try to include clues to the story's main conflict so readers get some idea of what the rest of the novel will be about and intrigue them to learn more.

Now you have a bunch of beginnings to start with. Recopy your favorite in your noveling notebook or onto your computer, and write, write, write!

Details, Details, Details

The noveling has begun, and you've been writing like your fingers are on fire. If your word count isn't where you want it to be, we have a solution. The best way to get your word count soaring (and to write vivid, memorable scenes) is this: add **concrete** and **sensory details** to your novel.



Concrete, sensory details are those details in your novel that come right out of your five senses:

1. Taste  2. Touch  3. Smell  4. Sight  5. Hearing 

Here's an example without any sensory details:

"There was a dog in the alley." (7 words)

That sentence paints a pretty basic picture. But what does the dog look like? What are the sounds and smells of the alley? Your job as a writer is to make the reader feel like they've been dropped right into the action, and to do that, you have to build a complete world.

Here's an example with more sensory details:

"A dog whimpered in the dark, moonlit alley. Its golden fur was matted and smelled like the inside of a toilet, but it wagged its curly tail and pressed a cold, wet snout into my palm." (36 words)

This time, you can hear the dog whimper. You can see its golden fur, feel how its nose is cold and wet, and maybe even smell the not-so-great scent rising off it. Plus, we've boosted our word count!

Below, we've listed a few things that could use some spicing up in the detail department. Answer the questions for each of the items using concrete, sensory details. Make your reader feel like they've been teleported away!

A thunderstorm

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

How do the clouds look? How does the rain look as it falls, or as it collects on the ground?

How does a thunderstorm feel on your skin? In your bones? Focus on physical sensations.

What does the rain taste like?

A music concert

What do you see?

What kinds of things do you smell?

What do you hear?

How does it feel? Focus on physical sensations, like someone's elbow jabbing into your side or concrete slapping against your sneakers, not emotions.

An abandoned house

What do you see outside? Inside?

What do you smell?

What do you hear?

What do you touch, and how does it feel?



Bonus Exercise: The NaNoWriMo Description Challenge

The following things are a little more difficult to describe, but not impossible. If you can describe the following using all your senses, you will have no problem reaching your word-count goal.

A blank white wall

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Embarrassment

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Love

Taste:

Touch:

Smell:

Sight:

Sound:

Stupendous job! If you ever feel like your word count is waning, be sure to use your senses to add a lot of concrete and sensory details.

Sub-Plotting

The More Plots, the Merrier

A surefire way to guarantee that there is enough action in your novel to fill the pages, meet your word count, and keep your readers reading is to add **subplots** starring your supporting characters. Just like your protagonist and antagonist, your supporting characters have dreams, fears, and weaknesses of their own.

If your protagonist wants to travel to Chicago for the freestyle hip-hop competitions to fulfill his dream of becoming a performer, perhaps a **subplot** could be about his best friend who wants to become a chef and is coming along to try to get a job at one of Chicago's five-star restaurants.



Watching TV is a great way to learn about **subplots**. Shows like *SpongeBob SquarePants* are filled with them. Episodes aren't always about SpongeBob. Patrick, Squidward, Mr. Krabs, and Sandy have adventures of their own that weave in and out of the main plot line. For this reason, we would like you to take a break from noveling and watch some TV. Don't get too excited though. You're not totally off the hook . . .

You have to choose a fictional show—meaning no reality-TV shows—and it can't be a show you really like. Otherwise, you will get too lost in the episode to pay attention to the assignment. Which is to sit down, put your thinking cap on, and write down answers to the following questions in your notebook:

1. Who is the protagonist?
2. How many supporting characters are there? Who are they? How are they related to the protagonist?
3. What are the subplots? These are the plots that involve the supporting characters going after something they want. They may include the protagonist, but sometimes the protagonist has little to no connection to the subplot.
4. Do the supporting characters have their own antagonists? Or are they also battling the protagonist's antagonist?
5. How did the subplots fit into the larger story? Did they all happen in one place, or was the action more spread out? What was the balance of main plot to subplots?

