Finish Your Story

COMPLETE GUIDE

A step-by-step template for storytelling, plus an interactive guide to help writers start and finish those pesky stories they want done already!

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Basics In Story Narrative

Let's start your story (or continue if you've already began) and finish it too! This workbook is designed to guide you through the essential steps of writing a compelling narrative, whether it's fiction or nonfiction. It will help you solidify the plot, develop your characters, and enhance your setting while ensuring your story resonates with a clear, powerful theme in this condensed guide.
Also, key tips and tricks for writers of all levels! Below are the key foundations needed to have a working narrative.

Story Structure

Brainstorm and create your Title and Genre if it's not done already

Central Theme

Determine the overall message your story is relaying

Plot Development

The actions that happen to support the theme. List and organize story arcs.

Setting

The story's location and time period in relation to the plot and characters

Character Development

Learn about your character and the characters supporting the plot

Dialogue and Voice

Create a unique voice to characters internal and external dialogue

Style and Tone

Think of which style and tone suits your story best

Conflict and Tension

Create conflict for your protagonist and build tension throughout the story

Narrative Structure and POV

Which perspective suits your story best

Editing and Final Drafts

Edit over and over again but get feedback for each draft!

STORY STRUCTURE

Know which type of story you want to create so you can build off it accordingly.

Genre:

What kind of story will this be?

Is your story fiction or non-fiction?

What genre does it fit into?

Some examples to choose from:

- Historical Fiction, Science Fiction
- Fantasy, Fable, Mystery
- Drama, Comedy, Horror, Thriller, Romance, Satire

Title of Your Story

If you don't already have an idea in your head, I like to think of short, catchy phrases that I can create a story from based on the connotations and value behind those words. Some story titles that share very popular names or phrases I'm thinking of are like Sin City, Happily Ever After, The Game, The Social Network.

It's okay to reverse engineer your story by starting with the title and working from there because there are no real rules to creativity, who knows what your small idea will end up becoming when you continuously work on it! This is a great challenge for working your mind into brainstorming mode too.

If you already have a great idea or situational conflicts for your narrative, think about a title that captures the essence of your narrative. It doesn't need to be final, but try to give it a sense of what's to come.

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Brainstorm a few potential titles if you don't already have one set! Do you have a favorite?

What is your genre and why did you choose it for this narrative?

Notes:

YOUR TURN

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Brainstorm a few potential titles if you don't already have one set! Do you have a favorite?

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Notes:

CENTRAL THEME

The theme is the soul of your story — the message, lesson, or idea you want to convey.

What is the central theme of your story?
Write a sentence or two that explains the heart of your story. Is it about redemption? Survival? Love? Loss? Explore this and ensure it's consistent throughout the story.

Sub-themes:

Do you have any secondary themes? Consider how your story's plot, characters, or setting reflect these sub-themes.

*Sub-themes should support, not overshadow, the main theme.

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CENTRAL THEME

MORAL LESSONS

SUB-THEME

SUPPORTING MORAL LESSONS

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CENTRAL THEME

MORAL LESSONS

SUB-THEME

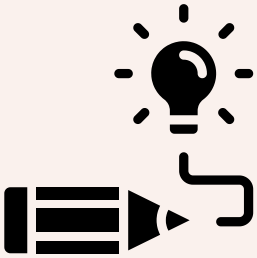
SUPPORTING MORAL LESSONS

Plot Development

Plot Summary:

Provide a brief summary of your plot: summarize the entire story within a few sentences or a short paragraph.

Think of it like an elevator pitch. What happens in your story, who are the key players, and what's at stake?



Plot Structure:

Includes the following order below:

01 Exposition

Who are your main characters? What is their normal world at the start of the story?

02 Inciting Inciident

What event disrupts the status quo and sets the plot in motion?

03 Rising Action

What obstacles or challenges do your characters face on their journey?

04 Climax

What is the highest point of tension in your story? The turning point?

05 Falling Action

How do things begin to resolve after the climax?

06 Resolution

How does your story end? Is there closure? Does it leave room for questions?

Tip for Writers:
Keep the stakes high! Readers are more engaged when the consequences of the characters' actions are significant. Every choice should matter.

