

THE NIGHTTIME NOVELIST

WORKSHEET 1: Developing Initial Ideas

Directions: Look back to the example on page 20 of brainstorming aspects of the novel from the initial idea. Then, follow your own novel idea through the following steps and see how much of the story is already present or suggested.

Premise:

Characters:

Plot:

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Tone:

Voice/POV:

Setting:

Theme:

Title:

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WORKSHEET 2: Character Concepting

Directions: Sketch your main character by filling in as many of the following baseline facts as you can and keeping track of any images or keywords that come to you.

Main character:

Age:

Physical description:

Internal motivation:

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Internal conflict:

External motivation:

External conflict:

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WORKSHEET 3: Character & Plot Arcs

Directions: Make a sketch of your overall plot and character arcs, looking back to the examples on pages 29–31 as a guide.

| WANT | WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY | RESOLUTION |
|----------|------------------------|------------|
| External | External | External |
| | | |
| Internal | Internal | Internal |
| | | |

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WORKSHEET 4: Supporting Characters

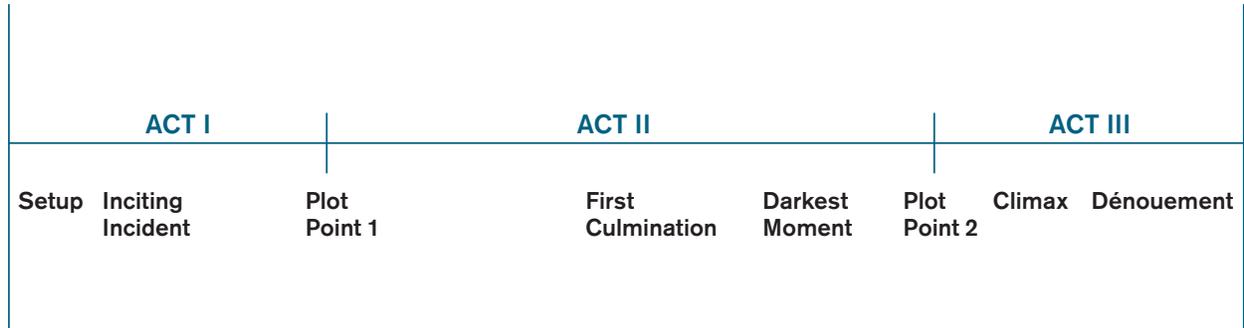
Directions: Make a sketch of your supporting characters, beginning with your conception of them as you introduce them and then adding to or amending the sketches as you work through the novel.

| Character name | Description/ Characteristics/ Keywords | Relevant story or backstory | Chapters/Pages where character appears (FYI) | How character relates to/reveals protagonist |
|----------------|--|--------------------------------|--|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

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WORKSHEET 5: The Plot Arc

Directions: Use the graph below to sketch the basic shape of your story arc. Begin with these major moments and turning points in the overall arc, then keep this page to jot notes for scene ideas that help bridge the gaps.



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WORKSHEET 6: Three Lesser-Used Novel Structures

Directions: Consider the following lesser-used novel structures and consider what benefit, if any, these forms might have for your own novel.

| Structure | Characteristics | Examples | Potential use for your novel |
|------------------|--|--|------------------------------|
| Epistolary | Most commonly told in the form of letters or diary entries, but can include grocery lists, police reports, e-mails, journals, newspaper clippings, top-ten lists, or any other kind of document that helps tell the story. | <i>The Color Purple</i> by Alice Walker <i>Dracula</i> by Bram Stoker <i>U.S.!</i> by Chris Bachelder <i>The Screwtape Letters</i> by CS Lewis | |
| Frame | A story within a story or, more properly, an outer story framing an inner one. Allows for a relationship and comparison between the "inside" and "outside" stories, adding up to a full experience. | <i>One Thousand and One Nights</i> <i>Frankenstein</i> by Mary Shelley <i>Heart of Darkness</i> by Joseph Conrad <i>The Blind Assassin</i> by Margaret Atwood | |
| Novel in Stories | A collection of linked stories featuring either the same protagonist or a cast connected in some way. Individual stories stand alone but also add up to a bigger overall arc. | <i>Winesburg, Ohio</i> by Sherwood Anderson <i>Love Medicine</i> by Louise Erdrich <i>Jesus' Son</i> by Denis Johnson <i>Olive Kitteridge</i> by Elizabeth Strout | |