As you probably noticed, within the main plot of the show, the writers have inserted several minor plots involving the supporting characters. Let's take a look at your supporting characters' hopes and fears so you can add subplots to your own story.

Complete the following for one of your supporting characters. If you want to create more subplots, answer the questions for more of your supporting characters on a separate sheet of paper:

Supporting character's name: _____

1. More than anything in the world, they want...

2. But they're afraid of...

3. They help the protagonist by...

4. In their free time, they...

Anytime you feel stuck or bored with your protagonist, go see what your supporting characters are up to. You can totally switch gears and follow their journeys whenever you'd like. Maybe they'll run into your protagonist, maybe they won't. No matter what happens, we promise that all kinds of unexpected things will unfold each time you explore a subplot.



Character Interviews on NaNo-TV

One of the best ways to *really* get to know your characters is to step inside their shoes for a little while—to pretend you actually are your characters! And guess what? We've given you the perfect opportunity to do just that, because your characters have been invited to be interviewed on the local NaNo-TV station.

With a friend or by yourself, answer the interview questions as your characters would answer them. If it helps you to get into the roles before you start, try closing your eyes and imagining how your characters speak and move. Maybe slink around the room like your protagonist would, or use a French accent if your supporting character is French.

PROTAGONIST INTERVIEW

Host: Hello, (*your protagonist's name*), and welcome to *NaNo-TV*, the best ever TV show based on a writing challenge. We're honored to have you with us today. Why don't you start by telling us a little about your journey so far? What are you trying to do, and how's it going?

Protagonist:

Host: Wow! Sounds like quite the adventure. Rumor has it that someone is out to get you, though! Can you tell us a little about your antagonist? How have you two been getting along lately? What have they been up to?

Protagonist:

Host: Oh dear, that's too bad. Here's a different question, then: Tell us about a favorite memory of yours. Something to cheer you up in these hard times.

Protagonist:

Host: Real quick, a question that's been weighing on everyone's mind: Would you rather live without music or chocolate? Why?

Protagonist:

Host: How do you feel about the rest of your adventure? Is there anything you're anxious about? Anything you're looking forward to?

Host: Well, we wish you the best of luck! We're confident you will succeed! Before you leave, do you have any words of wisdom (or juicy secrets!) to tell our audience?

Protagonist:



Okay, now it's time for one of your supporting characters to be interviewed! Choose your favorite supporting character, or one you want to get to know better, and take a few minutes to get into character.

SUPPORTING CHARACTER INTERVIEW

Host: Hello, (*supporting character's name*), and welcome to the show! We just talked to your friend the protagonist, and learned all about their adventures so far. Thrilling stuff! But enough about them, let's talk about you. How did you and the protagonist first meet? What did you think about them back then?

Supporting Character:

Host: Wow, you were both just so cute and tiny back then. What about now? How are you two getting along at the moment? How have you been helping them out?

Supporting Character:

Host: They are just so lucky to have you! Which makes us wonder: Is there anything or anyone that's been a big help to you along the way?

Supporting Character:

Host: Very interesting. Hey, it looks like we've got a call coming through. Hello, you're on *NaNo-TV*, the best TV show ever. What's your question?

Caller: *Yes, hi. Wow, I've never called into a TV show before! Hi Mom! Anyway, my question is: If you could only eat three foods for the rest of your life, what would you choose?*

Supporting Character:

Host: Good answer. Moving on to the dramatic stuff: is there something you want to tell the protagonist but can't? Any juicy secrets you're holding back from them? Dish!

Supporting Character:

Host: Our lips are sealed! We wish you both the best of luck and look forward to hearing how things work out for you. One last thing, before you go: What do you plan on doing after this novel is over?

Supporting Character:

Host: Wow! Wish I could join you! Thank you so much for your time. We hope you'll join us again soon. Up next, the character you've all been waiting for... the antagonist, just after this commercial break!



All right, now it's time to get antagonistic! Whatever you need to do, take a few minutes to get into character—then, let your antagonist take center stage.