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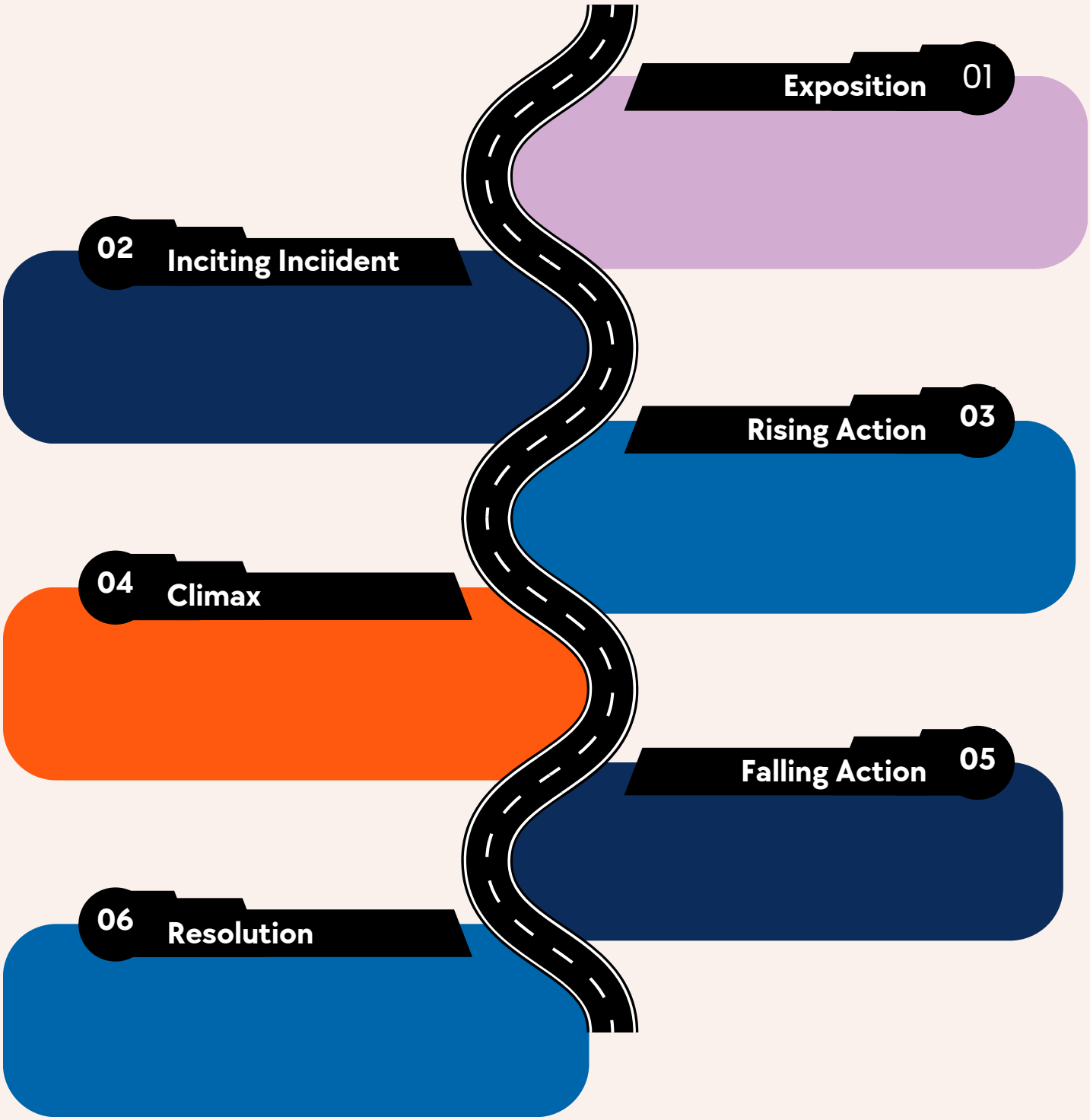
Plot Summary:

Plot Structure:



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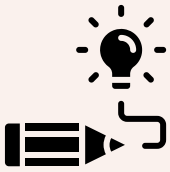

Plot Structure:

01 Exposition

02 Inciting Inciident

03 Rising Action

04 Climax

05 Falling Action

06 Resolution

SETTING

Where and When does your story take place?	Describe the main locations of your story (cities, towns, fantasy worlds, etc.). What time period is it set in (past, present, future)? Is it realistic or fantastical?
How Does the Setting Impact the Story?	Does the setting influence the characters' behavior, emotions, or choices? For example, a remote desert will have a different emotional weight than a bustling city street.
Important Note:	Don't spend too much time describing every tiny detail unless it directly serves the plot or character development. Focus on the details that matter.

