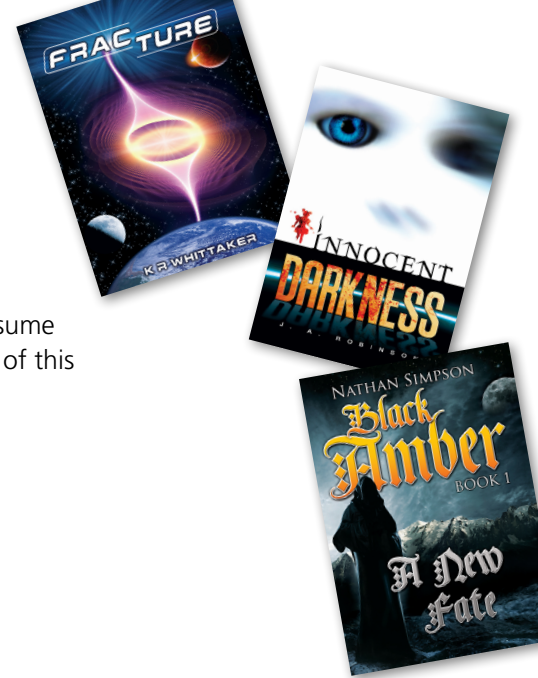


PublishMe

An introduction to
fiction writing

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Introduction (Checking your plans)

In this introduction to writing fiction, we make some assumptions. Primarily we assume you have read the book *How to plan your fiction book* available on 'Step 1 – Plan' of this site, and that you have done and understood the Six Ps of fiction writing;

Prepare
Plan
Plot
People
Places
Premises

If that is the case, then you already know what type of story you are wishing to write and who your intended audience will be. You will have constructed a plot and designed a range of characters with a thorough CV for each so you can keep them whole and balanced as you write about them. You will have divided your plot into scenes and planned how you will intertwine symbols, themes and core premises into the plot as you write. You will have broken your story down to chapters so you'll know what is to be in each.

You will have done your research on any scenes and historical, socio-political, scientific or geographical references, for example, that need to be used in the story and to be accurate for the story to have integrity.

Finally, you will have read plenty of material similar to the type of book you are intending to write so that you have a feel for the style of writing you feel will fit the market at which you are aiming.

If you haven't done these things, then take the time to read that book on planning now, completing these stages, so that you are at the start line for your writing.

About writing in general terms (selecting your timber)

The first thing to know about writing is that so long as you have the ability to put words together, such as to write a good and interesting email to a friend, then you have the potential to write a book. Perhaps the biggest impediment to good writing is that people tend to overcomplicate it, to try to sound like someone they're not, rather than just letting the words flow as they would if they were writing to a friend. So the first 'secret' to good writing is to write first and worry about editing later. Just let the words flow. While that may be a little simplistic, we don't want you to write like someone once told you you should – we encourage you to 'find your own voice'.

Find the way you would really naturally express things when you are not trying to create a piece of written work that conforms to someone else's expectations, restraints, forms and formats, controls, guidelines or traditions. Finding your own voice almost certainly means just letting the words come – write 'without thinking'.

Keep a notepad beside you as you write. As you add detail, plot twists or new material you will need to go back and check, add to or alter earlier sections, or amend the plot plan. Quickly make a note to go back and change things later, so you don't lose the immediate flow of your writing and the sound of your own voice. Many of the greatest writers have written really quite simply – less is more as they say – but in a very genuine tone so you feel as if they are speaking to you in the most natural way. Such writing makes the reader feel comfortable, at ease, and means they don't have to work at reading it – it just seems to fit; like reading a welcome letter from a friend; like putting on that favourite, comfortable old garment.

Quantity versus quality

The second secret of good writing is that in any shootout between quantity and quality, quality wins over quantity every time. Those of us who have been formally educated have often been set our writing tasks by word count

e.g., a 3000-word essay on underwater knitting. So we've learnt to waffle on to fill the space. When writing a book, we have to unlearn this behaviour and it can be quite difficult to shake. So the new rule is; just write what needs to be said. You'll know, depending on who you are addressing as your audience, just how much embellishment is expected. Obviously, if you are writing for an arty, literary audience, they will expect to know the colour of the crockery, the drape of the curtains and the brand of watch your lead character is wearing because these are the sorts of things that they would notice themselves and that would be included in a letter to a friend from that group. Rich metaphors and similes and a poetic beauty and rhythm to the language will find a natural warm reception from such an audience.