ANTAGONIST INTERVIEW

Host: Hi, (*your antagonist's name*), and welcome to the show! Why don't you tell us a little about yourself? Like, what has made you so unpleasant?

Antagonist:

Host: Jeez, no need to shout! We've just spoken to a few of your enemies, and they've told us a little about the conflict you all are having. Would you like to give your side of the story?

Antagonist:

Host: Fascinating. Is there a certain reason why you and the protagonist are enemies? Were you ever friends? Do you see yourself getting along in the future?

Antagonist:

Host: Is there anything you plan to do in the novel that you haven't done so far? Any nasty tricks up your sleeve you'd like to tell us about?

Antagonist:

Host: That is *messed up!* You really are an antagonist, in every way. Oh, it looks like we've got another call coming through! Caller, welcome to the show. What's your question?

Caller: *Yes, hello. I'm a research scientist and I'm doing a study on antagonists. I was wondering what you would change if you were writing this novel about yourself. Like, how would the story be different?*

Antagonist:

Host: Fascinating. Well, it looks like we're running out of time. We hope you'll come back again and join us when the novel is finished. And to all our viewers out there in TV land, be sure to join us tomorrow, when I'll be arm wrestling a ravenous koala bear, blind-folded. See you then!



Bonus Challenge!

If you're having a good time with these interviews, keep going! Make up your own questions to ask, talk to all your supporting characters, maybe even get into costume!

Lists, Lists, and Lists of Lists

"During the month of November, Nia was busy with all kinds of activities. Not only was she writing a novel in a month (no easy feat!), but she was also training for a marathon, helping her mom start a food truck business, volunteering at a local homeless shelter, and inventing a new color of hair dye to match the shade of her favorite shoes."

Oh hey, we were just doing one of our favorite noveling activities: using a list we made to help us write our story. These items were taken from a list we made called "All the important things Nia does in November."



Lists are great because they do a lot of things at once:

1. They help us discover new things about our characters.
2. They generate new plot ideas.
3. They help boost word counts (always a plus!).

You can use the suggested list topics below in many different ways. Here are a few ideas:

1. You can fill out the lists in the spaces below to see if you discover anything new about your characters or plot that will take your novel in a new direction.
2. You can take the items from your lists and write them into your novel as full sentences just like we've done in the example above.
3. You can just read the list of suggested lists below and see if any of them spur new ideas and write from there.

Whichever way you choose to do it, make sure to let your brain loose and just write. If you run out of room in any given box, take out a separate sheet of paper and keep writing!

Hidden things in this character's room:

Things in this character's refrigerator and freezer:

This character's bad habits:

What this character daydreams about:

Things in this character's closet:

Things this character collects:

Things this character carries in their pockets or bag:

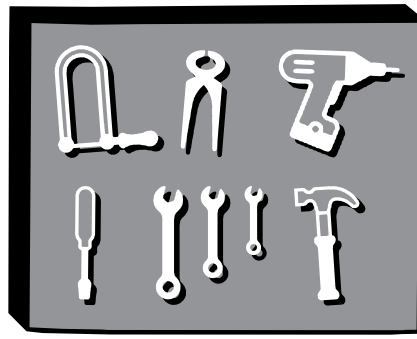
Activities this character did before ending up in your novel:

Bonus Exercise

If you like lists and you finish with these, come up with your own lists. Anytime you get stuck during NaNoWriMo, take out this list of lists and get writing. A list prompt like “Things my protagonist wants to eat this very moment” may help you get out of a rut and get your story moving again. . . to the taco truck! Here’s a List of Lists to get you started.

- Things about this character no one knows
- Favorite places for this character to visit
- Things that fascinate this character
- Things that embarrass this character
- Things that disgust this character
- What other people say about this character behind their back
- Objects this character might include in a time capsule
- What this character dreams about while sleeping
- Things this character plans to do in their lifetime
- Best/worst meals this character has ever eaten
- Songs this character knows by heart

**I Wrote a Novel!
Now What?**



The Workshop

Woo-hoo! You finished your first draft! Now it's time to workshop. When writers talk about a workshop, they don't mean a shed filled with hammers and wrenches. Instead, a workshop is when writers share drafts of their projects with each other in order to see what's working... and what's not. In other words, today is a big day for your novel, because it's about to get read by another living, breathing person!