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Story Setting

Where and When does your story take place?	
How Does the Setting Impact the Story?	
Important Note:	

YOUR TURN

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Character Development

Main Characters:

Protagonist: Who is your main character? Who are we rooting for in the story?

- What do they want most, and why?
- What do they fear? What flaws or strengths do they possess?
- What's their greatest obstacle (internal or external)?

Antagonist: Who or what opposes the protagonist? The antagonist doesn't need to be a villain—it could be an internal struggle, society, or even the protagonist's own flaws.

Supporting Characters: List a few key secondary characters. What is their role in the story? How do they influence or challenge the protagonist? Give them some depth—characters should not exist just to fill space. Even though they are considered secondary, create goals, flaws, and other characteristics - these small details are what make stories more flavorful!

Character Arcs:

Protagonist's Journey: How does your protagonist change by the end of the story? This could be emotional growth, a change in perspective, or overcoming a flaw.

Other Character Arcs: Do any secondary characters experience significant change? How do their arcs intersect with the protagonist's journey?

Probing Deeper Into Character Development:

- What is your character's internal conflict? (e.g., moral dilemmas, guilt, desire vs. duty)
- What external forces challenge your character? (e.g., societal pressure, physical environment, other people, family)
- What is your character's most significant fear, and how does this fear drive their decisions?
- What is your character's greatest desire? What are they willing to sacrifice to achieve it?

Tip for Writers:

Avoid clichés! Think about your characters' complexity. No one is 100% good or evil, and real people are often conflicted, with contradictions. Create nuanced characters. Remember, everyone believes they are right in their own perspectives, so their actions should reflect that.

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Character Development

Main Characters:

Protagonist:

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Antagonist:

Supporting Characters:

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YOUR TURN

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DIALOGUE AND VOICE

Character Voice

Each character should have a unique voice that reflects their personality, background, and emotions.

- How do they speak?
- Do they use formal language, slang, or metaphors?
- Is their tone sarcastic, gentle, direct?
- What are they carrying inside them but are not projecting to the world (so your character can observe their micro-nonverbals)

Remember, even after all the pre-planning we do, to complete our story, we have to sit down and actually write it (the hardest part for me)! An awful but complete story is better than an unfinished one. We can always build from the draft!

Dialogue Tips

Dialogue should reveal something about the character or advance the plot.

Avoid filler or unrealistic conversations. If you're unsure, ask: Does this exchange move the story forward or provide insight into the character?

Be sure to not have exposition in the dialogue as it isn't realistic and more amateur appearing.

Tip For Writers

How to prevent "exposition"
Avoid "info-dumping" in dialogue (too much exposition).

Let the characters reveal information naturally and don't reveal everything at once, leave breadcrumbs for the audience to make assumptions.

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Dialogue and Voice

Nature and Nurture Effects on Character External Voice	
What does the character present externally vs internally	
Important Note:	

YOUR TURN

Dialogue and Voice

Nature and Nurture Effects on Character External Voice	
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Conflict and Tension

Types of Conflict

External Conflict: What outside forces challenge the protagonist? (e.g., nature, society, other characters)

Internal Conflict: What inner struggles does the protagonist face? (e.g., fear, guilt, self-doubt, nurtured habits)

Tips for Writers

Tension is key to keeping readers engaged. Don't resolve everything too quickly; keep your audience guessing until the resolution.

This means saving those big battles until the end! With every step through the character's journey, try to give reasons to add tension or conflict so that the final battle is that more satisfying to readers!

Tension

- How do you build tension throughout the story?
- What moments are fought with uncertainty, surprise, or fear?
- Is the tension newfound or does it have history with the characters?