If you are writing for a largely male, action-detective story audience, then of course you will be interested in the curves of the leading lady character, the giveaway clues that tell your famous detective that the lady is a smoker who drives a Porsche, and that her hair is dyed blonde. These are the sorts of things that would be of interest in a letter to a friend with this sort of interest.

Audience

So think about your audience and, with an appropriate economy of words, tell all that a friend from that audience would want to know – AND NO MORE! You can always add a little more description or explanation later if your early reviewers feel there is information missing. Your job as a writer though, is to make your audience feel that every word in the story is there for good reason. If your review readers from your actual target audience confirm they find none of it boring to wade through, then you have done your job as a writer.

Pacing yourself

While we are still in the preparatory stages, prior to writing (selecting our timber), it may be timely to offer some advice to help you achieve your goal. Firstly, writing a book can be a long and at times laborious process. It may be the longest sustained commitment to a single complex task that many people achieve in their entire lifetime, and that, in itself, is often part of the charm and attraction many people feel for the notion of being a published author.

There will, however, be times where the flesh is willing but the spirit is weak – where you find it hard to get motivated to make another day's contribution to the overall task. This is the time to tell yourself that every great journey is accomplished by many small steps, taken one at a time. All you have to do that day is take one more small step. As Aristotle is reputed to have said when someone asked him how to reach Mount Olympus, "Just make sure that each step you take is in that direction."

Criticism

One of the surest ways to lose motivation is to subject yourself to unhelpful criticism. Be careful who you let read your work in the early stages to protect yourself from that. There is plenty of time later for criticism at a time when you can more usefully use it (or dismiss it) and will indeed be seeking it to ensure you have written well for your target audience. If someone insists on reading your work early and you don't feel you can refuse them, just gently explain to them that, as you are just free-forming your writing at this stage, they are looking at nothing more than the priming coat, to use a painting analogy. The subsequent reworks will add the gloss and any criticism at this point should either be withheld for fear of demotivating the painter, or expressed at least in terms that this is a very early draft that will be overlaid and reworked later to a more glossy finish. Few, if any, writers get it right in one go, and most work and rework early drafts to achieve the finish they seek.

It's not a straight path

If you do lose motivation to write at any point, just remember that a well-planned book does not even have to be written in chronological order. Think about it. Films are not filmed in chronological order. As long as your planning is thorough enough, you shouldn't need to write chronologically through the sequence. If you are stuck on the scene you are currently writing, or a bit tired with the part of the story you are working on, why not take a break by going to another part of the story where there is a scene that you can picture well and that you feel ready to write about immediately, and write that today. It is still one more step along the way, and it keeps the writing flow going. By avoiding getting frustrated by one section of the book that is holding you up, you feel instead the success of seeing



the words flow onto paper, a few hundred a day until, before you know it, you have a few thousand, then a few tens of thousands, and a book is produced. A simple sequencing tool, if you are writing in non-chronological order and are not choosing to use the computer to write and order your output, is to keep the writing you have done in a simple ring binder which can be divided into chapters and scenes. These can be added as you produce them, until the entire first draft is completed.

On a related point of course, you may choose to follow a single strand of the plot through, writing that as if it were a single chronological sequence, even though through folding in your plot plan, it will appear in fragments within separate scenes in chapters throughout the book. This can ensure good continuity as that particular plot strand unfolds and it saves you having to reread previous writing each time you meet a related section. The fact is, you should work in the way that feels most logical and comfortable to you, and as long as you are well planned, it should all fall into place.

Helping the writing process

A couple of important housekeeping matters. Again, don't stray far from a notepad. Sparks of inspiration or things that need to be remembered will strike at all sorts of odd times and you should jot them down as soon as they occur, as they will often not stay around if not captured immediately. Your brain operates at two levels. Your conscious brain processes in the conscious realm, but after you lose conscious focus on an idea or a problem area in your writing, your subconscious mind (sometimes also called your super-conscious mind) works like a super computer, processing the material and checking it against all sorts of stored memories from your past in such a manner that you are frequently unaware of it happening. When suddenly the computation stops and out to your conscious mind pops a solution, you need to be ready to capture it. Just notice it happening and capture these ideas as they come. If you work with real intent to let your subconscious mind help you, you can even spend a bit of time at the end of each day reading tomorrow's scene plan and descriptions, characters involved and so on, then consciously consign them to your subconscious and let it do its job. The next day, when you sit down to write you will find that a lot of material is more easily available than if you had just read those notes and were starting out to write straight from your conscious mind's processes. Try it.