It's this first reader's job to explain what they love about your story, as well as ask a ton of questions. It's not their job to tell you how to fix anything—it's not their story, after all, it's yours. As the writer, you'll consider their feedback and make your own decisions about how to use it. Below are guidelines this first reader will follow.



- **Read through the draft once without writing comments.** This can be a quick skim to get an idea of what the story is about and who some of the characters are. Then read it again more carefully.
- **Forget about grammar, spelling, and how you would say something if it were your novel.** Today, focus on the content of the story—the characters, the events, the setting, the awesome writing tricks the writer used!
- **Take time to circle words, sentences, or whole sections that you really like.** Then, in the margins, write a word or two to tell what you liked about each one.
- **Ask lots of questions.** If something doesn't make sense, ask about it. If you need more detail about a character, ask about it. If you want to know how or why the writer came up with a certain plot point, ask about it!
- **Be kind—and specific—as you point out areas that didn't "work" for you.** "I got a little lost following the action here," is more useful than "This doesn't make sense."
- **Keep the criticism private.** No one else needs to hear how you thought so-and-so's first sentence was super-boring!

To get a clearer idea of what “helpful” feedback looks like, compare these two paragraphs.

Not So Helpful

“Stop, thief!” Eloise cried. People on the street stared as the guy took off with her precious backpack. Eloise panicked. She had to get that pack back! What would she tell Juan when she arrived at their secret meeting spot without it? And how would they transform him from a clumsy, shy dancer into a breakdancing master in time for their competition without the special playlist that was inside?

This sentence is a little boring

??

I like your writing.

The main problem with these comments is that, like a dull novel, they lack detail. The first comment does not give specifics about why that sentence might be boring. And the last comment, “I like your writing,” doesn’t let the writer know what they’re specifically doing well. Now check out the comments below.

More Helpful

“Stop, thief!” Eloise cried. People on the street stared as the guy took off with her precious backpack. Eloise panicked. She had to get that pack back! What would she tell Juan when she arrived at their secret meeting spot without it? And how would they transform him from a clumsy, shy dancer into a breakdancing master in time for their competition without the special playlist that was inside?

Add detail here. What did the guy look like? What were the people doing as they stared? Etc.

Did you rhyme on purpose? Nice!

I love your use of suspense. I want to read more!

The comments here are more helpful because they are more specific. Now the writer knows what they need to revise, as well as what they’re already doing well.

Reader Review Worksheet

Fill in the blanks below as you read the writer's first draft. And remember, be specific! Return this sheet to them when you are done.

Novel Title: _____

Author: _____

1. Based on the beginning, what do you think this novel is about?

2. Who is the most important character so far? What are they like?

3. What do you like most about the first line? First paragraph? First chapter?

4. What is the setting? What other details would you like to know about it?

5. List three parts where the story was working so well you just couldn't stop reading.

6. Is there anything else you really love about the story so far?

7. List three parts where you the story didn't work so well for you. Maybe you got confused or bored, lost track of what was happening, or got pulled out of the story.

8. List three big questions you have about the story, or three suggestions for the writer to try when they revise. Focus on big things, like character, plot, dialogue, and conflict.

9. Finish this sentence based on what you just read: *This is a story about...*

Unleash Your Inner Editor

Your Inner Editor is *almost* ready to get to work. You've gotten some helpful workshop notes—which are a great start—but in the end, only you can decide what's best for your novel. Revising a whole book can seem pretty overwhelming. Some authors spend years working on second (and third, fourth, fifth, you get the idea) drafts. Just remember to stay focused on the big picture. We hope this worksheet will help you make a manageable and realistic revision plan!

