

Handout

Kickstart Your Novel 1: Find Your Story Idea and Write a Logline

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Th 5:15-6:05

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Do you know what you want to write about? If you do, is your idea strong enough to carry a novel? Whether you have a story idea or not, this class will help you find and combine great possibilities to build a resonant, powerful central core that is strong enough to bring you through to the end. Finally, you'll learn how to write a logline that summarizes your story in one sentence. This class includes lots of exercises and fun twists to get your ideas popping.

OUTLINE

Kickstart Class Overview

Find a Story Idea

Find the Compelling Kernel

Create a Premise from Your Story Idea

Write Your Logline

KICKSTART CLASS OVERVIEW

Welcome to the KICKSTART YOUR NOVEL minicourse!

This minicourse is designed to help you go from zero to developing a story idea, creating a solid outline of 40-60 scenes, and writing the first chapter. Yes, you can!

In addition to learning, we'll be doing exercises and group critiques to help you tune your work. Make sure you can open a text file on your computer during the zoom session, and/or that you keep a notebook and pencil next to you. For a jump on your work, get the handouts early and do the exercises, then refine them during class.

This course has five intense sessions:

- Kickstart Your Novel 1: Find Your Story Idea and Write a Logline
- Kickstart Your Novel 2: Build Your Story Foundation with the Four Story Pillars PART ONE
- Kickstart Your Novel 3: Build Your Story Foundation with the Four Story Pillars PART TWO
- Kickstart Your Novel 4: Assemble Your Story Into an Outline
- Kickstart Your Novel 5: Writing Techniques to Help Your Scenes Shine

Each session builds on the previous one. That being said, this conference is full of great classes and pitching appointments, so it's certainly OK if you can't make every single session. To keep up, just make sure to get the handouts and read them to get a good idea of what each session covers.

FIND A STORY IDEA

Story ideas/premises are all over. That being said, where can you find them? If you want to write a story but don't know what to write about, keep reading for some sparking ideas. Keep a notebook and pen handy or else type your thoughts as you stretch for interesting thoughts.

Read Voraciously

Documentaries and nonfiction have great ideas for stories. Look broadly — even self-help books, cautionary tales, and crazy legends can trigger an interesting rabbit trail. Don't forget to look at current events.

Listen and Watch the People Around You

Become an inveterate snoop. Think back on the stories your parents told you about when they were growing up. Listen into conversations between strangers at the bus stop. Imagine what life might be like for that waitress with the smeared eye shadow. Ask children questions about how things work — they often have unusual ways of expressing ideas.

Look at Nature and Animals

Question everything around you. Why does your dog turn around before he lies down? Why does your cat hiss into the corner of the room? Why does that rock formation look like a person? How does that ant carry that enormous piece of bread? Could you build a tiny house under that mushroom patch?

Think About Your Own Life

What are some high and low points of your own life? Did you have any near-misses? What might have been different if only you'd been smarter/older/richer/more attractive?

Ponder Fairy Tales and Bible Stories

These beloved stories are time-tested. Can you update a narrative into something new? For example, think of the possibilities with Daniel in the Bible who saw frightening visions of things he never understood. Or the ugly stepsister in Cinderella who isn't REALLY ugly — she just knows that Cinderella is a smug entitled girl who manipulates strangers for gain.

Ask What If?

Ask questions about everything. WHAT IF our planet had two suns? WHAT IF you found a sand glass that could freeze time so only you were able to move in it? WHAT IF your parents had political enemies and the enemies were now after you, even though you know nothing about it?

FIND THE COMPELLING KERNEL

It's important to know WHY this story idea appeals to you. Understanding the ideas's attraction may take a little time and reflection to figure out exactly why it appeals to you.

The kernel is often a struggle between what you WANT to do and what you OUGHT to do.

For example, suppose you're writing about David and Jonathan from the Bible. You might like the idea of two potential kings, yet only one will inherit the throne. Their lives could have gone in many directions, but in fact their brotherly love for each other was greater than the attractions of individual power. This is really a reflection of God's kingdom, isn't it? God wants us to love those around us more than we love ourselves. This conflict, or story

kernel, could be reflected in a number of scenarios, for example a husband who wants to draw his wife back to him through sacrificial love (*Fireproof* by Alex Kendrick).

Tease out the kernel in your ideas. See if you can apply this kernel in different ways and with different types of characters and setups..



STORY IDEA EXERCISES

- 😊 1. Make a list of three interesting ideas for your story.
 - 😊 2. Tease out the kernel in your ideas. Or maybe the kernel is the same between the ideas?
 - 😊 3. Turn the kernel of your ideas around with different characters/set-ups but the same take-home message.
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CREATE A PREMISE FROM YOUR STORY IDEA

An idea for a story is not a story. The idea is only an interesting fact, character, or situation that COULD be a story.

A story premise requires 4 things:

- A central character. (two if you are writing a romance).
- A Goal.
- Stakes.
- Obstacles.

Central Character

While your story is going to have lots of characters, you need to identify the central character or Hero through whose eyes we will see the story. For example, Frodo in *Lord of the Rings* is the primary character through whom we learn about Middle Earth.

Story Goal

The Story Goal is the thing that your Hero will be pursuing throughout the story. Its attainment or not will be clear by the end of the story. For example, Frodo must destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

Stakes

Stakes are why the Story Goal is so important. For example, if Frodo can't destroy the One Ring, the world will become an unimaginably dark and evil place.

Obstacles

Obstacles, especially a Villain, block your Hero from completing his goal. For example, Frodo must make a difficult journey with unclear direction and over rough terrain. He fights fearful enemies, most of whom tie into his primary nemesis, Sauron, who desperately seeks to retrieve the One Ring that Frodo determines to destroy.



PREMISE EXERCISES

- 😊 1. Choose your favorite story idea. Identify the kernel.
- 😊 2. Consider what sort of story goal might be created from the idea and what sort of Hero would want to accomplish that goal.
- 😊 3. Determine why it's so important for your Hero to accomplish that goal.
- 😊 4. What sort of person could be your Villain, standing in the way of the Hero accomplishing the goal. Often the Villain and the Hero want the same thing.
- 😊 5. Fill in your outline:

Hero

Goal

Stakes

Obstacles

WRITE YOUR LOGLINE

A logline is so helpful to describe the critical essence of your story. The logline is one sentence of about fifteen to twenty words. It takes a little time to formulate, but once you have it you will find the logline helps you to stay on course as you plan and write your story.

They are also really helpful when someone asks you what your book is about. Simply tell them the logline and you will sound smart and organized. If you've done the logline right, the person will then say, "Ohh. I can't wait to read it!"

There are many ways to write your logline. This formula produces good results if you're having trouble framing your sentence:

An (optional adjective) subject, in this situation, acts to do this.

Here are some examples of loglines:

The Wizard of Oz: A farm girl is transported to a magical land and must find her way home. (fifteen words)

The Fellowship of the Ring: A hobbit must destroy a magical ring of power before it destroys his world. (fourteen words)

Romeo and Juliet: Two teenagers from warring families fall in love and must overcome family obstacles of hate to stay together. (eighteen words)

The Count of Monte Cristo: A wrongfully imprisoned young man gains freedom and a fortune that he uses to wreak an elaborate revenge. (eighteen words)

The logline strips your story to its bare minimum. You'll notice that character names aren't used, yet the premise is specifically described. The logline doesn't have to follow this formula, but should contain irony if possible, and cause the listener to become intrigued. This is a deceptively challenging assignment: don't be satisfied with your first attempt. You'll return to writing the logline as you go further through the template, but start work on it now.



LOGLINE EXERCISE

😊 1. Write your logline.