

Writing the Great American Novel

Writing the Great American Novel
Or
Teaching Writing Concepts at Writing Conferences

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to discover which of the numerous concepts a writing instructor could teach at a writing conference that would help a beginning writer write a publishable novel. The researcher read and coded 10 different books on writing using the Grounded theory approach. The researcher discovered six themes, Plotting, Suspense and Conflict, Using the Beat Sheet, Creating Memorable Characters, Story Structure and Scene Execution. The researcher also studied various ways of presenting these themes including no slides, PowerPoint and Prezi. It was determined that PowerPoint was the most effective way for the instructor to stay on task and keep the interest of the students. The researcher took an internet PowerPoint presentation class to determine how to use PowerPoint effectively. She then wrote the scripts and PowerPoint presentations for three classes that would be taught at writing conferences.

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I appreciate my instructors in my Master's classes. They bent over backward to help a non-traditional student with an English degree master communication skills that the other students in the class had already learned. I also am very grateful to the other students in my classes who welcomed me and befriended me and helped me understand what they already knew. I am especially grateful to Tommy Gugino and Emily Ronquillo who spent many hours mentoring me. I love and appreciate them.

I am thankful for my children and grandchildren. I loved talking to my grandchildren about my project especially when they would say things like: "But grandma why do you have to go to school, you're old." I was grateful to my little four-year-old granddaughter, when I was near tears trying to make my PowerPoint slides, she said, "'Ou can do it, grandma. 'ou can do. I love you." And I managed even with her helping me.

Most of all I'm grateful to my husband and best friend who supported me and believed in me even when I wasn't believing in myself.

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Introduction:

As a professional writer, nothing bothers me more than having practically everyone I meet tell me that they want to write a best-selling novel. They make it sound like all they have to do is sit down and whip out 150,000 to 300,000 words and they will automatically make it on the best seller list.

What they don't realize is that there are hundreds of things, big and little, that a writer needs to do as he or she writes to grab the agent, publisher and ultimately the reader. Skipping any one of these things will turn the novel from a page turner that keeps the reader up until 2:00 a.m. to a 150,000-word manuscript that an agent won't even take the time to read.

Writing is a heart-breaking, finger-aching, brain-draining occupation that won't net a single cent if the writer doesn't know these rules and tips. So where does the writer learn the unbreakable rules for writing a gripping novel? Most of them aren't taught in college classes. An author can pick them up on the internet in blogs a bit at a time, but he won't get them all. They can be found in the dozens and dozens of books that the writer can buy on Amazon, but most writers have found an easier way. They attend writing conferences.

There are hundreds, if not thousands of writing conferences held all over the world. They vary from little one day seminars that cost \$40 or \$50 dollars in places like Kanab, Utah to five or seven day conferences in New York, Chicago and London. These conferences usually cost from \$500 to several thousand dollars.

These conferences have authors and teachers teach classes like "The 1% Solution" a class that covers ways to diagnose what is keeping the writer from publication. Another class I've taken is called "Deepening Conflict and Raising the Stakes" which talks about the basic building blocks of plot and conflict. Other classes range from characterization, pacing, foreshadowing,

emotion and dialogue to pitching to an agent, what a writer needs to know about self-publishing, designing a novel cover and how to write a great first page.

Those people who teach these classes go through the books, the blogs and the classes and pick out the most important things that a writer needs to know.

As part of my writing business, I want to teach at writing conferences. This Capstone project investigates the most important practices the need to be taught at a writing conference.

Presentation Techniques:

After coding all of the concepts (see method's section), I picked six themes that I wanted to teach about. The six themes are listed below along with the authors and books that covered what I used in my presentations.

Plotting:

Plotting is an important theme for a novelist. Plotting is defined as what happens in the novel. It is moving the hero through the Character Arc from point A to point B. Every book that I studied discussed plotting to some extent.

One of the most important themes is conflict and suspense. Conflict builds suspense. Tension and suspense are the same thing. Amy Deardon in her book, *How to Develop Story Tension* discusses thirteen techniques to build tension in a novel. But she bases every technique on plotting. She says that there needs to be an Inner Story and an Outer Story. The Inner Story is what changes within the hero as the story progresses. The Outer Story is what happens to the hero physically.

Within the Outer Story are only three story components, but they are vital to a novel writer. The first component is the Story Goal which is the overriding thing that you want your

hero or protagonist to accomplish. It is usually asked as a question. For example, will Sheba find her namesakes mythical kingdom. The second component is the Story Stakes which explains why the story is important. There can be multiple Story Stakes. Sheba wants find the mythical kingdom to save nephew's life. Then the third component is Story Obstacles. These are the source of tension in the novel. There will be many Story Obstacles in a novel.

Larry Brooks in *Story Engineering: Mastering the Six Core Competencies of Successful Writing* notes there are nine things that you, as a writer, need to know as you are writing your novel. There are four contextual parts to your story. The Setup, Response, Attack on the problem, and the resolution. There are five milestone story points within the four contextual

Saving the Cat Strikes Back is a continuation of Blake Snyder's writing techniques. These range from Chapter 1: Wow! What a Bad Idea to Chapter 8: Discipline, Focus, and Positive Energy. In Chapter 1, Blake talks about that wonderful, fabulous idea that an author thinks is so good that they don't want to talk about it because they're afraid that the idea will be stolen. He says that if that happens then the writer had better go back to the drawing board or computer keyboard because any writer with that thought has a 95% chance that the idea is crap. One of the profound things that Blake says is: "The most important thing to do is to love what you're doing. That way, getting better at isn't a struggle, it's a pleasure. His entire book is devoted to breaking down the myths that writers hear all the time.

Noah Lukeman, in *The Plot Thickens*, discusses the various ways to concoct great plots. The plot is the external action, the challenges, that the hero fights that cause him or her to change and to either grow better or worse. He answers the questions that writers ask, but can't get answers to. Because Lukeman is a literary agent, he has read thousands of manuscripts and knows what a manuscript needs to sell in the very competitive world of traditional publishing.

Suspense and Conflict:

One of the most important themes is conflict and suspense. Conflict builds suspense. Tension and suspense are the same thing. Amy Deardon in her book, *How to Develop Story Tension* discusses thirteen techniques to build tension in a novel. These techniques are invaluable in creating a page turning novel.

James Scott Bell teaches the writer how to build conflict and suspense in his book with the same name, *Conflict and Suspense*. Conflict is what builds suspense and suspense is what makes the reader stay up until 2:00 a.m. to finish that spellbinding novel. He gives ideas on what to do when you don't know what to have your hero do. He reminds the writer that he can't love his hero too much because the writer has to be tough on the hero. He must force him to change, to either improve or get worse, and change is never easy. If the writer is too easy on the hero, then the reader has no stake in the book and will soon put it down. He discusses how to build suspense into the theme of the book and into the hero's conversations. Then he teaches the writer how to put it all together.

Using the Beat Sheet:

Blake Snyder was a screen writer who wrote *Saving the Cat!* Although this is a book about plotting for screenwriters, it can be used to help plot any type of novel. Snyder divides his screen play into 60 pages. By using some easy math, a writer can easily convert Snyder's page numbers into the pages of a novel. He goes into great detail on how many pages should be spent on the opening scene, the inciting incident, the mid-point, the middle before the mid-point and the middle after the mid-point. He talks about how many pages to the climactic scene and how many pages should be used to tie up loose ends.

K.M. Weiland in her book *Outlining your Novel* takes the writer step by step through the outlining process. In Chapter One, she answers the questions of should you outline, what are the benefits of outlining, then she talks about the best outlining methods, the different types of methods and how to figure your outlining personality. Then she goes into the details of outlining like crafting your premise, key story factors, exploring the backstory and many other items that a writer needs to consider when writing a novel. She ties each of the concepts that she covers in with the rest of the concepts to show how a novel should be outlined.

She also promises that if the writer outlines their novel first, there will be fewer rewrites when the novel is finished.

Outlining your Novel Workbook has a number of worksheets that go along with the book *Outlining Your Novel* that help the writer figure out what needs to go where. Each worksheet has places where the writer can fill in the blank as he or she gets an idea from reading *Outlining Your Novel*. The workbook covers concepts like Character Arc and Theme, Backstory, and the different types of conflict that needs to be planned into a best-selling novel more thoroughly than the original book because the writer fills in the blanks with her own ideas.

In *Beginnings, Middles, & Ends*, Nancy Kress goes into detail on what a writer needs to put in the beginning of the novel starting with the very first scene. She helps the writer go from the ‘story in their head’ to writing the first, and possible the most important scene in the book. Because this is the scene that must grab the reader’s attention, she teaches the author how to write the hook—that vital sentence that pulls the reader into the action. She then covers the second scene in the book. This is the scene that solidifies the reader’s interest. Then she covers staying on track in the middle of the story, what to do when a writer gets stuck in the middle and how to use the middle to develop the hero. She talks a lot about delivering on the promise that

the writer made in the very first scene and how if that doesn't happen then the writer will lose the reader who probably won't buy another book from that writer. She talks about the 'very last scene, last paragraph and last sentence'. She also has a chapter on "Help for Endings" which helps the writer end the book with a great finish. She even has a section that covers how to write the ending of the first book in a series in such a way that the first book is finished but the premise is set up for the next book.