A good place to start is by thinking about what the **heart** of your story might be. The heart of a story is what it's all about, not only the plot, but also the big picture themes. A story's heart is like the heart in a body: it keeps things alive, strong, and moving forward.

Here are some examples:

"My story is about how love really does conquer all, even if one person is a sea monkey and the other person is a great white shark. It's about how two people (or sea creatures) can really change each other and the world for the better despite the differences between their families."

"My story is about how an ordinary 12-year-old boy's life is dramatically changed when he wins the lottery. It's about how he loses track of who he is and has to figure it out again, and all the new, unexpected problems he faces."

"My story is about a heroic superhero who has to undergo many challenges before she conquers the villain. It's about how you have to learn to trust other people in order to trust yourself."

What's the heart of your story? What's it all about?

Now, it's time for you to get to work revising! First of all, take a deep breath. You can do this! Personally, we think revising is a lot easier than writing a first draft. You've already done the hard work of creating something from nothing! You know your characters, your conflict, and the world of your story. Now it's time to make them all shine. Follow these guidelines to help you revise.

Note: You may notice that none of the items below have to do with grammar or spelling or typos. You and your Inner Editor will do that absolutely last, after you've revised your novel in every other way.



Revision Guidelines:

- To help read your draft with fresh eyes, **change how it looks**. If it's on a computer, print it out, change the font or formatting, or switch to reading it on a phone or tablet. If it's handwritten, consider typing it up, or making copies of it on different colored paper. Trust us, this helps!
- Read** your draft as fast as you comfortably can, just like you read other books. **Jot down quick, big-picture notes**, including sections that are boring, confusing, or not developed enough. Don't try to fix anything yet, just jot down your questions and comments. You can also highlight parts you really love!
- When you finish reading, write a **1-3 page synopsis** of what actually happens in your first draft. Include all the major plot events. You can write a sentence summary of each chapter or retell it in paragraph format, whatever works for you.
- If you want more revision guidance, answer as many **Revision Support Questions** as you want from the **following four pages**.
- Finally, use your goal, notes, synopsis and answers to the revision questions as a jumping off point as you start to **rewrite**.

Did we say **rewrite**? We did! Revision isn't about changing one or two words and calling your story done—it's about adding, deleting, and rewriting whole sections of your draft. So, we suggest starting a new, blank sheet and rewriting word by word from the beginning, even if you spend some time just copying down parts of your original draft. You'll end up with a more exciting and polished second draft that way!

Revision Support Questions: Answer as many of these as you want to help guide you as you revise.

I. Organization — *Make sure your reader can follow the story.*

1. Is your novel organized in chapters? If so, how did you decide where to make chapter breaks? If you didn't use chapters, why not?

2. Find and read a few transitions between chapters (or between scenes if you didn't use chapters). What kinds of words or phrases did you use to help the reader understand when and where the next scene or chapter was taking place? Is your organization clear?

3. Name three places in your novel where readers might get confused about the order of events, and what you could do to fix them. These changes could be big (moving whole chapters) or small (adding transitions like "Early the next morning" to make the flow of events or ideas clearer).

- _____
- _____
- _____

II. Characters — *Fill your novel with unique, interesting people.*

1. Look at your protagonist. Is it clear from the first few chapters what their greatest wish or desire is? Describe the moment that makes it clear below (or think of how you could add it).

2. Will the reader root for your protagonist after reading the first few chapters? Describe a few early moments that build sympathy for them (or think of how you could add some).

3. Real people are complicated! Describe a moment where your protagonist makes a mistake or behaves less-than-perfectly (or think of how you could add some).

4. Name three changes you plan to make as you revise your novel to make other characters stand out or feel more real. These changes could be big (writing a full backstory for a character) or small (giving a character a few more lines to say).

- ---
- ---
- ---

III. Conflict — *Keep your reader turning the page.*

1. In one sentence, describe the conflict in your novel.

2. What will happen to your protagonist if they lose the conflict? Make sure the stakes are high enough. (For instance, rather than getting grounded if they fail a test, maybe they'll fail the class and have to repeat the grade, or be transferred to a military school in Alaska.)

