

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEM SERVICESINK.COM

NUGGET

What if?

- Whose story is it?
- What's happening?
- What's at stake?
- What's the theme?
- Hints at the lie she believes and the ensuing conflict

Do it

- One-paragraph summary (first two steps of the [Snowflake advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/](https://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/))
- One sentence to set the story up
- One sentence for each of the three main disasters in the story
- One sentence for the ending.
- Include theme, internal issue, plot issue
- For character use noun (skill, trait, competency) + adjective (emotional state)

EXAMPLE

A directionally-challenged architect stumbles unknowingly onto a crime scene when the contractor who gave her directions turns up missing. In her attempt to help the police with the search, she becomes a target, and her house is broken into and vandalized. One of her in-progress buildings is burned down, and she begins to lose clients. And when she goes to check out another project, she falls through a sabotaged floor into the basement and breaks her ankle. In the end, she has to trust those around her and face her fear of fire by rescuing the man she loves.

BACKSTORY

Who?

- Where is she emotionally, mentally, physically the day BEFORE the story begins?

EXAMPLE

When Emily taught in Reedsville, she and Thomas developed feelings for each other. When she left to care for her ailing grandfather in Seattle, Thomas proposed to her. She turned him down, insisting her duty was with her grandfather. Thomas, dejected, said nothing to anyone. After her grandfather's recovery, Emily decided to accept Thomas's proposal. She could teach for a year and become endeared to the community. Then she and Thomas would marry, and she could establish a Ladies' Aid Society and other social and charitable groups, the way a woman of proper social standing would. Afraid he would return a letter from her, the story begins as she arrives in Portland on her way to Reedsville to accept Thomas's proposal. She's played many roles in the past. She can play this one long enough for it to become true.

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEMSERVICESINK.COM

The Why

- What does she want (the external goal as the story opens)?
- Why (motivation)?
- What keeps her from getting it?
- What's the Dark Moment in her past (write it out as a specific scene)
- What's her deep emotional wound?
 - * The lie she believes
 - * The fear she's trying to avoid
 - * Her emotional response to the Dark Moment that motivates her behavior going forward.
- What was her happiest moment in the past (write this out as a specific scene)?
 - * How has that lead to her deepest desire (internal goal)?
 - * What would it cost her to get it?
 - * What will getting it mean to her?
 - * What is the emotional opposite of the Dark Moment?
- Her flaw flows from her Dark Moment and is her coping technique to protect her wound that results from the Dark Moment.

Do it

After working on these questions, write three scenes in chronological order from the backstory.

- One is the Dark Moment
- One is her Happiest Moment
- One is a time when she acted on the worldview created by her Dark Moment that reinforces her flawed worldview.

Now write the ending knowing these whys have to be resolved. See the section on Act III for more help.

EXAMPLE

Dark Moment Story: Sarah's house burned down when she was little, killing her little brother and sending her mom into clinical depression.

Happiest moment scene: Emily had a tea party and felt like a true lady.

Reinforcing worldview scene: She will lie to someone about her past, and it will go better for her than if she told the truth.

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEM SERVICESINK.COM

ACT I

The Tipping Point

The story opens on the page when:

- Life can no longer go on the way it has been
- Something threatens her worldview
- We have a sense that all is not what it seems, all is not well
- A sense that big changes are coming

The Inciting Incident

- Given her past, what event would compel her to react and begin the external goal quest?
- An event ignites her external goal and forces her to face her fear.
- It creates the tension between the desire to keep things the same and to reach for her internal goal.
- It calls into question a long-held belief.

EXAMPLE

Emily finds money in her bag that she thinks her "grandfather" stole and stuck in her bag before she left. She wants to do the right thing and get the money back to its rightful owner. But she already talked Josh into driving to Reedsville against his better judgment because she was so set on seeing Thomas. Determined not to let Grandfather derail her plans any longer, she decides to go to Reedsville and write to her grandfather to determine who the money belongs to.

Protagonist

Must be:

- Relatable
- Flawed
- Vulnerable
- Able to make the reader care about her
- Wants to get the most by giving up the least, making things worse
- Must confront the thing she's been avoiding

External Goal

What she think she wants, and what she is striving for.

- Must be able to last a whole novel
- Have stakes that escalate
- Create a real problem for her if it fails
- Creates a ticking clock
- Forces her to make an inner change
- Costs her big emotionally

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEM SERVICESINK.COM

ACT II

The Inciting Incident and the Ending are two tent poles holding up your story. You know the beginning and the ending. The Backstory and the Why give you the info for Act II.