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WORKSHEET 7: POV & Voice

Directions: Look back to the section on POV and voice beginning on page 71 and then test your own narrative choices by answering the questions below.

What POV have you chosen for the novel and why? What does the selection offer you in terms of telling the story you want to tell?

Will the POV have access to all the information—external or internal—you’ll need to tell the story? If not, are there ways of overcoming this, of introducing information the narrator doesn’t directly know?

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Will the POV be appropriate for the story in terms of its relationship to what's being said? If it's a rather personal story, for instance, is the POV close enough to convey that? If the story is emotionally complex, does the voice also have enough distance and perspective to be able to tell the story without distortion? Will it be able to strike the balance you need?

Does the POV help you find the voice, as well as the attitude conveyed? This has to do with the narrator's ability to evoke the right tone and kind of images that will convince your reader that the world of your novel exists. List any keywords—or even any full lines—that capture the mood you're looking for in the piece.

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WORKSHEET 8: Finding Your Voice

Directions: Choose one of the following first lines, take it as your own, and without planning where you're headed, write a second one that seems to fit and interests you, and then a third, and keep going. Whenever you feel satisfied enough to stop, read back over what you've written and then put it aside, let a day or so pass, then come back and choose another first line and try the exercise again. With any luck, you'll begin to see things in common from exercise to exercise: a consistent pull toward the comic or the dramatic, perhaps, or toward a particular subject matter, or a style that's more colloquial or formal, whatever. What you find in your word-by-word storytelling and its tendencies might begin to suggest your baseline voice. This exercise has worked very well with my writing students; it never ceases to amaze me how twenty writers, all starting from the same first line, can end up with twenty completely different stories, in varied styles; their own voices have begun to kick in and steer the work.

Here are the first lines to choose from. Again, don't overthink where the story should go; in fact you shouldn't look any farther than the very next line to write.

Sheila needed the money, and so against her better judgment she said yes.

In the morning I see that things have gotten worse.

Bob has that look on his face again.

I almost speak up, but at the last moment I don't say anything.

George realizes he's made a mistake two seconds too late.

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WORKSHEET 9: Avoiding Clichés

Directions: For each cliché below, first determine what information or meaning is being conveyed; then conjure the event, object, or idea in your mind and re-examine it, paying particular attention to what the five senses reveal about it. Finally rewrite the line, conveying the meaning through some particular sensory detail or figurative comparison. Feel free to brainstorm, to try different things, to write down whatever comes to your head. Again, effectual description starts in exploring unconscious associations before moving into more conscious construction. (I've started the first one as an example. Please note that it's not important in the exercise to match up the POV or tense of the original line; we're just practicing our image-making here.)

| Cliché | Meaning | Details | Senses | Rewritten |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--|---|---|
| It's raining cats and dogs. | It's raining forcefully. | ground swampy earthworms floating up potholes burbling car tires whooshing windowpanes popping | Taste: N/A (can taste reveal the force of something?) Touch: Hard little droplets like dimes being thrown; like fat beestings Sight: Like chain mail? Like tinsel? Sound: Like fingers drumming? Like beating a pillow with your fist? Hissing? Sizzling? Smell: N/A (can smell reveal the force of something?) | Which might you turn into an effective image to convey the original's meaning? If none, what images or ideas come to mind for you? |