3. How do you hint at the conflict in the very beginning of your story?

4. Open your novel to one page, any page. (If you turn to a page related to your subplot, try again.) Skim the paragraphs. Then repeat with another page. How does the conflict appear on those pages? Did you or your characters lose focus on your main conflict at any point? Is this okay, or do you think readers might lose interest?

5. Name three changes you plan to make to keep the conflict present throughout your novel.

- ---
- ---
- ---

IV. Language and Literary Techniques — Use all your writing tricks!

1. On a scale of 1-5, give your first draft a rating for how often you used the following techniques.

1 = never 2 = rarely 3 = sometimes 4 = often 5 = always (but not too much)

_____ Dialogue that moves the story forward, reveals things about your characters, and increases tension

_____ Detailed settings that create moods and reinforces characters

_____ Specific sensory details, including sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and sensations

_____ A beginning that hooks the reader and introduces the main character

_____ A climax that makes the reader gasp "What's next?!"

_____ An ending that resolves the conflict and shows how the character changed

_____ Other: _____

_____ Other: _____

_____ Other: _____

2. Look at your list. Give yourself a high five for the parts you're doing well, then take a look at the techniques you assigned low ratings. Which ones could you try more of in your second draft? Name 3-5 things you plan to do when you revise. These changes could be big (add dialogue everywhere) or small (add more sensory details to the car chase on page 10).

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Okay, you've got a plan and you're almost ready to revise. Go back to the Revision Guidelines on page 89 to let that Inner Editor loose!

Cleaning It Up

All month long, we've told you to focus on getting your words on paper. "Don't worry if it's not perfect," we've repeated. "Write as much as possible," we've reminded. Now we take it all back! Well, not really, but here's the deal: You've worked really hard on this novel, and while it doesn't have to be perfect, you also don't want it to be full of typos. Typos and grammar mistakes really distract readers' attention away from your brilliant story. And who knows what you may do with this novel in future? Maybe you'll want to submit it to a contest. Maybe you'll want to try to get it published. If so, you're going to have to do the dreaded deed anyway: proofread.

Below are a few areas where writing can get messy. Read the description of each writing woe then grab your very best red pen, imagine it's a scrub-brush, and clean up the messy sentences. Don't do this to your own story until you're 100% satisfied with it in every other way, though! You don't want to waste time editing a draft you're going to end up changing anyway.

Sentence Beginnings and Endings

Let's start with the basics! Use correct capitalization and end punctuation. Your reader will get lost if you don't follow the basic rules.

the stadium went silent matt's older sister heather
grabbed the bat she looked so grown-up in her los
angeles uniform (9 missing periods and capitals)

Spelling and Tricky Words

First, check your spelling. But don't think you can count on your computer's spell check. Spell check won't always pick up on tricky words that sound alike, such as *they're*, *their*, and *there*. You've got to use your own brain to find those mistakes!

The excitement was so great that Matt couldn't
bear it. They're was no way to describe the intense
anticipation. (2 tricky words)

Make Your Mark!

^ insert

ƒ delete

∩ switch

◉ period

^ comma

∩ quotation
marks

¶ start new
paragraph

Pick and Stick to One Verb Tense

It is important to stay with one verb tense. There are times when you may have to switch (dialogue, flashbacks), but for the most part, pick a tense and stick to it.

The summer evening was filled with cheers and suddenly, the crack of a bat. Matt closes his eyes for a minute and tries to imagine the ball heading way, way out of the stadium. *(2 verbs with the wrong tense)*

Use Commas to Combine

Commas are great for lists, connecting thoughts, and cluing your reader that it's time to take a pause. Without them, it can be hard to understand what's happening in a long sentence.

The people jumped up out of their seats clapped their hands and cheered. Heather had hit a home run! *(2 missing commas)*

We said commas are great for connecting thoughts. That's especially important if all your sentences are short, or if they start in the same way. Can you use commas to combine these three short, simple sentences into one or two longer, more complicated sentences?