Backing up

Think very carefully about backing up your work, whether you are using a computer or not. Ideally, keep a second copy at all times and keep it at a different place. With a computer this may involve a process as simple as emailing a copy of your work to date to yourself at a hotmail address each day. That way, if your computer corrupts and you lose everything on your hard drive, you should still be able to access the latest file from any other computer. Equally, depending on the age of the machine, it might involve burning to CD or copying to a portable data storage device (memory stick/flash drive/USB stick). In fact with the portability of data through such devices today, you could feasibly work at various times of day on several different machines, carrying your latest data backup with you on your portable device and leaving your second backup on whichever machine you last used. This would suit someone who works on a computer and can use their lunch hour for a bit of additional writing.

For those who don't write using a computer – and let's face it, when the most financially successful books of the last century, the Harry Potter series, have been written with pen and paper, who can criticise? – it is important to find a way to do this too. You may photocopy your new notes each day after writing and take them offsite, or you could even fax them directly to a trusted external receiving point where they can be stored safely. There is nothing as demoralising as losing a large amount of your hard work, and nothing you write to replace it will sound as right in your head as the piece you lost did, so don't lose it!

About writing in more specific terms (preparing and sharpening your tools)

Now let's think about the construction of any piece of fictional writing.

Beginning, middle and end

Essentially, there is a beginning, a middle and an end, but within that work there may, and almost certainly will be, other beginnings, middles and ends. In fact each paragraph, each scene, each section, each chapter also has its own beginning, middle and end – rather like Russian nesting dolls.



Whenever you are sitting down to write, whether it is a paragraph, a scene, a section or a chapter you are considering, think in these terms.

Paragraphs

Each paragraph, for example, should generally be related to a single idea. As such then, the paragraph should introduce that idea, expand it then in some way close it, which may be to lead into the next paragraph in which a different point will be added. These beginnings, middles and ends need not be contained in separate sentences, nor even be separate words, but you should ideally see that the thought contained is complete. A paragraph could even be a single sentence. The following single-sentence paragraph might, for example, appear in the early stages of an action drama:

A split second after turning the key in the ignition, his body and car fragmented, peppering the walls and pavements of the narrow street with shimmering black and red.

You can see that it is a complete thought with a beginning, middle and end, though it may be quite tricky to define where one part stops and the next commences. In this instance, the commas are reasonable markers of the transition points between each.

Imagine you are driving across the outback of Australia. The road is so long and straight that it disappears into the horizon and everything either side is sand. It might be fun to try for a while, but it would soon become fairly boring.

Now, just imagine that in the distance a corner appears, and as you turn you realise that it is taking you to somewhere quite different – an oasis. In a story we need some of these sorts of corners – called turning points – at which a story suddenly takes a new and unexpected twist or a turn. Usually a writer tries to make sure these are at the end of a chapter, as they entice a reader to keep going onto the next chapter as there is something new up ahead. When thinking about your chapter endings, think about turning points too and try to end as strongly as possible, ideally with a new twist or a new revelation that adds depth and interest to the story and keeps the reader reading. The endings of each chapter are almost as important as the ending of the story.

At the end of the story you decide whether to bring the reader through to resolution or not. Some stories leave the reader hanging in that they don't get told whether the lead characters lived happily ever after or whether the bullet-ridden lead recuperates adequately after hospital treatment. While it is common that readers are left hanging when there is likely to be a sequel, it is nonetheless an acceptable decision for the writer to make in any case. If you do go for resolution, however, make it strong. Many good stories are ruined by a weak final chapter that ties off every end and, in the effort to do so, sounds overly constructed. Famous authors generally end as strongly as they begin.

Audience

Whenever you are writing fiction you must keep in mind whose point of view you are asking the reader to see the action from in that scene. The only times there is no point of view is where the narrator is a completely objective, unknown and un-named externality who describes without opinion or judgement, and that is hard to sustain. As soon as judgement is passed or emotive language is used then a personality is being conveyed. A good writer will want to control that personality and, through the language used, what the reader is discerning about the person through whose eyes the scene is being played out.

It is completely forgivable if a reader does not like the person whose point of view they are being asked to see through, for example, if the reader is being asked to see a scene through the eyes of a twisted killer or a depressed mother. It is neither forgivable nor desirable, if, for example, the text is filled with observations that make the reader feel that they are seeing through the eyes of a sexist bigot, and yet the writer thinks those eyes are just innocently telling a story.

Types of writing

When writing all those beginnings, middles and ends there are effectively three types of writing that can be used. They are description, narration and dialogue, and the writer's art is to try to get a pleasing and rhythmical balance between each. For our purposes a potted definition of each might be:

- Description – a verbal depiction of something or someone.
- Narration – the act of telling a story or giving an account.
- Dialogue – the actual words characters utter, as reported in your book.



Some simple rules of thumb with regard to each (some of which some of the greatest writers of all time have completely disregarded) are;

Description

Be very careful of excessive use of adjectives and make sure you are aware whose point of view you are writing from when describing a scene or another character. A great deal of descriptive information can be cleverly woven into the narrative and speech, such that one doesn't get the feeling of reading a description. Consider these two examples of the same idea being conveyed in different ways;

The room was a picture of old elegance – everything laid out in its place and polished to a shine. The fine crockery laid out on a lace cloth, reflected off the polished tabletop at the corners where the cloth, diagonally spread, left polished wood showing.

"Tea, my dear?" asked Aunt Grace, elegantly raising the fine china pot above a French-polished table spread with a fine lace cloth.

Essentially the same elements are conveyed, and the description that weighs so heavily in the first sentence is still present, but without the sense for the reader of having to endure a heavy descriptive passage. While there are times for extended descriptive passages, there are also means to eradicate them, so make the judgement – how will your audience prefer to receive the information?

Having said that, to make sure that your text is alive with a richness of description that feels real; conveying the sense that the author or character whose point of view we are looking through has actually been present and that this is a real place or happening, you as an author need to continually ask yourself questions about the setting, the person or the activity. What is he wearing? What is on the floor? What is outside the window? What time of day is it? What can he hear?

Narration

Where possible, as with description, the general rule is 'show me, don't tell me.' Keep the amount of narrative to a minimum and let the dialogue and descriptions of the scene carry the story as much as possible while ensuring you are well aware of whose point of view is being conveyed in any narrative you do employ. The storytelling function (narration) can often be easily absorbed into good dialogue with interspersed description to achieve a smoother read while still telling the story effectively. Consider these passages, the first being narration, the second blended;

The wet and dejected boys trudged home, wondering just what their parents would make of the state of them when they arrived, not to mention the fact that they neither had the groceries they had been sent to buy, nor the money with which they had been sent to buy them. And they knew that if they told their parents the truth, they were as good as dead anyway. It was all very worrying.

"We're dead," Nate finally muttered grimly.

"No groceries ... no money ... late and all wet and muddy," Karl affirmed dejectedly. "But if we tell Mum what happened, she'll get Tyson in trouble and then he'll kill us anyway,"

"We won't be so dead if Mum kills us," Nate offered. "We have to lie."

Which would you prefer to read?

Dialogue

When writing dialogue try to make it sound as much like speech as you can, recognising that the written word won't, in most cases, be exactly the same as speech. Speech has very few full stops and frequently incomplete grammar, amongst other faults, whereas written speech has to be sufficiently grammatical and well punctuated to be discernable to the reader. In fact, one of the risks with speech is to overdo the attempts to sound like the speech. Consider these two sentences:

"Aye lad," the old fisherman gasped, "but if I hadn't of grabbed 'im, he'd be a goner by now."

"Oi lard," the old fisherman gasped, "bu' if oi hardn't of garbed 'im, 'e'd be a goner boi now."



You can clearly see here that though the second sentence is more true to the spoken accent as uttered, it makes for very hard reading and should be avoided if the character is to be around and speaking for a significant amount of the story. It is better, as in the first sentence, to evoke the dialect of a speaker by using the vocabulary and the general rhythm of the speaking rather than invent spelling which can be hard to read and quite off-putting to readers.