Larry Brooks in *Story Engineering* covers this same idea using book one of *The Hunger Games*. Katniss and Peeta have successfully won the seventy-fourth Hunger Games. As they come out of the arena and get ready for the parade, Katniss is told that President Snow isn't happy about the way she and Peeta forced his hand by threatening to commit joint suicide if the game master didn't hold to his promise of two winners. Suzanne Collins is masterful in using this technique to close her first novel—with them winning the tournament. But she sets up the next book by telling them that Snow isn't happy with her even though Peeta was also involved. Immediately the reader's interest is peaked and he or she wants to grab the next novel.

Creating Memorable Characters:

Snyder is most best-known for his idiom 'saving the cat'. He says that all writers, that is, all successful writers, whether they are writing screen plays or novels, need to make sure that the reader is favorably disposed to the hero. The hero can be a jerk at the beginning of the novel, but he must have some redeeming features that makes the reader want to root for him. He says that the writer needs to put something in the first ten pages that shows that the hero is worth reading about. This is where saving the cat comes in. The hero needs to save a cat, or a child or do something nice like helping an old lady cross the street. Snyder uses examples from the movies

to illustrate his points. He also uses movies that weren't the success that the producers hoped for to illustrate what happens when 'Saving the Cat' isn't used. The example he used were the two Laura Croft movies. The producers spent millions on A-list stars like Angelina Jolie who has acted in a number of lucrative films. The first film did okay but the second bombed because the writer forgot to write in a scene that shows Laura in a favorable light. She comes across as an arrogant, spoiled person with more money than brains and more brains than just about anyone else. The shows had great special effects and beautiful scenery. The acting was good, but there wasn't anyone to root for so the audience didn't come back

Larry Brooks in *Story Engineering, Mastering the Six Core Competencies of Successful Writing* discusses the "Character Arc". Character Arc is the change the hero makes throughout the novel. He goes from the status quo, the place where he is when hit by the 'inciting incident' through waffling to taking charge and finally he makes the changes in his personality that allow him to succeed. All great novelists make their heroes go through a character arc. If there is no Character Arc, then the story fails in the mind of the reader. He tells the writer to avoid falling 'in love' with his protagonist because that makes it harder to give the hero the hell that needs to happen to bring about the Character Arc. He also uses Laura Croft as an example of what not to do as a writer. Laura has no Character Arc. She is successful, wealthy and an English Peer who never fails at anything. She doesn't change. There is only one small portion of the first movie where she 'steals time' to talk to her father where she shows even a hint of feeling or emotion and that is totally selfish.

If a writer makes his protagonist like Laura Croft, he won't be able to get an agent to read past the first ten pages which is all the chance a writer gets to sell the agent on his novel.

Story Structure:

Larry Brooks' book *Story Engineering* covers in some detail all the elements of writing. He says that “neither a killer idea nor a Shakespearean flair for words will get you published without a command of these six core principles of dramatic storytelling.” Most writers begin their career with little or no understanding of what makes a successful story. Without an understanding of the architecture of the six core competencies, a writer can write for their entire life without being able to sell their work.

The six core competencies are Concept, Character, Theme, Story Structure, Scene Execution and Writing Voice. Each of these competencies are vital to writing a compelling novel no matter in what genre the writer is writing.

Brooks says: “The genesis of the story, the very first spark of thought that leads to another thought that ends up being a story, always emerges from one of the four elemental core competencies—concept, character, theme or less often, story structure. First comes the spark of an idea. But an idea isn't a story. Some ideas won't ever be compelling enough to be a story. The author takes the idea, the conceptual notion and then adds a “what if.” If the “what if” is compelling, then the character can be added to the mix. Then the novelist tries to come up with a theme. Sometimes the theme comes easily at the beginning of the story and other times, the entire book is written before the theme emerges, but it is vital that each book has a theme.

One tip that Brooks give in relation to theme is that the writer should be able to say in one sentence, before he puts a single word under chapter one, just what the book is about. If the writer can't write that one sentence, then the writer doesn't have a story. He only has an idea. The example he gives is the sentence to describe *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. A

young wizard is sent to boarding school where he finds that someone is trying to steal a stone that can give life to the most evil wizard that ever lived.

One of the big mistakes that a writer can make is to begin writing from the idea without giving thought to the other core competencies. Sometimes an idea isn't enough. Blake Snyder in *Saving the Cat Strikes Back* says that often an author takes an idea and runs with it. He is so sure that it is a good idea that he refuses to talk about it for fear that the idea will be stolen. But, he continues, that generally means that the idea isn't a good idea. If the writer can't or won't talk about it, how will he get feedback on whether or not other people like the idea. If others don't like the idea, the writer won't be able to write a *good* story. No matter how accomplished the writer is, *a bad idea won't make a good story*. Even Steven King won't be able to twist it enough to turn it into a good story.

Scene Execution:

Story Physics, Harnessing the Underlying Forces of Storytelling is a continuation of Larry Brooks' book *Story Engineering*. He delves more deeply into each of the six core competencies focusing on how the writer can refine and define each sentence, paragraph and chapter. He teaches the reader about narrative and how to use it to help move the story from scene to scene and from point to point. He talks about challenging your hero which is the biggest motivation for the reader to keep reading. The greater the challenges facing the hero, the harder it is for the reader to put the book down until the end.

Again, he uses the example of *The Hunger Games*. He shows how Suzanne Collins keeps throwing challenges at Katnis, her lead character. First, her sister is picked for the games and Katnis volunteers to change places with her. Then they go to the training for the games and Katnis shows that she doesn't have many skills other than her ability with the bow. Her mentor

seems to favor Peeta and she is pretty much left on her own. Then during the games everything she does goes wrong even when it goes right. When Katnis uses the Killerjaks to take out the group from the capitol that were stalking her and her teammate, Rue, Rue gets killed because of it. Then at the end of the story, even winning the Games goes wrong because she's told President Snow is angry about the way she won because it made him look bad.

Process:

I chose Grounded Theory because there was very little information that I could use to determine what were the most important ideas that a beginning writer needed to know. I read ten books and took an internet PowerPoint class before I began the project.

Grounded theory begins with a question or a collection of data. As I reviewed the data, concepts become apparent. These concepts are tagged with codes that have been taken from the data. As I collected more data, the codes were grouped into concepts and then into categories. These categories can become the basis for a new theory.

I coded, line upon line, the data that was gathered. As the data was coded certain concepts emerged. As more data was coded, more concepts emerged. I theorized how these concepts related to each other and to the research question. The concepts were then put together to form categories which are broad groups of concepts that relate to each other. The groups that emerged are Plotting, Suspense and Conflict, Using the Beat Sheet, Creating Memorable Characters, Story Structure, and Scene Execution

Grounded theory enabled me to gain knowledge in an area that hasn't been investigated or investigated in the same way that the research question demands.

Finally, I looked at the different categories that have been derived from the research and generated a theory that answers the research question(s).

However, in this Capstone Project, grounded theory is being used for two things:

1. To find the information necessary to produce the script and create PowerPoint slides for teaching the different topics to writers at writing conferences.
2. To make the PowerPoint slides simple and to the point.

Part One: Research for script and PowerPoint slides

As I read each of the ten books on writing, I flagged each concept. There were four 413 different concepts that were discussed in all of the ten books. There was an overlap because many of the concepts were discussed in each book. Those concepts that were the same were counted individually since not all explanations were identically the same. After the books were read, I went back and made a spreadsheet. After putting the 413 concepts on the spreadsheet, I could see that many of the concepts were similar. Using the cut and paste method, I began grouping the concepts into larger ideas even though some explanations were different in each book. There turned out to be thirty-three ideas. Again reviewing the spreadsheet, I discovered that the ideas could again be grouped into themes. There were thirteen themes with a few outliers that didn't fit in anywhere. The outliers could be used for specialized classes.

Since the purpose of the project was to develop a series of one hour classes that I could teach at writing conferences, I studied the thirteen themes, going back to read more about each theme in the books I'd previously read. Each of the thirteen themes were grouped together into still more basic themes. These six themes were Plotting, Suspense and Conflict, Using the Beat Sheet or Outline Your Novel effectively, Creating Memorable Characters, Story Structure, and Scene Execution.

Part Two: Presentation

I have attended a number of writing conferences ranging from a one-day conference in Kanab, Utah that cost \$40.00 to a week-long conference that cost well over a thousand dollars. In talking with other conference attendees, I discovered that most writers felt the way I did. The writing classes that didn't have a visual presentation were more difficult to understand. It was very obvious that presenters seemed to have more trouble keeping to the subject of the class without a visual presentation. When the participants asked questions, it was easy for the presenter to go off on tangents and many times, the entire class covered something entirely different from what was supposed to be given. This is frustrating to the serious writer who knows that he needs help in a particular area so he takes the class and the class, essentially, is taught about something else.

Presenters that taught using Prezi slides were better able to stick to the core presentation, but I heard many comments from participants about this type of presentation. Many complained that the slides were difficult to follow because they seemed to bounce around. Janette Rollison said, "The way the Prezi slides jump around makes me slightly sick to my stomach. I agreed with these comments. She found she couldn't look at the slides without the urge to lose her breakfast especially during a fast paced presentation.