She ran to all the bases. She waved at the crowd. She did a dance on home plate.

Choose Correct Pronouns

Make sure to choose the correct form of every pronoun.

Matt was feeling as giddy as a child on they first day of summer. *(1 wrong pronoun)*

Say it Loud and Proud!

Use capital letters, quotation marks, and sometimes commas to make it clear where the dialogue is.

He cupped his hands over his mouth. You did it! He turned to the man sitting next to him and grinned. That's my sister he said. *(5 missing quotation marks or commas)*

Indent New Paragraphs

Start a new paragraph each time the story moves to a new place, time, action, idea, speaker, or section. You can also get creative, and try using different paragraph lengths for different effects (like short paragraphs for quick actions or longer paragraphs for more slower-paced sections).

Now take a look at the beginning of a novel below. It's got promise, but it's also got some major problems. Wield thy mighty red pen!

James Frederick Monroe, why are you late?

Jim looked directly down at the floor. How could he answer that question without being sentenced to a year of house arrest. His dad had bawled him out last week just for forgetting to take out the trash garbage. This was way worst than that. Jim knew it isn't his fault that he is late but the reason was to risky to confess. Just then a lie presented itself. It all began with Tommy Jim said after takeing a slow, deep breath. (*A bunch of mistakes! Go wild!*)

Now it's really time to unleash that Inner Editor of yours. Apply this Editing Checklist to your own novel!



- I began sentences and proper nouns with capital letters.
- I ended all sentences with the correct end marks. (. ? !)
- I punctuated dialogue with quotation marks and commas (when needed).
- I used commas, dashes, or parentheses to separate ideas within a sentence, or to combine short, simple sentences into longer ones.
- I indented a new paragraph each time there was a new place, time, action, idea, speaker, or section.
- I used a consistent verb tense.
- I used the correct form of all pronouns.
- I have checked my spelling.
- I have *really* checked my spelling and looked for tricky words!
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

After you check off all of the items and feel confident (or at least confident-ish) about your manuscript, it's time to look for opportunities to share it with the world! Congratulations, novelist—you've finished a novel!

Writing a Query Letter

Okay, so you've got a polished final draft and you want other people to read it. Woo hoo! There are many ways to share your writing. You could submit an excerpt to a contest or a literary magazine, you could self-publish your whole book, or you could try to find an agent who wants to help publish it for you. For that last bit, you're going to need to write query letter.

A query letter is a brief note to an agent giving them an idea of who you are, what your work is about, and why they should read it.

(Even if you're not planning to email an agent, a query letter is a good thing to have. You could send it your Great-Aunt Ida to convince her to give you feedback on your draft, or you could read it out loud to your friends so they'll be climbing all over each other for the chance to read your novel first.)

How to write a fantastic query letter:



- Email Subject Line** - Your subject line should follow a format like this: "Query for [insert genre] - TITLE." Here's an example: "Query for Fantasy Novel - THE RAINBOW SWORD."
- Greeting** - You can start with "Dear So-and-So" or just use the recipient's name—"Sidney Jones," "Alma Jefferson," etc.—with a colon at the end.
- Hook** - In one or two sentences, hint at some of the most exciting or compelling issues in your novel. What huge problem is your main character facing? What's the part that will grab even your little brother's attention?
- Novel Summary** - Provide a brief description of your novel. It shouldn't be too detailed—about one or two short paragraphs at most. You want to give the reader a taste of what happens in your novel and who the major characters are, but you don't want to reveal all the twists and turns.
- Title, Genre, Reason to Read** - This is a packed couple sentences! Start with your title, say what genre your novel is, and include a few details about why everyone should read it. Does it address issues all young people are facing? Did you experience an alien abduction first-hand so you know all the inside info? Have you won any writing contests? This is a place to say that!
- Closing** - Be sure to thank the reader for their time, and end simply with "Sincerely," and your full name.

