

To Outline or Not: There is no Question

Template for SiWC at Home: October 2020 by Mahtab Narsimhan©

PART I:

- 1) What is this story about? Describe in one word or phrase:
- 2) Premise 1-3 lines which includes Strange Attractor (By Terry Rossio): This is the *high concept* which should be original/unusual but compelling:

<http://www.wordplayer.com/columns/wp02.Strange.Attractor.html>

- 3) MICE Quotient: To determine what this story is about and the conflicts it will generate.

<https://writingexcuses.com/tag/mice-quotient/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blehVIDyuXk&ab_channel=BrandonSanderson

<https://thewritersaurus.com/2015/05/08/orson-scott-cards-mice-quotient/>

Also described well in Orson Scott Card's *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* – Pages 77-88

MILIEU = Setting

Story starts when a character enters the world and ends when character leaves it. Eg : The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

IDEA or INQUIRY = Ask/Answer

The story presents a question and ends when the question is answered. Eg: Mystery stories. Sherlock Holmes

CHARACTER

A character is unhappy with an aspect of self and wants to change it. Story ends when character changes that aspect. Internal change. Eg: Gregor The Overlander series

EVENT

An event changes the character's world/status quo. Character tries to set things right –lot of action involved. External change. Eg: Harry Potter series

PART II

Jot down the following in bullet points only. Details will come later, so don't sweat it.

- 1) Setting: As fun as you can imagine it. Give yourself permission to go anywhere!
- 2) Cool ideas YOU would enjoy writing (and reading) about.
- 3) Plot (high level since this will be developed in detail, later)
- 4) Magic Systems: You need not develop entire system, just what elements of nature/man-made/futuristic they will be used.
- 5) Unusual Props and Creatures inhabiting your world

6) Sources of Conflict : List as many as possible (based on your MICE quotient) and then you can pick the best – these will also spark ideas re plot/subplots

- a) Between characters
- b) Character and setting
- c) Character and society

Once you have the conflicts, you're ready to write scenes:

Scene:

A scene is a unit of movement. Something has to happen and something has to change from the beginning of the scene to the end of the scene.

<https://www.writingclasses.com/toolbox/tips-masters/elmore-leonard-10-rules-for-good-writing> As Elmore Leonard said for rule 10 : Try to leave out the parts that readers tend to skip.

In a Scene:

- a) Character has a CHOICE
- b) Character makes a DECISION
- c) Character takes ACTION/OR NO ACTION
- d) Character faces the CONSEQUENCES

Make a list of AWESOME scenes you would love to write. Make them fun, full of conflict which you have already brainstormed from above. Write out a few to get a feel for the story, character, pacing.

PART III

Character Grid:

Primary and Secondary Characters:

Name	Role	Want (External Quest)	Need (Internal Quest)	Obstacle	Change	Notes	

Use this template to review and combine characters if possible to deepen their role.

Go deep instead of wide.

PART IV

Dan Wells' Seven Point Story Structure:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcmiqQ9NpPE&t=1s&ab_channel=S.JamesNelson

Dan mentions this was inspired by : [Star Trek Narrator's Guide to Roleplaying](#)

I find this an extremely useful exercise to do at the beginning and at the end, once the first draft is finished.

- 1) HOOK: Your premise/ what the story is about/ character's starting point
- 2) PLOT TURN 1: Something happens to set the story in motion
- 3) PINCH 1: Introduction of Villain
- 4) MID-POINT: Character moves from reaction to action
- 5) PINCH 2: All is lost/ worst scenario ever
- 6) PLOT TURN 2: Character finds the missing piece that will enable him to succeed/move towards goal
- 7) RESOLUTION: Opposite to where the character started

RECOMMENDED ORDER TO WRITE THESE OUT:

Best advice I received from Brandon Sanderson (plot backwards and write forward) ties in well with Dan's 7-point story structure.

- Resolution
- Hook
- Mid-point
- Plot-Turn 1
- Plot Turn 2
- Pinch 1
- Pinch 2

PART V : OUTLINE

Connect the dots from the above sections to write your detailed outline:

Try and fit the scenes/characters and find ways to plug them into your plot

Expand each scene. As you write, more ideas will occur to you, fill them into the appropriate section and keep going. Remember, this is a constantly evolving process, but only when you START, will more ideas occur, helping you write a stronger, nuanced story.