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EXTERNAL CONFLICTS AND FORCES

INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND FORCES

PRACTICE

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EXTERNAL CONFLICTS AND FORCES

INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND FORCES

Style and Tone

Writing Style:

How would you describe your writing style? (e.g., descriptive, minimalist, humorous, poetic)

Do you want to evoke certain emotions through your word choice or sentence structure?

Tone:

What tone do you want your readers to experience? Is your story dark and moody, lighthearted and funny, or somewhere in between?

*Ensure the tone matches the plot and theme.

Tip for Writers:

Don't overuse literary devices. Alliteration, metaphors, and similes can enrich your writing, but too much can make it feel forced. Use them sparingly and purposefully.

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Writing Style:

Tone:

Writing Style:

Tone:

Point of View and Narrative Structure

Point of View (POV):
Will your story be told in the first person, second person, or third person? How does this choice affect the reader's connection to the characters?

First Person: Allows readers to closely follow one character's thoughts and experiences.

Third Person Limited: Focuses on one character but from an outside perspective.

Third Person Omniscient: The narrator knows all thoughts and experiences of every character.

Second Person: Less common, directly addresses the reader (you).

Narrative Structure:
Are you telling the story chronologically, or will you use flashbacks or non-linear elements? Will there be multiple narrators or perspectives?

Tip for Writers:
Stay consistent with your chosen POV. Switching between first and third person can confuse readers unless there's a compelling reason.

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List Your Chosen Point Of View and Why

How Is The Story Order Told?

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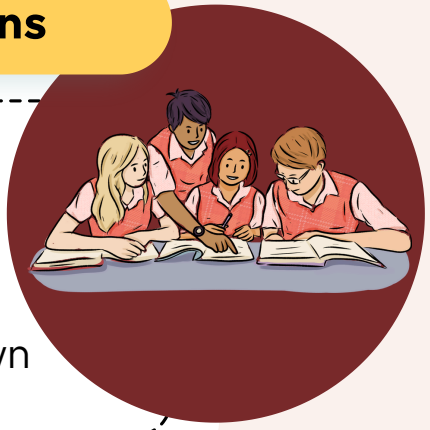
Editing and Final Draft Tips

The First Draft

Don't worry about perfection at first. Get the story down. Editing will come later!

Revisions



After your first draft, go through several rounds of revisions. Focus on plot consistency, character development, and pacing first. Then address language, tone, and sentence structure! Get feedback from peers after a few rounds of your own edits!

Common Mistakes To Avoid

Too many themes can confuse readers.

- Stick to one core theme, and use sub-themes to support it.

Over-complicating the plot or characters

- keep things clear and concise.

Telling instead of showing

- Use sensory details and action to convey emotions.

WRITING AND EDITING SCHEDULE

try your best, but know it's not final!

2 - 4 WEEKS	Fill in this template guide within this time frame before moving onto the next step
2 - 3 WEEKS	Using your completed template, begin an outline from start to finish, separating major events and plot points by chapters
8 - 12 WEEKS	Start breaking your story up into digestible pieces. Start with Chapter 1 and make important notes that should happen or just begin writing the entire chapter. Once that is complete, move on to the next chapter and don't stop until you are complete!
8 - 12 WEEKS	Your finished product may be awesome or awful, but this is Draft 1. Begin with another read through of your story by adding fluff and perfecting the plot and characters as you go.
6 - 8 WEEKS	After Draft 2, do this process a few more times by adding more details and layers, and removing what isn't needed.
2 - 6 WEEKS	Start sending it to trustworthy friends, editors, or anyone who will provide constructive feedback. Make as many drafts as you want to get it right, but don't sit on it forever.
2 - 4 WEEKS	Self-publish your book once you are happy with it!

Final Words of Encouragement

Remember, writing is a journey, not a race. Don't rush to the finish line. Keep refining, keep questioning, and always stay true to the story you want to tell.

Tip for Writers:

Keep writing, even when it gets hard. The hardest part is often finishing, but once you push through, you'll find the payoff is worth it! Use the outline template and writing calendar below to block out time to write down everything you've gathered and finish your story!