Now take a look at the parts of a fantastic query letter in action:

Email subject line	→	<i>Query for Comedy/Horror - ZOMBIE DOG</i>
Greeting	→	<i>Dear Alma Jefferson:</i>
Hook	→	<i>Buster is just a normal dog. He loves going on walks, playing tug-of-war, and... eating brains.</i>
Novel Summary	→	<i>Buster has had a hard life. First, he was abandoned on the side of the road by an owner he can't remember. Then, at the animal shelter, a strange dog bit him. If his new owner, Hannah, finds out he's a zombie, she'll take him back to the shelter, or worse.</i>
		<i>All Buster has to do is figure out how to keep his condition a secret. There's always roadkill brains for him to eat, and it's not like he's dangerous to humans. One day, though, Hannah meets a mysterious person who claims to be Buster's owner, and at night, Buster hears the pack of zombie dogs getting closer and closer. Like it or not, he's going to need Hannah's help.</i>
Title, Genre, Reasons to Read	→	<i>ZOMBIE DOG is a fast-paced novel filled with both comedy and horror. I've spent many hours observing my own dog's behavior, plus I'm a twelve-year-old (just like Hannah), so I really understand my readers' senses of humor.</i>
Closing	→	<i>Thank you for your time and consideration.</i>
		<i>Sincerely, Sammy Student</i>

Choosing an Exceptional Excerpt

Whether you wrote a 600-page epic or a 30-page novella, it's probably too long for someone to read all in one sitting. That's why authors often choose **excerpts** from their novel. **An excerpt is a short section from a larger work.**

What can you do with an excerpt? You can include it as an attachment with your query letter so the agent gets a sense of what your writing is like. You can submit it to a literary magazine that publishes work from young writers. You can read it out loud in front of your class, friends, or even a group of strangers at a library or book store so everyone can hear a little bit of your fantastic story. Published authors do readings like this all the time, and now you can, too!

How to choose an exceptional excerpt:



A good excerpt represents your novel at its best. It should be short but engaging; in the best case, it makes the reader want to know more about your plot and characters. Here are some of the traits of an excerpt that really **CALLS** out to publishers and readers:

Character - Remember that readers are most interested in original, well-developed characters. They want people they can love, hate, relate to, and so on. So be sure your excerpt includes a strong sense of at least one important character.

Action - Choose a part of your story where something important, dramatic, mysterious, sad, or funny happens. In other words, think about an event in your novel that really stands out. Chances are it will also stand out in an excerpt!

Language - You've worked hard on the language in your novel. You've crafted great dialogue and description, and used imagery, metaphors, and similes to put pictures in the reader's mind. What part makes you say, "Wow, I love my language here"?

Length - A good length for an excerpt is generally about 1,000 words (2 pages, if your manuscript is double-spaced). Don't worry if you go over or under a little. If you're reading it out loud, you should practice and time yourself so you're sure the piece you picked doesn't take 20 minutes when you only have 5 to read.

Stands on Its Own - Readers may be confused if you choose an excerpt that doesn't make sense without knowing the rest of the story, or a part with too much description. Think of the excerpt as a mini-novel, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.

Use the space below to name a few sections or chapters that might make good excerpts. List three different options, including page numbers for where each excerpt starts and ends. What makes each excerpt exceptional? Explain in your notes.

- _____

- _____

- _____



Woo-hoo, Novelist!

You did it—you wrote an entire novel in a month! Remember way back at the beginning, before you met your precious characters, before you built the remarkable rollercoaster of your plot, before you dotted that very final period (or exclamation point or question mark) on "The End"? You weren't quite sure what to expect, but you picked up a pencil and did what most people only dream of: you created an entire world out of just your own imagination. Congratulations!

If you want to keep writing (and we think you should!) you've got all the tools and knowledge to start again. Check out ywp.nanowrimo.org for more resources, including an online writing space, young writer forums, and motivational supplies like author pep talks, certificates, and goal-tracking charts. If you're 13 or older, you can sign up for an account at nanowrimo.org, too!

Good luck, from all of us at NaNoWriMo. We can't wait to see what wild and glorious adventure you try next!