There are other presentation slides formats such as Clearslide, but I found that they were more difficult to use and much more costly. Since I've never seen any of these presentation programs used, I include them.

PowerPoint was the program that has been used most often at writing conferences. According to Boundless.com, a presentation website, "PowerPoint is regarded as the most useful, accessible way to create and present visual_aids."

PowerPoint presentations help keep the presenter on track. They are easy to make and easy to read. However, PowerPoint presentations are used so often that they tend to be horribly boring with too much information given on each slide. Often the slides are a simple black and white like a piece of paper. I have seen a number of bad PowerPoint presentations and fewer good PowerPoint presentations.

For part two of the project, I took an on-line PowerPoint class given by Dave Paradi. There were six lessons given plus an introduction and a summary.

According to Paradi, the author of *PowerPoint Effectiveness E-Course*, PowerPoint presentations have been overused. Many people complain that: 1. The slides are boring, 2. There is information overload, 3. Visuals are often unclear, and 4. Graphs and Charts are vague and ambiguous.

Because I use PowerPoint slides as part of my presentation, Paradi's classes were very helpful.

Lesson Overview

Lesson 1:

This lesson teaches the three steps that show to make an outline that ensures that the message is clear and compelling.

1. The presenter needs to decide on the Goal of the presentation. What does the presenter want the audience to know by the end of the presentation?
2. The second step is to analyze your audience to determine where to start with the presentation. Does the audience consist of beginners or advanced learners? What are they expecting to hear?
3. Plan your content. Paradi suggests that you use sticky notes on a white board so that you can see the entire presentation. You can make sure that there are no gaps in the coverage and make sure that you keep the information to a minimum—no information overload.

Lesson 2

This lesson teaches a presenter how to avoid information overload which is the biggest complaint about PowerPoint presentations. Paradi (2015) gives five strategies for reducing information overload.

1. Don't include answers to every question in the core presentation. Rather than overloading each slide, have a handout with more detailed information.
2. Reduce the text on the slides. A wall of text is the most annoying thing a presenter can do to their audience. Dave suggests using bullet points to show the most important information. Limit the number of bullets to three or less—remember less is more.

3. It is essential to explain why the number on a slide are important. Take the time to explain charts and graphs. The presenter shouldn't expect the audience to automatically understand as much about his presentation as he does. Otherwise, they would be giving the presentation.
4. The presenter needs to eliminate any information that isn't "relevant" to the point that is being made on the slide. Eliminate anything that isn't meaningful.
5. Each slide should only have one point. This may force the presenter to have more slides, but that doesn't matter to the audience. What matters is the effectiveness of the presentation.

Lesson 3

This lesson outlines how produce a slide. Paradi (2015) says that the presenter should write first what he wants to put on a slide on a large sticky note. This keeps the presenter from getting bogged down in the mechanics to setting up the slides. It is easy when setting up a slide to forget to compose the slide so that it says what needs to be said clearly and succinctly. The steps Dave gives are:

Step 1: Write a headline. The headline is what the presenter wants the audience to remember.

Step 2: Sketch the visual on the sticky note. Sketch what you, the presenter, think will best illustrate the point you want to make. It could be a photo, a graph or a chart. This is just a simple sketch to show where the visual will go on the slide.

Step 3: Determine the data source. This tells where the presenter got the visual from. It gives credit where credit is due.

Step 4: Additional information. This might not be necessary, *but can be added if needed.*

Lesson 4

This lesson discusses the colors and fonts that work best for a PowerPoint Presentation. Color and text must have enough contrast so that the audience can read what is on the slide. Remember black ink on white paper tends to be boring when viewed on a slide. White background doesn't keep the viewer's interest. Fonts should be a standard sans-serif font because they are easier to read. Fonts must be big enough to be seen from the back of the room. As a general rule, you should use 36-44 point or larger for the headline and 24-32 point or larger for the slide text.

Lesson 5

This lesson shows how to use graphs in a PowerPoint Presentation. Paradi (2015) says that graphs are a good way to show numeric information in a visual form.

1. Paradi (2015) says that the best practice is to create graphs in PowerPoint rather than in Excel because if you create a graph in PowerPoint, you can animate it. You keep the full set of editing features that PowerPoint offers and finally, the default paste exposes all the data in the entire spreadsheet to anyone who opens the file which could expose confidential information.
2. The second practice is to make sure that you have selected the right type of graph for your presentation depending on the data you are using and the message you are delivering.
3. The third practice is to make sure that the graph is clean and free from any elements that could distract your audience.

Lesson 6

Lesson six discusses using photos and Images. The presenter must be careful to use only pictures from Creative Commons licenses. There are a number of royalty-free images on the morguefile.com and commons.wikimedia.org. There are also reasonably priced images on sites like istockphoto.com or shutterstock.com. To use these photos you choose the one you want, pay the fee, usually about ten dollars and then download the image to your computer.

One thing that Paradi (2015) emphasizes: Pictures on the web are not free. These pictures are all copyrighted and the presenter must have permission to use it. If you use a picture without permission, you can get sued. Often it is better to take your own pictures just as it's better to make your own graphs. If the presenter does his or her own work, he or she will be better able to explain what the slides actually mean. They also have the background knowledge to answer any questions someone might ask.

I used these rules and ideas on her PowerPoint slides which are shown in the Appendix. Unfortunately, after taking the E-course, I've had a hard time not saying negative things about dismal PowerPoint presentations. I guess a little knowledge isn't necessarily a good thing.

Results and Discussion:

The six themes that I felt should be taught to beginning writing students are: 1. Plotting, 2. Suspense and Conflict, 3. Using the Beat Sheet or Outline Your Novel effectively, 4. Creating Memorable Characters, 5. Story Structure, and 6. Scene Execution

I picked these particular themes because they are the ones that most writers ask questions about in the writing conferences. Each theme is vital to writing a riveting story. They all tie in together and the writer can't use one or two and just avoid the others. Theme number three,

Using the Beat Sheet or how to outline your novel effectively isn't integral to the actual story. In other words, the reader won't know if the writer is an outliner or a pantser. A pantser is a writer who just sits down and writes whatever comes into their head. Rather the Beat Sheet is a means of tying each of the other themes together to produce a well-crafted and easy to read novel. Most successful writers use some sort of outline and eventually pantsers usually end up using some form of outline.

The Beat Sheet simply helps get the different themes into the right place. Memorable Characters and Plotting tie in together. Many writers are asked whether they plot from their character or blend their character to their plot. For example: When Dan Brown wrote *Angels and Demons*, the first book in his series, he wrote from plot. But when he wrote *The DaVinci Code*, it seemed like he wrote from plot, but because he was already using the character from *Angels and Demons*, he actually wrote from character. But the reader isn't able to tell which came first and that shows that Dan Brown is a master writer.

Scene execution is the way each scene is written and then how the scene's tie into each other. There are usually between sixty and eighty scenes per novel. Without story structure, the scenes often don't tie into each other and it is easy for the writer to go off on tangents that he ultimately has to discard because they don't further the story.

Using the Beat Sheet to outline the scenes means that each scene is placed exactly where it can do the most good in furthering the story and in increasing the tension. The Beat Sheet enables the writer to build his story structure efficiently and effectively. If the writer knows ahead of time when the 'saving the cat' scene needs to be placed and he knows what should come in the first and second scenes, it makes the mid-point scene where everything comes

crashing down on the hero easier to write. If the writer knows what the mid-point scene is, he can build each scene from the beginning to the mid-point.

If the writer know what death and despair scene is—this is the three-quarter point in the novel—he can write toward that scene avoiding side trips that detract from the story. Don't get me wrong, no one says that the writer can't veer from the outline along a promising road, but the writer will know that it is a promising road, because he knows where he wants to be at the quarter point, the half-or mid-point, the three-quarter point and finally the ending. As the writer uses the beat sheet to build his story structure, he can make notes on scenes that need to happen and then he can rearrange them so that they are in the most effective order. Larry Brooks, in *Core Competencies* (2011) says, "As he builds his story structure he can build in foreshadowing, flashbacks, tension and conflict. He can make sure his A and his B stories work together to build both conflict and suspense."

Then when he writes the actual novel, he can follow his road map and if an interesting detour blossoms in his mind, he can pursue it, safe in the knowledge that he knows his destination and this little side jaunt will still take him safely back to each point on the beat sheet. He can throw harder and yet harder challenges and difficulties at his protagonist, knowing that whatever happens he knows where he's going and he'll know when he gets there.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the project, all I wanted was to be able to prepare a script and a presentation in some format that I could teach in a writing conference. I had attended many conferences and I had seen both the good, the bad and the really, really bad presentations. As a professional teacher I felt like I could do better.

However, as I worked with Art and Matt, my vision began to expand. All the books I read and coded helped me, both as a professional writer, and as a teacher. I began to better understand nebulous concepts like theme and Character Arc. And as I began to understand more I began to see that I didn't know as much as I thought I did. I could see what a beginning writer needed to know and how best to explain these difficult concepts.