Act IIA

She tells someone her Dark Moment story from her past. This generates empathy with the reader.

Act IIB

She tells someone her Happiest Moment story and begins to understand why she does what she does, based on her past. Now to make amends.

Obstacles

Come from her internal emotional and psychological barriers.

- What is she scared of?
- Why does she believe she'll fail?
- How does achieving one goal force her to abandon another goal?
- What values would achieving that goal violate/compromise?

Scenes

- Must have a goal (What does she want?)
- Must have a cause and an effect
- Must matter (What will it cost her?)
- Must have her realize something
- And so? Now what must happen?

Plot = Action + Reaction + Decision

- Each scene must influence the next one.
- The "why" of each action, reaction, and decision must make sense given her worldview.
- Nothing else belongs on the page.

Subplots

- Occur often after a major twist, turning point, or revelation.
- Supply info that affects the main storyline
- Make her quest harder
- Deepens our understanding of her

Scene Turning Points

- Secrets
- Lies
- Mine the past for people, conflict, misbeliefs

Story isn't what happens; it's how she reacts to what happens

- Show her train of thought as she reacts to everything.
- Show her figuring out how to deal with the latest action.
- Show her figuring out how to still achieve her goals.
- Show the "why" as she is figuring it out.

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEMSERVICESINK.COM

Ask "Why?" of
everything.

Ask "And so?"
of

Write what you
know *emotionally*.

ACT III

The End We're Driving for from the Beginning

Know your ending before beginning. It must contain these elements to be satisfying.

- A glimpse of her Happily Ever After or happiest moment or desire in the first scene must come true in some fashion at the end.
- Emotional satisfaction is more important than how the plot wraps up.
- The external goal does not have to be achieved.
- She has to face her biggest fear (relive her Dark Moment) to experience change.
- Her lie is proved to be a lie.
- Her wound is visibly healed.
- Her deepest desire is reached or reachable.
- Her change must have been earned.
- She must come back to where she started the story--literally or figuratively--to show how she is different.

The Black Moment

- Ushers in Act III
- Triggered by an Aha! moment of clarity that gives her the courage and strength to engage in "final battle."
- OR the Aha! moment comes after she realizes she feels different than she expected to.
- The lie must feel real in the moment, but she realizes it isn't, based on everything she's learned in Act II.
- Her wound is healed.

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEM SERVICESINK.COM

OVERVIEW

Story Level

ACT I

- Ordinary World
- Inciting Incident
- Great Debate

First chapter must show her to be at least two of these:

- Sympathetic
- Admirable
- Heroic
- Likable
- Funny
- Relatable

Internal Level

ACT I

- Coping with the wound based on the lie generated from the Dark Moment
- Life can no longer go on the same way
- Do I or don't I?

Reveal her:

- Identity (attire, first impressions)
- Purpose
- Skill/superpower/gift
- Reaction to stress
- Insecurity
- Belonging

Deepen all of these throughout the story

Transition

- Act I ends and Act II begins when she decides to walk through the door brought about by the Inciting Incident--a point of no return--that begins the adventure.

Story Level

ACT II

- Disappointments
- Difficult decisions
- Competing Values
- Public Stakes
- Private Stakes
- Attempt to solve problem by cheating, but makes it worse
- Disaster
- Destruction

Internal Level

ACT II

- Choices reveal values and Backstory
- Goals and values come into conflict
- She does something she would never do given her Worldview and Backstory.

THE NOVEL BLUEPRINT



WWW.TANDEM SERVICESINK.COM

Story Level

Act IIA

She tells someone the story of her Dark Moment

Act IIB

She tells someone the story of her Happiest Moment

The fight

- Taste of death
- Taste of victory
- Drive toward the Black Moment

Internal Level

- Sees her greatest desire
- Sees her flaw for what it is

Transition

- Act II ends and Act III begins with the Black Moment. Devastation occurs, and all seems to be lost.

Story Level

ACT III

- Black Moment
- Her Dark Moment from the past is resurrecting itself
- Final battle armed with the truth
- Happily Ever After
- All plot threads resolved
- Circle back to the beginning (literally or figuratively) to show change

Internal Level

ACT III

- The lie feels real
- All she has learned refutes the lie
- Aha! moment
- Wound is healed
- She is changed by the truth
- Her greatest dreams (symbolized by her Happiest Moment in the past) are realized.