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| Cliché | Meaning | Details | Senses | Rewritten |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|--|-----------|
| The crowd roared. | | | Taste: Touch: Sight: Sound: Smell: | |
| She was screaming her head off. | | | Taste: Touch: Sight: Sound: Smell: | |
| The car screeched to a stop. | | | Taste: Touch: Sight: Sound: Smell: | |
| I felt my stomach drop. | | | Taste: Touch: Sight: Sound: Smell: | |

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WORKSHEET 10: Description

Directions: Use the following worksheet to map out (and keep track of) your use of description in forming a complete fictional world.

| What's being described | Physical descriptors or attributes | Narrator's attitude toward the described | Feeling that should be evoked in the reader | Images/ Keywords |
|--|------------------------------------|--|---|------------------|
| Supporting characters | | | | |
| Environment (time, weather, communities, etc.) | | | | |
| Objects or props | | | | |
| Other ideas, objects, or motifs | | | | |

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WORKSHEET 11: Crafting a Setting

Directions: Choose a place from the left-hand column and then choose an attitude about the place from Column A on the right-hand side. Try to imagine the place through that specific lens, and then think of what details about the place you might use to illustrate the particular attitude. Be as specific as you can. Then, match up the same place with an attitude from Column B and do the exercise again. (The idea, of course, is to illustrate how the exact same place might be conveyed in very different, but no less concrete, ways depending upon how you perceive it and want it to be perceived.)

| PLACE | A | B |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| Your town described as if you find the place | annoying | comforting |
| Your street | back-biting | relaxing |
| Your place of business | snooty | uplifting |
| Your church | lonely | hopeful |
| Your favorite bookstore | intrusive | safe |
| Your favorite coffee shop | fake | nurturing |
| Your favorite restaurant | oppressive | convenient |
| Your least-favorite place | depressing | heartbreaking |

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WORKSHEET 12: Major & Minor Settings

Directions: Use the following worksheet to map out your descriptions and relevant details of the novel's major and minor settings. Look especially to how the descriptions serve not just to show the places in terms of physicality but what they mean for the protagonist and reader.

| Place being described | Physical descriptors or attributes | Narrator's attitude toward the described | Feeling that should be evoked in the reader | Images/Keywords/Peculiar or relevant details |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Major setting(s) | | | | |
| Minor settings | | | | |
| Objects or props | | | | |
| Other ideas, objects, or motifs | | | | |

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WORKSHEET 13: First-Act Markers

Directions: Briefly sketch those markers and pivotal moments which will determine the shape and function of the first act.

| Opening Scene and Setup introduces character and motivation | Inciting Incident conflict which reveals personal stakes for the protagonist | Plot Point 1 turning point which changes the dynamic of the story and launches Act II |
|---|--|---|
| | | |

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WORKSHEET 14: Setup & Opening Scene Sketch

Directions: Briefly sketch your opening scene, considering above all how it introduces character and internal motivation and effectively entices the reader into the novel.

OPENING SCENE SKETCH

Summary:

Hook:

Setting:

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Characters:

Arc of individual scene:

Novel arc/Question(s) introduced:

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WORKSHEET 15: Inciting Incident

Directions: Briefly sketch Act I's Inciting Incident, the moment of external conflict that reveals the protagonist's internal stakes.

INCITING INCIDENT SKETCH

Scene summary:

How external conflict reveals the personal stakes:

Setting:

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Characters:

Arc of individual scene:

Novel arc/Question(s) introduced:

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Scene

Scene

Additional scenes/plot points [building toward Inciting Incident and Plot Point 1]

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WORKSHEET 17: Plot Point 1

Directions: Sketch out Plot Point 1, the turning point that reveals external motivation or goal and leads to the story's second act.

FIRST PLOT POINT SKETCH

Scene Summary:

How external motivation or goal is introduced:

Relationship to internal motivation or goal:

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Why this is a turning point (and the character can't go back or refuse):

Setting:

Characters:

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WORKSHEET 18: Crafting Dialogue

Directions: Below are opening lines setting up a particular relationship and scenario. Complete the lines by choosing an adjective from the list provided and filling in the blank, and then consider what the lines suggest in terms of a scene.