Good luck, and happy writing!

Digital Workbook

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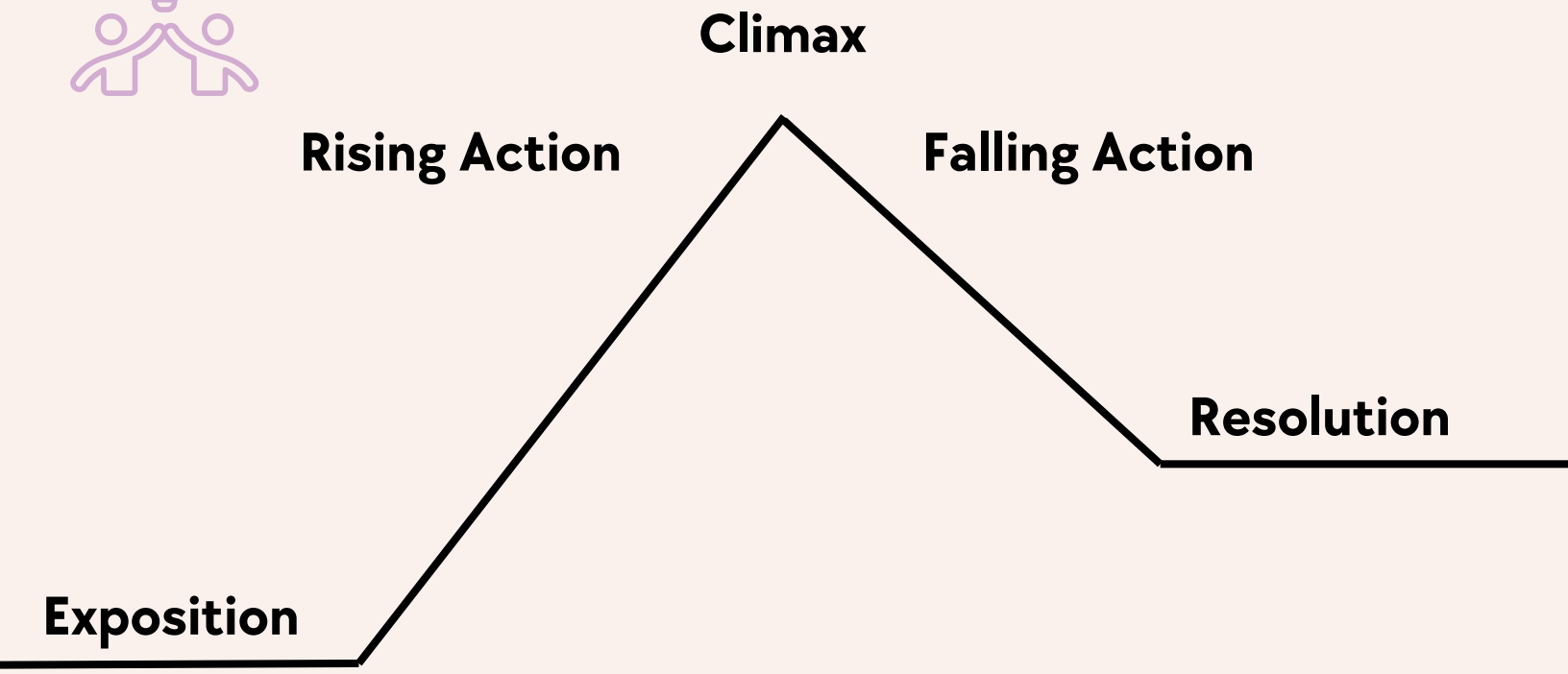
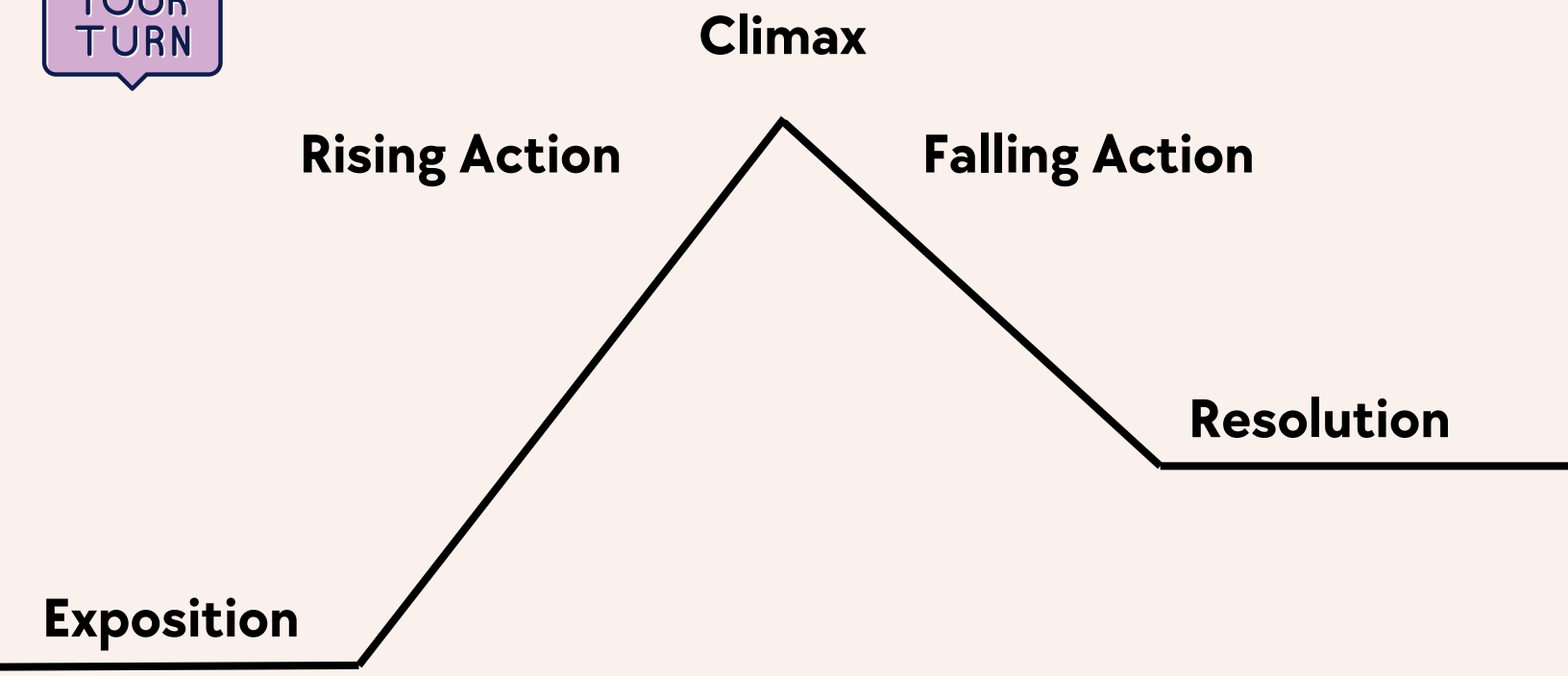