My revised objectives for my project are:

1. Devise a PowerPoint presentation that will clearly explain certain difficult concepts
2. Discover which concepts are most commonly misunderstood and use my writing scripts to clarify these concepts, and
3. Improve my ability to teach these concepts in a fun and compelling way.

I believe that I have achieved all three objectives. First, my PowerPoint presentations follow Paradi's rules for engaging the learner. They are colorful with contrasting backgrounds and words. I have added some fun pictures to illustrate the concepts I am teaching. The slides give only one point per slide while my script add additional information.

My coding increased my understanding as I put concepts together that hadn't made sense to me so I knew that they wouldn't make sense to a beginning writer. I think that the coding was a key part in helping me to teach difficult concepts.

As I looked over my coding I could see a number of other themes that a writer needs to know about once he's mastered the basic six. In connection with the Beat Sheet another class could be taught on Story Boarding which is a way to use your Beat Sheet effectively. A class could be taught on "The Ten Worst Things that Could Happen to Your Lead."

Several of the books I read had sections on maintaining a writing schedule and on having a life. There was even a section on how to keep your characters and your novel from taking over

your life. There were sections on maintaining balance between home, work, and writing if writing wasn't yet a full time career. Classes could be taught on query letters and making a pitch to an agent, as well as on contracts, agents, and publishers. There could even be classes taught on what the author needs to do once they publish their book.

Some of the outliers that stood by themselves that I found as I completed my coding would make compelling classes. Several of the outliers were 'Pantsing' (writing without an outline), Organic Storytelling, and the Six Most Important Words in Storytelling.

Finally, as I have given the PowerPoint presentations to friends and family for feedback, I've discovered better ways to get my point across.

I feel good about the comments that have been made on my presentations. Doing the practice sessions has also helped me brush up on my teaching skills so that I am better able to answer questions.

After completing my capstone project, I have a better understanding of my topic and my abilities. When I apply to teach these classes, I will be better able to explain what I plan to teach and why. I can also attach some of my slides so that the panel members who choose who will teach at the conference can see what I can do. I believe it will increase my chances of making this a part of my writing career.

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Appendix One

Script—Core Concepts—1 hour

Slide 1—title—taken from *Story Engineering—Mastering the 6 Core Competencies of Successful Writing* by Larry Brooks

Slide 2—Core competency #1--Concept

Slide 3--Concept Concepts are difficult to understand. An idea is the foundation of a concept. If you add a compelling question to your idea, then you have a concept. Start brainstorming by adding a compelling what if question to an idea and you have a concept. If you add a what if question that should lead you to additional what if questions, then if you add a person to a what if question and you have a premise.

Slide 4—Core Competency #2—Character

There are three dimensions of character. Dimension #1 is surface characteristics such as make-up, hair, wardrobe—physical looks plus the physical attributes of character—likes and dislikes. The second dimension are behaviors and choices and why the character does what he/she does. Writer exposes backstory (character's life prior to the novel), his agenda and why he looks and acts like he does in the first dimension. In the third dimension All the choices in the first and second dimension are diminished when the character is forced by circumstance (third dimension) to change—to become better, to be more heroic

Slide 5—Character

The Character Arc is where the hero and possibly the villain grow from the easy, comfortable choices and life-style at the beginning of the book to the growth and change that comes at the end of the book. If there is no character arc, then the reader won't have any motivation to finish the book and the writer fails in his promise to the reader.

Slide 6—Core Competency #3—Theme

Theme is what the story means. It's what the story says about life and reality. Theme is manifested through the story's character and plot and it is how you touch your readers. There are various ways to show theme. The first way is how the character feels about certain issues and how those feeling change as a result of the consequences of the choices made by either the hero or the villain. An author can either sell a point of view on an issue or explore an issue.

Slide 7—Theme

Internal Conflict: This is something inside the character that keeps him from succeeding in the external conflict. It can be a personality trait like shyness or something like a drug or alcohol addiction. External conflict: This is the plot. This is what happens to the hero that makes him change and become something greater.

Writing the Great American Novel

Slide 8—Core Competency #4—Story Structure

There are 4 parts to Story Structure that fit into 4 boxes. Each box takes about 25% of the book. There are about 60 scenes per book divided by 4

Slide 9—Story Structure—Box 1

In Box one the author sets up the Plot, introduces the hero and the villain. He shows the hero's life before the inciting incident and first plot point. He shows what the hero will be giving up after first plot point. The author also creates the stakes, give some of backstory. Possible the most important purpose of box one is to gain sympathy for the character. The reader doesn't need to like character, but the reader must feel sympathy or empathy for character's plight

Slide 10—Story Structure—First Plot point

This is the most important moment in your story because the hero and the reader begin to get an idea of the nature and extent of the person, place, or thing opposing the hero. The author presents the full view of the story's primary antagonist

Slide 11—Story Structure—Box 2

In the second box the author shows the hero's response to the new situation created by the conflict. It is important that the hero becomes a wanderer. He is responding to the situation and trying to wrap his head around what has happened to him. The Hero may try but he MUST fail because his failing builds tension. This part takes about 75 to 100 pages and about 20 scenes

Slide 12—Story Structure—Midpoint

The midpoint is the 2nd of 3 major milestones. The author gives the hero and thus the reader new information. It is either hidden knowledge that the hero hasn't known before or totally new knowledge. This new information adds weight and tension. It changes the hero's and the reader's understanding of what has been going on and most importantly it changes the hero from wanderer (trying and failing) to warrior

Slide 13—Story Structure—Box 3

The new information at the midpoint causes the hero to take a new approach. He has changed and is no longer running or wandering. He becomes proactive, courageous and ingenious

Slide 14—Story Structure—Second Plot point

After this point, no new information can enter the story after the second plot point. This information changes the hero from an attacking warrior to a heroic champion

Slide 15—Story Structure—Box 4

Writing the Great American Novel

There are two rules for Box 4. Hero needs to be heroic—no one else can resolve the story or the author has failed the reader. Hero can perish, but must resolve the major elements of the story before he does

Slide 16—Story Structure—Major Milestones

There are three major milestones. The First Plot Point starts the hero on his quest. The Mid Plot Point is a major change in the plot. The Second plot point changes the plot yet again. With each plot point the hero's life changes dramatically. The final resolution is a scene where the details are wrapped up.

Slide 17—Scene Execution

A novel is made up about 60 scenes divided equally into each box. A scene is a unit of dramatic action or exposition which can include narrative review, overview or even connective tissue (narrative that connects information). A scene can be a single chapter or there can be several scenes in each chapter. If you have several scenes in a chapter separate them by a while space to transition each scene smoothly so that the reader knows when the scene changes

Slide 18—Scene Execution

A novel is a sequence of scenes. A scene has a beginning, a middle, and an ending—you should enter the scene as late as possible to keep the scene interesting. The reader doesn't need to see every movement, but there must be conflict in every scene. If there is no conflict that moves the scene forward, then cut the scene.

Slide 19—Scene Execution

A scene won't work unless you, the writer understands the mission of the scene and the next scene so that the scenes work together to move your story forward. The scene MUST provide some information that the hero needs, if only, the information that the hero succeeded or failed in what he was attempting to do. Heavy weight scenes should be major milestones and should increase the tension of the story. Don't make all scenes heavy weight scenes. Some scenes should simply move the story forward. This is called pacing.

Slide 20—Scene Execution

The cut and thrust technique is used to keep the reader turning pages. The writer must know what happens in the scene to come so that the last paragraph or sentence makes the reader want to know what's going to happen next. Scenes are the bricks in your story house. Make sure each one is placed for optimum effect.

Slide 21—Core Competency #6—Writing Voice

Slide 22—Writing Voice

The voice needs to be professional. focus on dialogue –get rid of grammar—write like people talk, but better. Check out the dialogue in books written by bestselling authors. Remember that dialogue is specific to variables like age, culture, geography and agenda.

Writing the Great American Novel

Slide 36—Putting it all together

The only way to become a great writer is to write, have someone (not your spouse or your best friend) critique your writing and then rewrite.

Slide 1



Slide 2



CONCEPT

- An idea is a subset of a concept.
- Add a compelling what if question to an idea and you have a concept
- Add a person to the what if question and you have a premise

CORE COMPETENCY #2

CHARACTER



Slide 5


CHARACTER

- Character Arc: The character grows from the one dimensional choices made at the beginning of the book to the three dimensional choices made at the end of the book
- The hero absolutely must have a character arc or the reader feels and is cheated.

Slide 6

CORE COMPETENCY #3

THEME

A cartoon illustration of two purple elephants facing each other. Above them is a yellow speech bubble containing the text "The Great American Novel". The elephants are standing on a green patch of ground.