My boss calls me into his office to tell me he's quitting. On his face is a look of _____.

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| despair | rage |
| hopefulness | confusion |
| unchecked lust | panic |
| recklessness | relief |
| accusation | guilt |

Write a brief scene (250 words or so) using the above opening lines of narration as your start. Then construct a dialogue between the two characters in which this moment plays out, using the way the two speak to each other in the moment to reveal, and briefly reveal in, the predicament.

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Scene

Scene

Additional scenes/plot points [building toward First Culmination and Darkest Moment]

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WORKSHEET 20: Raising the Stakes

Directions: Choose a scene from the second act to consider how you might effectively raise the stakes and tension through the following means.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Scene Summary (Include characters in the scene, arc of the scene, setting, and placement /purpose in the story)</p> | |
| <p>Conflict (What do the characters—the protagonist and others—want in the scene? Is the conflict external, internal, or both?)</p> | <p>External:</p> <p>Internal:</p> |
| <p>Tension (Does the tension in the scene come between the protagonist and someone or something else? Is the tension public or professional? Personal and private? What's at stake in the scene?)</p> | |
| <p>Building Suspense (What opportunities exist to build tension by turning down the volume in narration or dialogue? How might going quiet make the tension more palpable?)</p> | |
| <p>Pacing (How might you draw out the tension while keeping the focus and pacing of the scene tight? What tricks of time and place or subjective focus can you use?)</p> | |

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WORKSHEET 21: Deepening the Protagonist

Directions: As your protagonist faces escalating conflicts in the second act, consider how your understanding of the character, and the character's complexity, has grown by answering the following questions.

What aspect of the character's personality is her biggest asset?

What aspect of the character's personality might be her undoing?

What is the character most afraid of?

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What are her weaknesses, whether mental, emotional, physical, or psychological?

What are her strengths, whether mental, emotional, physical, or psychological?

What will have to change about the character, or what will she have to overcome in her own nature, in order to be successful in her quest?

What in the character's past is reflected in the current motivation and/or conflict?

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WORKSHEET 22: Subplot Tracker

Directions: Use the following worksheet to consider the function of your novel's subplots and how to keep them advancing the main plot and character arcs.

| Subplot and character(s) involved | Motivations of protagonist and secondary character(s) in subplot | How subplot helps reveal protagonist and larger story/character arcs | How (and when) the subplot should resolve | Chapters/pages where subplot comes in |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

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WORKSHEET 23: First Culmination & Darkest Moment

Directions: Sketch these Act II moments where the protagonist nears the goal and fails, or suffers a loss or setback.

FIRST CULMINATION/DARKEST MOMENT SKETCH

Scene summary:

What protagonist is within reach of in the scene:

What the loss means for the external or internal quest:

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Setting:

Characters:

Arc of individual scene:

Novel arc/Question(s) introduced:

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Are the stakes at this turning point clear? Is it clear what he hopes to gain in Act III by facing the conflict directly?

Is the original internal motivation—as well as the external—still present and recognizable in the story?

Setting:

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Characters:

Arc of individual scene:

Novel arc/Question(s) introduced:

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What does he hope to accomplish if he succeeds?

Does the protagonist succeed or fail at this moment?

Setting:

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Characters:

Arc of individual scene:

Has the external arc or quest been tied up by the end?

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WORKSHEET 27: Dénouement & Closing Scenes

Directions: Consider the novel's post-climax scenes with an eye toward tying up unresolved arcs and the novel as a whole.

DÉNOUEMENT SKETCH

Scene summary:

How the Dénouement recalls the opening of the book and the overall internal motivation:

Tone that should be struck at the end of the book ... the feeling the reader should take away with him:

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Setting:

Characters:

Arc of individual scene:
