Story Outlining

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Introduction

Whether you are interested in writing a story for a novel, short stories, movie scripts, or plays, a writer must understand the basic elements of a story to effectively write one. In this course, you'll learn about the key elements of a story and how to creatively outline your own story.

Your final project for this course will be an outline of a story of your own.

By the time you've completed this first module, you should be able to:

- Define what a story is
- List and define the basic elements of a story outline

Connect

What is a Story?

An idea by itself is not a story. Neither is an imaginary world. Characters are not a story. Their problems and their personalities are not a story.

If ideas, imagined worlds, characters, and their problems are not a story, then what really is a story?

A ***story*** is the series of events experienced by characters in conflict ultimately resulting in the resolution of the conflict and a change of one character that directly answers the controlling question related to the theme the author is seeking to share.

It is what happens to the characters in their world through their eyes in the face of their problems. It is the series of events with all the tension and excitement that go along with it. It is the changes characters undergo or resist. It is what keeps you on the edge of your seat, turning the pages or waiting for the next scene after a commercial or going to the sequel of a movie.

There are several key elements to a story outline. Every story has a:

- Theme – the central message of the story
- Idea - the basic "what if" concept, the premise, the basic thought around which the story will turn
- Characters – people in your story that experience your story
- Conflict – the competing desires/needs of the characters that drive the story
- Setting – the real or imagined world your story takes place in
- Plot – the structure of the story that moves the story's conflict purposefully from beginning, middle, and end through a logical progression of cause and effect events

Apply

If you have not already done so, watch the movie *The Fugitive.* Analyze The Fugitive to identify the basic elements of a story outline present within the movie based on these questions.

- What do you think was the central message?
- What was the basic "what if" concept around which the story turned?
- Who were the major characters (three is enough for this exercise)? Who was the good guy (i.e. the main character)? Who was the bad guy? Who was neither or both?
- What were the competing desires/needs of the major characters?
- What was the setting?
- What were the beginning, middle, and end?

Post your analysis in the forum under the week 1 topic: Basic Story Outline of *The Fugitive.*

Do your best with this exercise – it is not about being right. We will discuss the correct answers during the next class session.

Reflect

Most of us have been impacted by stories from books and movies. Some have been told stories or experienced real life events that impacted them deeply.

Reflect on a story that connected with your values or made you challenge your values. Post your reflection to your blog.

Extend

Genre

Genre is the category/classification in which the story is placed within. Although genre is not a central topic in this course, it is helpful to determine what kind of genre you would like to write within. It is also important to research what works and what does not work in the genre you choose.

Where can I learn more about the different genres?

There are many types of genres of stories and Wikipedia provides a good summary of several of them:

- **Science Fiction**
- **Fantasy**
- **Romance**
- **Crime Fiction**
- **Comedy**
- **Horror**
- **Thriller**
- **Western**
- **History**