Beginning

Middle

End

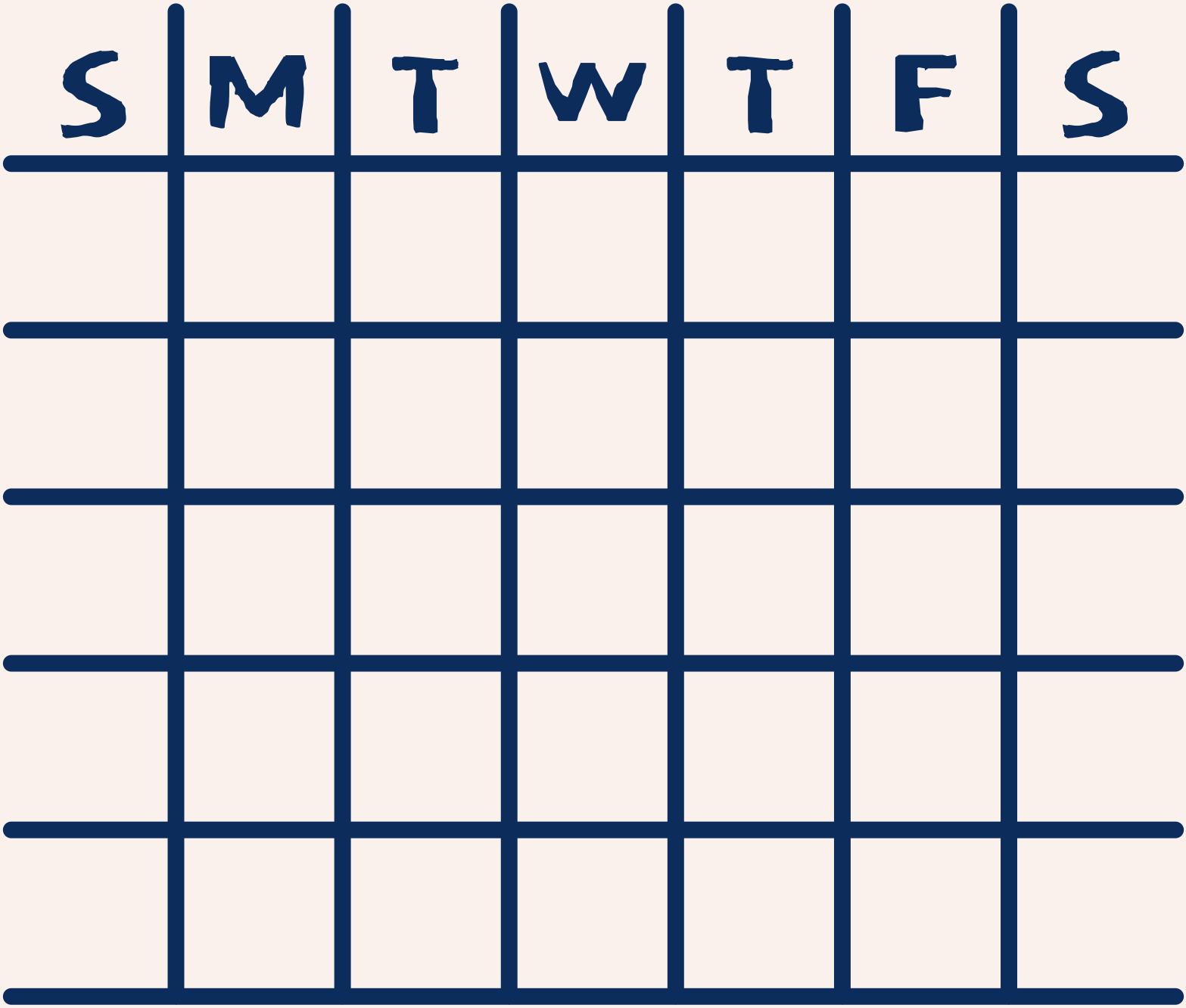
YOUR TURN



Beginning	Middle	End

Create Your Writing Schedule
&
STICK WITH IT

Repeat the same schedule monthly or change it up to work best for your schedule and needs!



WORK LOG

Write for a total of 5 hours a week at least. Either in one-hour blocks or in a few bulk hours. Just make sure those hours are spent writing and thinking, not phone scrolling and snacking (calling myself out on that last comment)

DATE	DESCRIBE WRITING FOCUS		TIME WRITING

Bonus Writing Prompts

Writing Prompt Aids:

Writing Exercises for Practice

Here are a few writing exercises to help spark creativity and get you thinking deeply about your story.

Character Backstory Exercise: Write or think critically from the perspective of your protagonist and again as your antagonist.

- What were they doing a week before the story begins?
- What past events shaped their worldview?
- How do they feel about their current situation?

Character Dialogue Challenge: Write a scene where two characters with opposing views must work together. Focus on how their voices, language, and attitudes clash. How do they negotiate or struggle to find common ground?

Setting Description Prompt: Choose a location central to your story and describe it using all five senses. Think about how the place makes your character feel. What does it smell like, sound like, and look like? How does the environment reflect the emotional tone of the scene?

Conflict Exploration: Write two paragraphs: one where your character takes the easy route to solve a problem and another where they take the more challenging route. How do their choices reflect their inner conflict?