Slide 7

THEME

- Character Conflict—create great conflict and the author must show the consequences of decisions whether good or bad
- Character Conflict and consequences show theme
- Theme and Character Arc are intertwined

Slide 8

CORE COMPETENCY #4

STORY STRUCTURE



STORY STRUCTURE

- **Box 1—Set UP the Plot**
 - First 20-25%
 - Introduce hero
 - Create stakes, backstory, character sympathy

STORY STRUCTURE

- **FIRST Plot Point—Most important point in story**
 - First full view of the story's primary antagonist Force—the hero and the reader gets a notion of the nature and extent of the opposing force

STORY STRUCTURE

- Box 2—The Response to the new situation represented by the conflict
 - 20-25%—75-100 pages
 - Everything changes including the hero's plans—new journey, quest or need.
 - If hero tries—he fails

STORY STRUCTURE

- Midpoint—changes hero from wanderer to warrior
- New information enters story
- New weight and tension has been added

STORY STRUCTURE

- **Box 3—The Attack**
 - The hero tries to fix things, becomes proactive, courageous and ingenious
 - No longer running, he's attacking the problem

STORY STRUCTURE

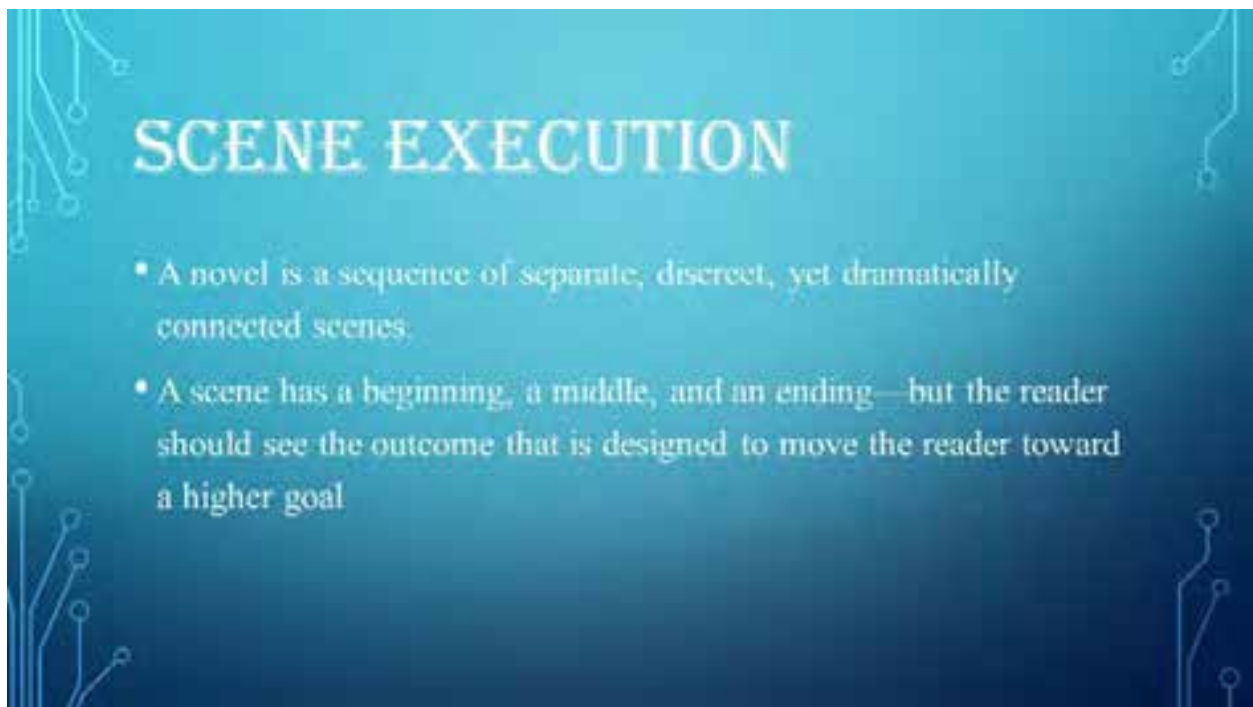
- **Second Plot Point—final injection of new information**
 - No new information may enter the story after second plot point
 - This information changes the plot again
 - This information changes the hero from an attacking warrior to a hell-bent, heroic champion

STORY STRUCTURE

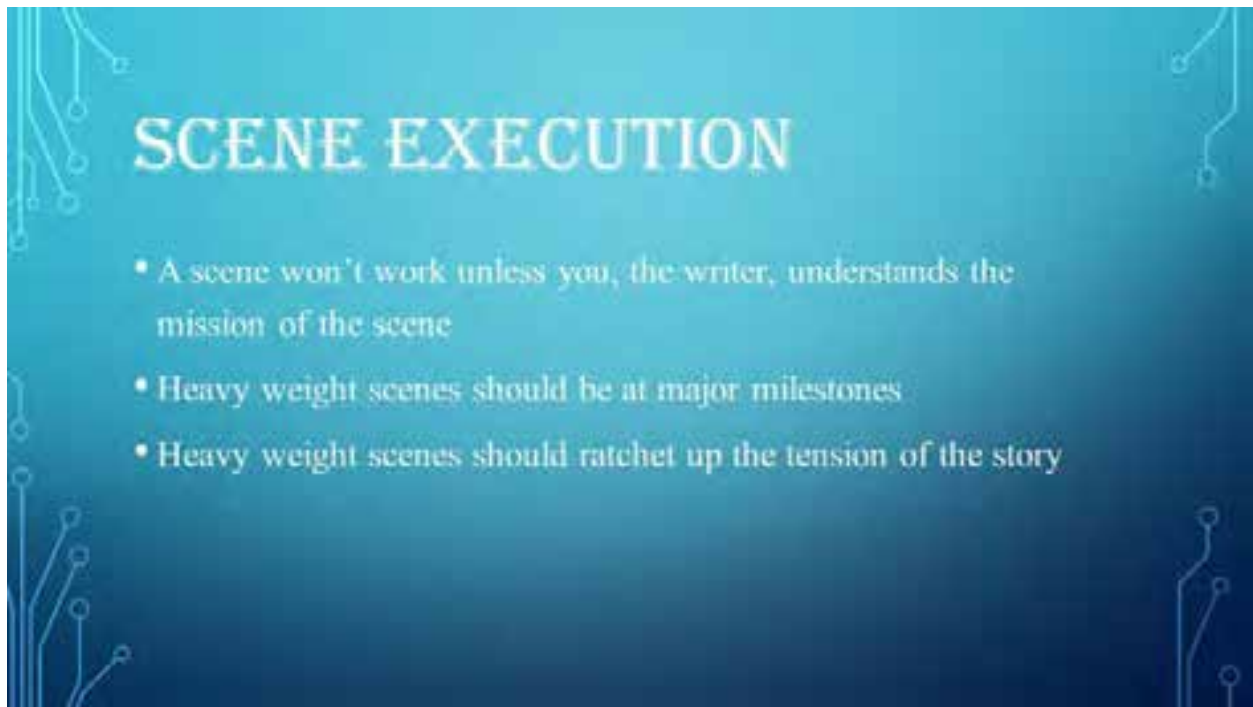
- **Box 4—The Resolution/Martyr**
 - Hero is primary catalyst—he makes the action happen.
 - Hero can perish during this part of the story
 - Hero must solve major elements before (if) he dies

STORY STRUCTURE

- **Milestones Defined—second half of story**
 - Midpoint—at precisely the middle of story
 - Second Pinch Point
 - Second Plot point—at about 75% of story
 - Final resolution scene or sequence



Slide 19

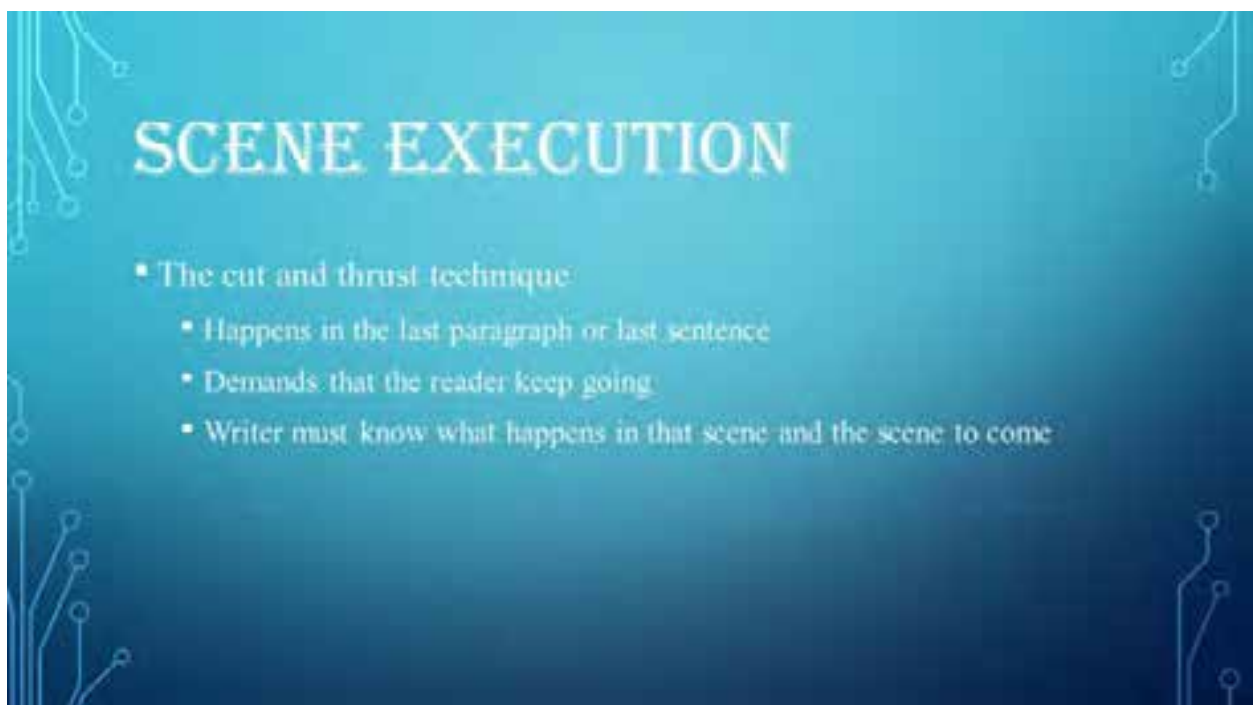


Slide 19 features a blue gradient background with white circuit-like patterns in the corners. The title "SCENE EXECUTION" is centered at the top in a large, white, serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

SCENE EXECUTION

- A scene won't work unless you, the writer, understands the mission of the scene
- Heavy weight scenes should be at major milestones
- Heavy weight scenes should ratchet up the tension of the story

Slide 20



Slide 20 features a blue gradient background with white circuit-like patterns in the corners. The title "SCENE EXECUTION" is centered at the top in a large, white, serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

SCENE EXECUTION

- The cut and thrust technique
 - Happens in the last paragraph or last sentence
 - Demands that the reader keep going
 - Writer must know what happens in that scene and the scene to come

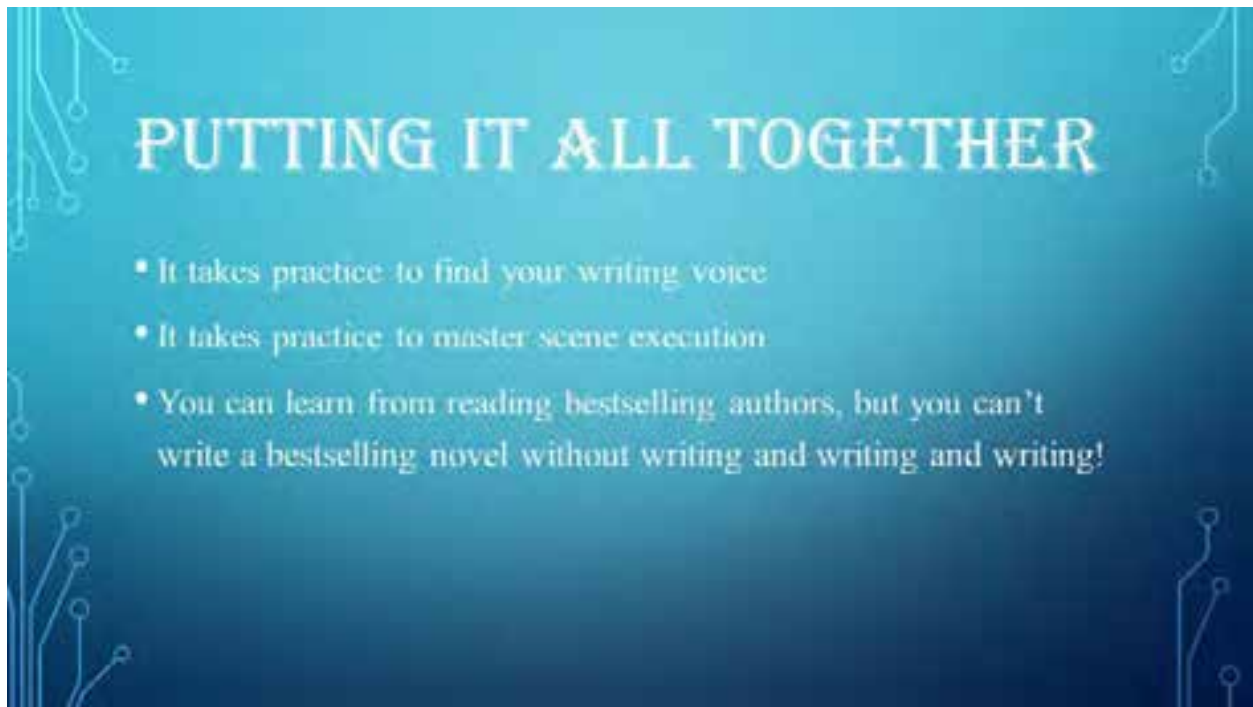
CORE COMPETENCY #6

WRITING VOICE

An illustration of five diverse cartoon children standing together. From left to right: a boy with brown hair in a yellow and black striped shirt, a boy with blonde hair in a blue jacket, a girl with purple hair in a green dress, a boy with blonde hair in a brown shirt, and a girl with black hair in a blue shirt and black skirt. They are all smiling and appear to be in a classroom or library setting.

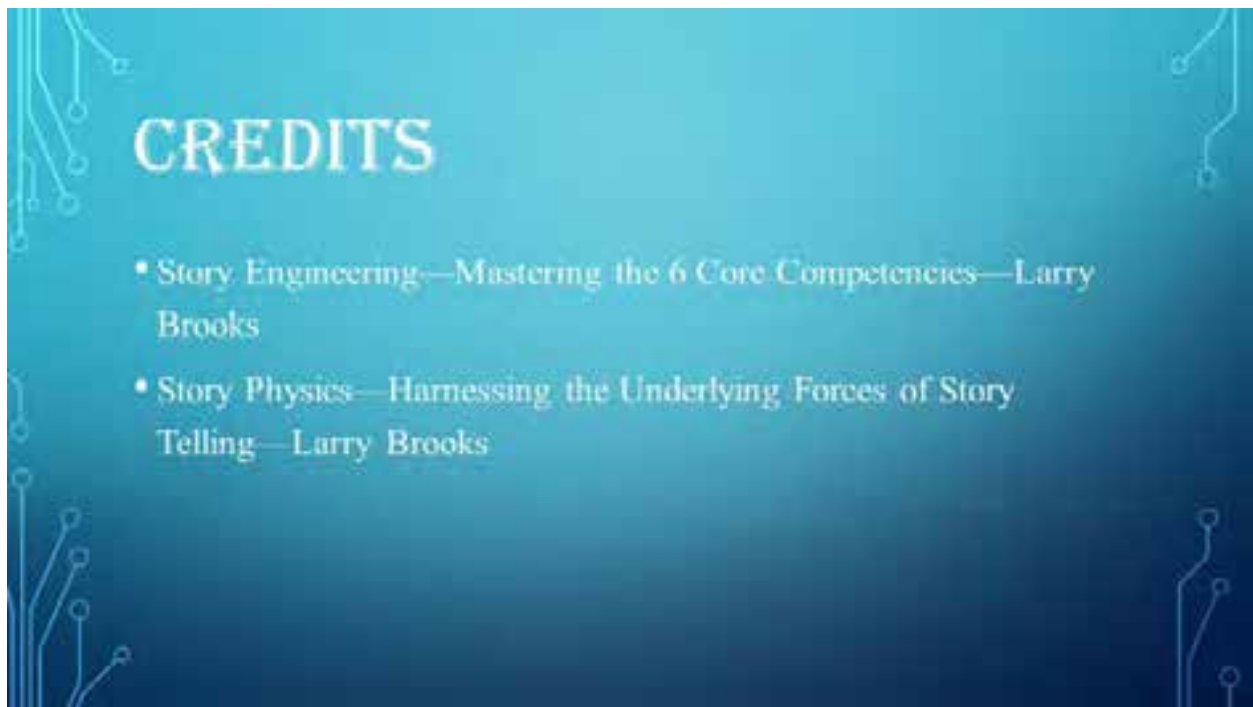
WRITING VOICE

- Needs to be professional
- Focus on dialogue—get rid of grammar—write like people talk only better
- Dialogue is specific to age, culture, geography and agenda

A presentation slide with a blue gradient background and white circuit-like patterns in the corners. The title "PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER" is centered at the top in a white, serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of three points in a white, sans-serif font.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- It takes practice to find your writing voice
- It takes practice to master scene execution
- You can learn from reading bestselling authors, but you can't write a bestselling novel without writing and writing and writing!

A presentation slide with a blue gradient background and white circuit-like patterns in the corners. The title "CREDITS" is centered at the top in a white, serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of two points in a white, sans-serif font.

CREDITS

- Story Engineering—Mastering the 6 Core Competencies—Larry Brooks
- Story Physics—Harnessing the Underlying Forces of Story Telling—Larry Brooks

Appendix Two

Plotting by the Numbers

Plotting Using Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

Plotting by the Numbers	Blake Snyder, a screen writer divided a screen play into different beats. I've changed the numbers so that they match with a 300 page novel. If you plan on a longer or shorter novel just divide 60, the number of a screen plays pages into the number of pages you want to write.
Beat 1, Page 1	This is the opening image, the first impression of book. It's what your reader sees first. It also sets the tone, mood, type, and scope. It gives us the starting point of the hero, what the hero was before the inciting incident.
Theme stated	Within the first 12 pages, someone, not the main character will pose a question or make a statement (usually to the main character) that is the theme of the book. It is an offhand remark, but will have far reaching implications later. This is the thematic premise. This is an argument posed by the author—the pros and cons of doing a particular thing, living a particular kind of life, pursuing a dream
Set-up	In the first 18 pages your need to set up a make or break situation. This sets up the hero, gives the stakes and goal of the story, introduce characters, plant every character tic, exhibit every behavior that needs to be addressed later on, and show how and why the hero will need to change in order to win. Stick the six things that need to be fixed— <u>show</u> what is missing in the hero's life. These pages are the novel's thesis. This is the hero's world before the inciting incident.
Catalyst	This is where you knock down the hero's perfect before world—life changing moments often come disguised as bad news. The catalyst isn't what it seems. It's the opposite of good news, and yet, by the time the adventure is over, it's what leads the hero to happiness. Catalyst must be on page 19—get rid of any junk that pushes the catalyst back further than page 19!
Debate	(19-50)—this is where the hero debates course of action. His last chance to say this is crazy, but I gotta do it. Show how daunting, how hard this is going to be for the hero.
Break into Two	This is the moment when the hero leaves the old world, the thesis statement, behind and proceeds into a world that is the

upside down version, the antithesis. These worlds are so distinct that stepping into Act two must be definite. The hero must choose to leave the old world and step into the new one—he is being proactive. This happens about page 100.

B Story

(37)—“the love story” Your hero has landed into a whole new world so the B story—this is the time out where the hero meets someone new. The B story is often about a new bunch of characters. This is where the hero gets nurtured. It can be a romance or a meeting with a different type of nurturer—but must be an anti-thesis creature.

Fun and Games

(30-55)—the promise of the premise. It is the core and essence of having fun. We take a break from the stakes of the story and see what the idea is about, we see the promise of the premise and need not see anything else. The buddies get to do all the clashing.

Midpoint

The midpoint should be half way to the end of the book. If your book is 400 pages, then the midpoint should be on page 200. This is either an up where the hero seemingly peaks (though it’s a false peak) or a down when the world collapses all around the hero (although it is a false collapse) and can only get better from here. The midpoint changes the dynamic of the story. The stakes are raised. The rule is: It’s never as good as it seems to be at the midpoint and it’s never as bad as it seems at the all is lost point.

Bad Guys Close In

(55-75)—this is the situation that the hero finds himself in at the midpoint, the bad guys seem to be defeated, but the bad guys regroup and send in the heavy artillery. It’s the point where internal dissent, doubt, and jealousy begin to disintegrate the hero’s team. The forces of evil tighten their grip and the hero has nowhere to go for help. He must endure. He is headed to a huge fall.

All is Lost

(75)—false defeat or false victory—it is the opposite of the midpoint. The whiff of death—someone dies or there is something symbolic that hints at death. This is where the old world, the old character, the old way of thinking dies. It clears the way for the fusion of thesis—what was—and antithesis—the upside down version of what was—to become synthesis, that being a new world, a new life. And the thing you show dying, even a goldfish, will resonate and make that All is Lost moment all the more poignant

Dark Night of the Soul

(75-85)—This is vital—it’s the darkness right before the dawn. It’s the point where the hero reaches way, deep down, and pulls

out that last, best idea that will save himself and everyone around him. But at the moment, that idea is nowhere in sight. We must be beaten *and know it* to get the lesson.

Break into Three

(85)—thanks to what happens in the B story and all to conversations discussing them and thanks to the hero's last best effort to discover a solution—lo and behold, an answer is found. Both A story and B story meet and intertwine, the hero has passed every test and dug deep to find the solution. Now all he has to do is apply it. The world of synthesis is at hand. The hero gets the clue from "the girl" that makes him realize how to solve both—beating the bad guys and winning the heart of his beloved.

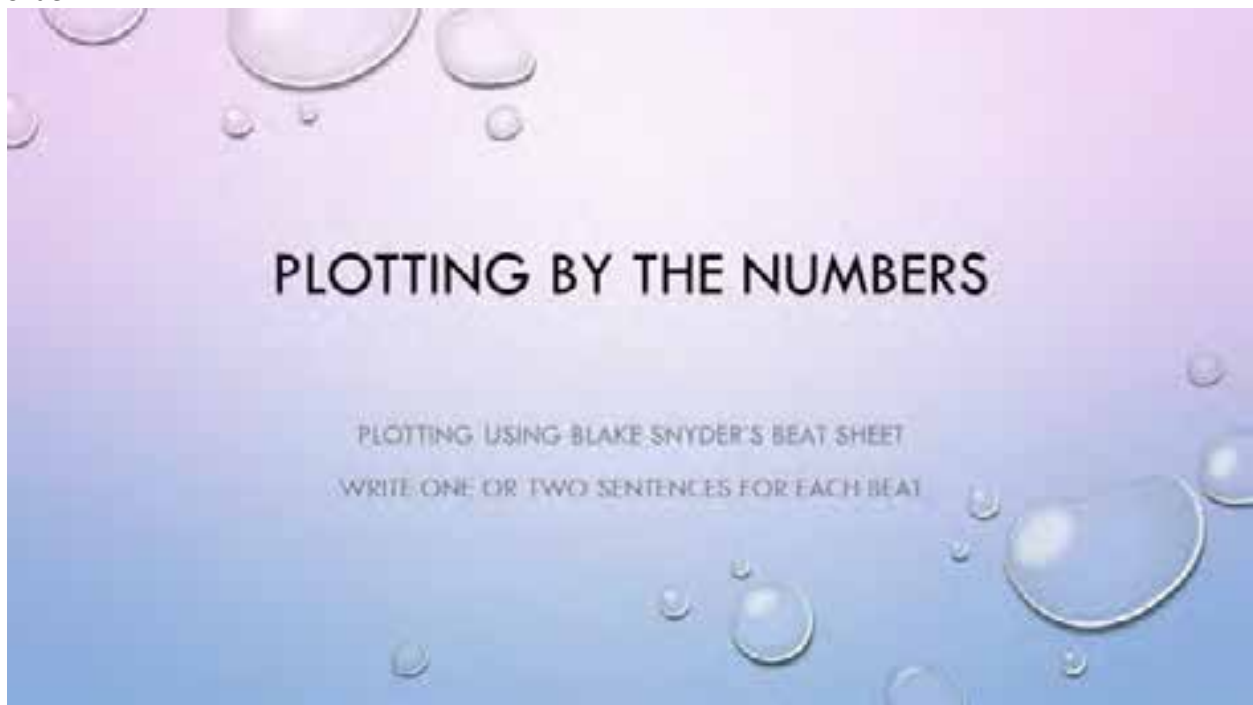
Finale

(85-110)—this is where the lessons learned are applied, the character tics are mastered. It's where A story and B story end in triumph for our hero. The finale entails the dispatching of all the bad guys, in ascending order. The henchmen die first, then the boss. The chief source of "the problem" must be dispatched completely for the new world order to exist.

Final Image

(110)—the after snapshot—should be opposite of opening image—showing change so dramatic that it documents the emotional upheaval that the book represents

Slide 1



PROJECT TITLE—NAME THAT BOOK

- **BEAT 1, PAGE 1:**
 - FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE BOOK
 - GIVES THE FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE HERO—THIS IS THE BEFORE SNAPSHOT




THEME STATED

- **THEMATIC PREMISE**
 - WITHIN THE FIRST 12 PAGES SOMEONE WILL POSE A QUESTION OR MAKE A STATEMENT TO THE MAIN CHARACTER THAT IS THE THEME OF THE BOOK
 - IT IS AN OFF HAND REMARK THAT HAS FAR REACHING IMPLICATIONS LATER
 - IT'S THE PROS AND CONS OF DOING A PARTICULAR THING

Slide 4

SET UP

- THE MAKE OR BREAK SITUATION
 - SETS UP THE HERO
 - GIVES THE STAKES AND GOAL OF THE STORY
 - INTRODUCE MAIN CHARACTERS
 - PLANT EVERY CHARACTER TIC
 - EXHIBIT EVERY BEHAVIOR THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED LATER ON
 - SHOW HOW AND WHY THE HERO NEEDS TO CHANGE IN ORDER TO WIN

A cartoon illustration of a young boy with orange hair, wearing a red shirt and green shorts, with his hands raised in a gesture of surprise or excitement.

Slide 5

CATALYST

- THIS IS WHERE YOU KNOCK DOWN YOUR HERO'S PERFECT WORLD
 - CHANGE MUST BE DISGUISED AS BAD NEWS
 - IT'S WHAT LEADS THE HERO TO HAPPINESS
 - MUST HAPPEN BY PAGE 30

A cartoon illustration of a chemistry flask containing yellow liquid, with a test tube pouring green liquid into it.

Slide 6

DEBATE

- PAGES 32- 50
 - YOUR HERO DEBATES HIS COURSE OF ACTION
 - SHOULD I OR
 - SHOULDN'T I
 - REASONS FOR EACH
 - USE DEBATE TO BUILD SUSPENSE THROUGH CONFLICT



A cartoon illustration of a debate stage. At the top, the word "DEBATE" is written in a stylized, outlined font. Below it are two orange podiums. The left podium has a microphone and the word "HOPE" written on it. The right podium also has a microphone and the word "CHANGE" written on it. The background of the cartoon is white with some black lines suggesting a stage floor and backdrop.

Slide 7

B STORY

- PAGE 51-60
- THIS IS THE "LOVE STORY"
 - DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CLASSIC 'BOY MEETS GIRL' LOVE STORY
 - HERO MEETS NEW CHARACTERS
 - HERO GETS NURTURED
 - USED TO BUILD SUSPENSE LATER



A simple black and white outline of a heart, centered on the right side of the slide.

Slide 8

FUN AND GAMES

- PAGES 70-110
 - BUILDS TO MIDPOINT
 - HERO HASN'T CHANGED
 - BUILD PREMISE
 - HERO SEEMS TO BE SUCCEEDING



Slide 9

MIDPOINT

- PAGE 150 (DEPENDING ON LENGTH OF STORY)
 - THIS IS WHERE EVERYTHING CHANGES
 - FALSE HIGH POINT OR
 - FALSE LOW POINT

- RULE: IT'S NEVER AS GOOD AS IT SEEMS AT THE MIDPOINT AND IT'S NEVER AS BAD AS IT SEEMS AT THE 'ALL IS LOST' POINT.

Slide 10

BAD GUYS CLOSE IN

- PAGES 160-200
 - THE GOOD GUYS SEEM DEFEATED
 - EVIL TIGHTENS IT'S GRIP
 - HE'S HEADED FOR A HUGE FALL



Slide 11

ALL IS LOST

- PAGE 200
 - OPPOSITE OF MIDPOINT
 - HINT OF DEATH
 - SHOW SOMETHING DYING—EVEN IF A GOLD FISH



Slide 12

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

- PAGES 220-250
 - HERO MUST BE BEATEN AND KNOW THAT HE IS BEATEN
 - HE REACHES DEEP FOR AN IDEA TO SAVE HIMSELF AND OTHERS

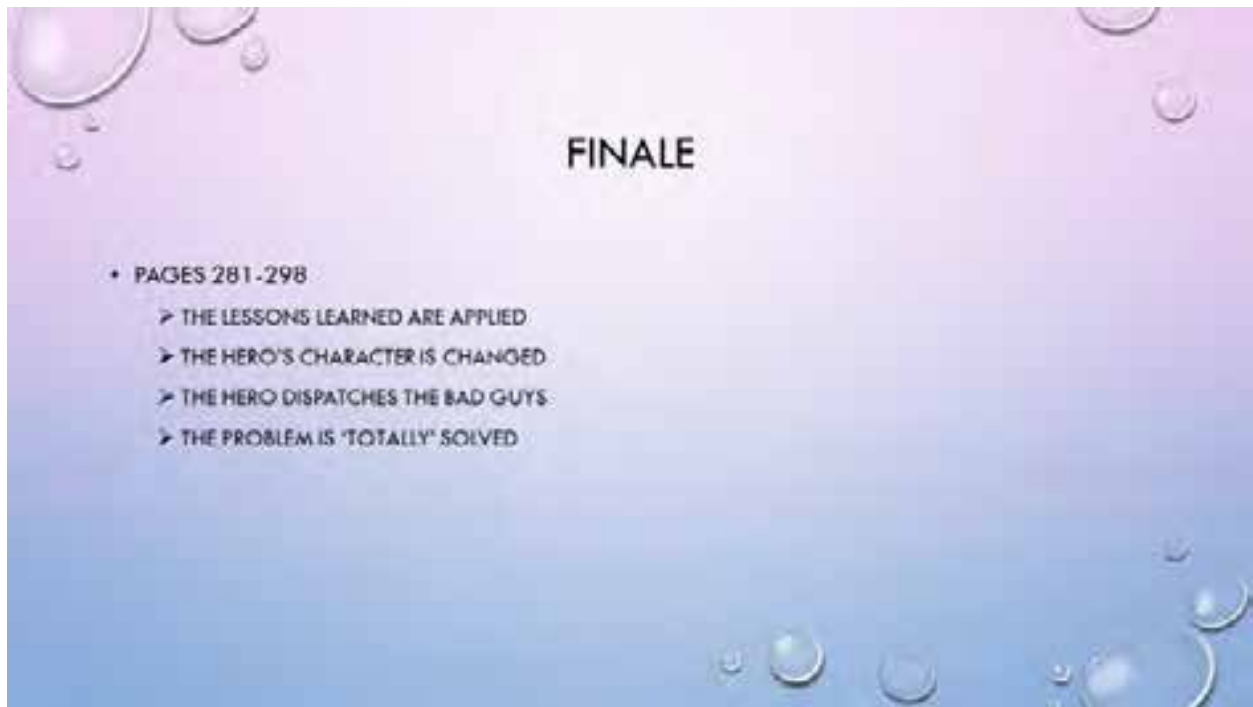
An illustration of a man in a dark suit walking to the right. Above his head is a dark, rain-filled cloud with rain falling. The background of the illustration is a light, hazy sky. The entire slide has a purple-to-blue gradient background with several water droplets scattered around.

Slide 13

BREAK INTO THREE

- PAGES 251-280
 - A STORY AND B STORY MERGE
 - THIS IS THE HERO'S LAST AND BEST EFFORT TO DISCOVER A SOLUTION

Slide 14



Slide 15



CREDITS

- SAVING THE CAT
- SAVING THE CAT! STRIKES BACK!



The slide features a light purple to blue gradient background with several translucent water bubbles scattered across it. The word "CREDITS" is centered at the top in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below it, on the left side, is a bulleted list with two items: "• SAVING THE CAT" and "• SAVING THE CAT! STRIKES BACK!". To the right of the list is a square white box containing a cartoon illustration of a friendly-looking orange and white tabby cat with large, expressive eyes and a small smile.

Appendix Three

Your Suspense Toolbox

Macro Suspense	Suspense is what is going to happen next to your lead character and does it mean death to the hero. Each scene must end with suspense to keep the reader turning pages. Hero doesn't know who is opposing him and neither does the reader.
Cliff Hangers	A moment of unresolved danger either inside or outside the character. It comes at the end of a scene, never at the end the book. A. Get the reader to care about the character B. Vary the type and intensity of the cliff hanger
Stretching the tension	Give the character a scene goal that matters to him. Make sure that the character suffers a setback because that ratchets up the tension in further scenes because he gets farther and farther from solving his story problem
Dialogue and Suspense	Dialogue is an extension and expression of action. Keep dialogue clipped and short. Use techniques of nonresolution and withholding information. A. Sidestepping response—don't answer directly B. Stretched dialogue C. The unexpected
Suspense in Setting	Circumstances start closing in. Shoot for a sense of foreboding, a feeling that any moment the trap will spring shut and destroy the character either physically or psychologically. A. Let the reader experience the scene as the character experiences the scene. B. Keep scene fresh C. Can build suspense from any scene.
Style and Suspense	Stimulus Response Transactions—If you show a stimulus, you <i>must</i> show a response. If you show a stimulus without a response, then the stimulus is meaningless because nothing happened. Readers will lose interest if you do it too often. If you provide a response without a stimulus, then readers become confused. For example: Tom ducked. The bullet whizzed past his ear. To ramp us suspense, concentrate on making the stimulus-response units clear and sharp.
Suspense and Surprise	Alfred Hitchcock used to explain the difference between surprise and suspense. "Surprise is when two people are sitting at a table in a

restaurant and a bomb goes off. Suspense is when the audience sees the ticking bomb under the table and wonders when it will go off.

Instant Suspense

Microobstacles are a seemingly small incident that occurs in a scene with the potential for huge ramifications. Writing Exercise: 1. Look for a scene with two or more pages of low suspense. 2. Make a list of obstacles until you have nine or ten. Don't edit yourself. 3. Insert one in a scene

Raise the stakes—give the hero greater risks and the potential to lose more.

Plot Stakes—try to find a way to cause more physical harm to hero. Make opposition stronger. Bring in another character that causes more trouble

Slide 1



MACRO SUSPENSE

- Each scene must end with suspense
- Hero doesn't know what's opposing the hero and neither does the reader.



CLIFF HANGERS

- Get the reader to care about your hero
- A moment of unresolved danger
 - Inside the character
 - Outside the character



STRETCHING THE TENSION

- Give your hero a scene goal that matters
- Give him a set back that gives him more problems.



DIALOGUE AND SUSPENSE

- Keep dialogue clipped and short
 - Sidestepping response
 - Stretched dialogue
 - The Unexpected



SUSPENSE IN SETTING

- Writing Exercise:
 1. Look at a scene you've written
 - Change it from day to night or night to day
 - Try different locations
 - Who or what can oppose your hero
 2. Make it unexpected
 3. Spring the trap



STYLE AND SUSPENSE

- Stimulus Response Transactions
 - Stimulus must have a response
 - Stimulus must come before response



SUSPENSE AND SURPRISE

Surprise



Suspense



INSTANT SUSPENSE

- Microobstacles—a seemingly small incident with big potential
- Raise the stakes—give the hero greater risks
- Plot stakes—find a way to cause more physical harm to hero
 - (Don't be nice to your hero. Make him suffer so reader will be sympathetic)