Writing Prompts to Inspire Creativity

The "What If" Prompt:
"What if your protagonist discovered a secret about their family that changes everything they thought they knew about their past?"

The "Opposites" Prompt:
"Write a scene where a character who is normally introverted is forced into a situation where they must lead a group of people. How do they handle it?"

"Write about two characters who are complete opposites in their views on life, and have them attempt to solve a common problem."

The "Moment of Change" Prompt:
"Write the moment when your protagonist makes a decision that alters the course of their life. What do they fear, what do they hope for, and why do they ultimately make this choice?"

The "Misunderstanding" Prompt:
"Write a scene where a major conflict in your story stems from a simple misunderstanding between two characters."

Famous Writing Advice & Quotes

Here are some famous writing tips and quotes from well-known authors that hopefully inspire and help guide you through your writing process.

"You can make anything by writing."
— C.S. Lewis
Writing has the power to create worlds. Don't be afraid to think big and let your imagination run wild.

"The first draft is just you telling yourself the story."
— Terry Pratchett
Don't worry about perfection when you start. The key is to get the story down, and then you can refine it later.

"If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot."
— Stephen King
Reading and writing are the two essential practices for honing your craft. Make sure you're regularly reading books that inspire you and challenge your thinking (personally I count movies, shows, and videogames too as long as I'm analyzing them).

"Write what should not be forgotten."
— Isabel Allende
Writing can be a way to preserve history, emotions, or personal experiences that have meaning. Focus on what matters the most to you and to the story - anthropologists in the future will appreciate it!

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."
— Mark Twain
Don't wait for the "perfect" moment or the perfect idea. Start writing today, and the rest will come with practice and persistence.

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."
— Maya Angelou
Don't let your story go untold. Writing is a way to free those inner thoughts, experiences, and ideas that are aching to be shared.

"You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great."
— Zig Ziglar

Starting is the hardest part, but once you've taken that first step, the process gets easier. Keep going, even when it feels tough.

"I am a storyteller. I write to discover what I know."
— Roger Rosenblatt
Sometimes the act of writing itself helps you understand more about the story, the characters, and even yourself. Trust the process.

Practical Writing Tips

Avoid Overwriting: It's easy to fall into the trap of over-describing or over-explaining things. Trust your reader to fill in some of the gaps themselves. Less is often more.

Find Your Rhythm: Every writer has their own writing process. Find what works best for you—whether that's writing in bursts, setting specific word-count goals, or outlining before writing. Experiment with different methods until you find your rhythm.

Consistency is Key: Writing every day, or at least on a regular schedule, will help keep your momentum going. Even if you can only write for 15 minutes, consistency is crucial.

Beware of Info-Dumping: Be careful with the amount of background information you include. Don't overwhelm your readers with excessive exposition. Instead, weave backstory and context naturally through the narrative.

Use Active Voice: Whenever possible, write in the active voice instead of the passive voice. Active voice makes writing more direct, clear, and engaging.

Make Every Word Count: Every sentence should serve a purpose. Whether it advances the plot, deepens character development, or builds the world, make sure every word in your story is contributing to your overarching goals.

Final Thought

I'm so happy you took the time to check out my template! Thank You Very Much! You must have a story you want to tell! Or perhaps, you still need to create that story, but regardless, you want to share it to the world! *or maybe keep it secret so no one close to you can see the personal thoughts manifested from your imagination...*

Either way, I'm here for it and want you to GET THAT STORY DONE! Simply because, I know that shameful feeling of having works in process. But let's not let that stop us and use my guide to help complete the writing cycle and finish that story (or novel, screenplay, short, cookbook)

Whether you are a pro writer, or just starting out, you may have realized already that it is hard to complete a project from start to finish. I may have 13 works in progress, but I don't count them officially complete until it's published - so no need to feel overwhelmed or alone, that's just a part of the process!

"Writing is an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go."
— E.L. Doctorow

Keep exploring, keep writing, and most importantly, keep believing in your story. You are on a creative journey that will lead to a finished work you can be proud of.

Don't be afraid to try new ideas and enjoy the writing process! Happy Writing!

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Message me (B. A. Steele) on one of these social platforms and let me know if my guide worked to help you complete your story!!