Having said that, however, it can be very useful in both cutting down narration and description if the speech can convey something of the character of the speaker. Consider this:

"Oh, you useless idiot. Can't you do anything right?"

"Sorry Duke. I... t-try. I do try!"

As a reader, you probably know quite a bit about these two speakers now through this small piece of dialogue. As a writer, especially when writing dialogue, you need to feel the situation, letting your emotions free so that you can truly capture the nature of the speaker and hence what would be said and how.

Information must be given subtly in speech though, not as expository text disguised as speech as shown below. Not many will tolerate an entire book of speeches of this forced sort;

"We're nearly there," said Sasha. "Trinity is a nice little town, about 7000 people and it's set in a wee valley with fruit orchards all around. It gets very hot in the summer, but cold in the winter, which is good for the trees as it kills the bugs that attack them."

The punctuation and word order we choose, particularly with regard to dialogue, can also impact significantly on conveying the way something is said. Consider these variations on the same four words:

"You will come here!"

"You will come here?"

"Will you come here?"

"Will...you...come...here!"

"Come here! You will!"

"Come here? You will?"

"Come here will you!"

"Come here will you?"

Then of course we can still add intentional mis-spellings sparingly as discussed above, to add further texture.

"Com 'ere will ya!"

In fiction you often see spaces longer than a paragraph space left within a paragraph. These usually signify scene changes and there can, of course, be a number of scene changes within a chapter, particularly where a work cuts between the present and the past, or between scenes of several different aspects of the story unfolding at once. Just as in a play, scene changes are progress markers and each needs its own beginning, middle and end. A scene within a chapter may be just a glimpse of a larger unfolding scene which we return to every now and then to observe progress, rather like someone flicking between channels on a television set, but finding that each story has waited for you while you've been away.

Each smaller scene should contain as small a number of characters as possible. Sometimes the natural break points in a larger scene can be defined by when additional characters are to arrive or when one or more characters leave a conversation or setting.

When writing a scene the author should constantly be in the act of answering six key questions; *Who? Where? When? What? How? and Why?* Normally these are answered primarily through the subtle use of dialogue, interspersed with narration and description as necessary to adequately tell the story and describe features of the scene important to the nature of the work and the reader's experience with it.



Tackling your book (constructing your manuscript)

Now it is time to break down your chapter plot planning; firstly into scenes and then into paragraphs. You can happily do this a chapter at a time, just before you write – doing so gives you a chance to interplay the ideas from your plot in your mind once again before actually writing.

Your scenes should be largely self-defining – usually where there is a significant change in time, setting or characters – and it is quite possible and acceptable that your chapter is a single scene. If so, fine.

Once you have defined your scene, you need to write a few short sentences to define the key events that need to happen in that scene and how the scene adds to the overall gain in dramatic tension that you should be aiming to develop as your work unfolds. In effect these are the descriptors for what each of your paragraphs in that scene will be about. Once you have written the key sentences, check the following before commencing writing:

1. **Beginning, middle and end** – are the paragraphs you have planned going to provide a strong opening to the scene that will hook readers to continue to read, followed by an effective and economic middle and a strong ending?
2. **Description, narration and dialogue** – for each paragraph, plan first what can be conveyed in dialogue, then what still needs to be described or narrated. Remember to try to use as much dialogue as possible to tell the story and to convey descriptive ideas about things such as personality, mood and personal likes, dislikes, affectations, strengths and weaknesses in particular.
3. **Point of view** – make a reminder to yourself about whose point of view the reader is to see through in each paragraph.
4. **Setting** – take some time to see, hear, smell and feel the setting your characters will be performing in within this scene. What aspects of the setting do you wish to convey in this scene? In which paragraph will each be revealed and how? Remember to intersperse these.
5. **Characters** – what aspects of the characters do you wish to convey in this scene? In which paragraph will each be revealed and how? Remember to intersperse these. Make sure you understand what problems – major and minor – your characters face in this scene and why your characters will behave the way they will in this scene even though you may not necessarily reveal this to the reader at this point. If the motivations for such behaviour are to be revealed in any degree, what will be revealed, in which paragraph and how? What interrelationship do the characters have and how will they express this? Consider again your characters' manner – are they hard, gentle, loud, softly spoken, brave, fearful, confident, shy, blunt, caring, essentially good, bad or any shade of these? How and where can you add to the portrayal of these or other characteristics? How can you create and maintain a recognisable 'voice' for each character within the writing? What change or development of attitude do you want your readers to have towards your characters by the end of this scene?
6. **Symbols, themes, premises** – are there any symbols that could be used in this scene? Are there any opportunities to expand the core theme/s or premise/s of the book? Where and how?
7. **Signposting** – is there any information that could be hinted at in this scene by way of foreshadowing a later event or circumstance? If so, where and how?

Before we finish this introduction to fiction writing, we need to pay some particular attention to some specific parts of a story. The first is action sequences.

There are techniques by which writers create a sense of breathless excitement in action scenes, and more restful moments in between. Rhythm and contrast is important in writing. Your reader will appreciate the variety.

Consider these two passages:

I walked into the bar and there she was sitting there staring at herself in the mirror. Her eyes spotted my movement and came up to inspect me as I walked up behind her with my hand in my pocket holding my small pistol. I knew this lady could be dangerous and I wasn't about to take any chances because I was pretty sure it was she who'd blown Kenny Stark's head off.

73 words – 3 sentences



I walked into the bar. She was sitting there staring at herself in the mirror. Her eyes spotted my movement. They came up to inspect me as I walked up behind her. My hand stayed in my pocket. Held my pistol. I knew this lady could be dangerous. I was pretty sure she'd blown Kenny Stark's head off. I wasn't about to take any chances with mine.

67 words – 9 sentences

You can see that the staccato approach of the second creates a rhythm like a fast beating heart, conveys close concentration and readiness to act. In short it raises the tempo and suggests impending action. The same sort of approach can be used throughout any action scene, and the sentences can lengthen out again at the conclusion of the action to suggest a heart returning to normal rhythm and an end to the immediacy of the moment. The same can be achieved with dialogue. Let's read on.

*"Dick," she said, the thin glimmer of a half-meant smile turning up the corner of her mouth.
"I thought you'd never come."
"Were you expecting me?" I asked, a little surprised.
"Of course," she said in her soft, mellow voice. "You telephoned me virtually saying you were coming, so I prepared a little party for you."
"Nice of you to think of me," I replied, wondering what she meant by that.
I glanced at the mirror just in time to see a large arm swinging a cosh onto the back of my head at speed. There was a crack and then all was black.*

106 words – 8 sentences

*"Dick," she said. A half-meant smile kissed the corner of her mouth. "I thought you'd never come."
"Were you expecting me?" Odd.
"Of course." Soft, mellow voice. "You telephoned me virtually saying you were coming, so I prepared a little party for you."
"Nice of you to think of me." What did she mean?
My eyes caught the mirror. A large arm swinging a cosh to the back of my head. A crack then all was black.*

78 words – 13 sentences

You can see here that the writer has adopted writing devices other than just short sentences, the first two at least, to keep the sense of speed. These are:

1. Abandoning many 'she said' and 'Dick said's. Leave the flow of the dialogue to tell the reader who is speaking. There are after all only two central characters in the bulk of this dialogue, and as readers we know that a new speaker gets a new line. The woman must have spoken the entire lines that go;

"Dick. I thought you'd never come."

and

"Of course. You virtually telephoned me to say you were coming, so I prepared a little party for you."

because the speeches follow on on the same line.

2. Adopting improper sentence construction to eradicate unneeded words;

she said in her soft, mellow voice

became

Soft, mellow voice.

and

There was a crack and then all was black.



became

A crack then all was black.

- Using italics in a plain script text, or plain script in an italicised text to suggest what a character *thought* as opposed to *spoke*. You can see the economy of words this allows as well as the opportunity for the reader – who in this piece is looking at the scene through the point of view of the thinker – to actually identify with the thoughts as well as the words of the character.

This sort of approach can be particularly useful where you are dealing with an emotion-laden situation between characters and you need your reader to be able to identify with one or more of the parties and to understand the true feelings versus those expressed in words. Here is an example;

“Good evening Mr Sutcliffe,” she said; all grace. You are the most unattractive man I have ever seen and there is no way I will marry you!

“Charmed to meet you Miss Winter.” A polite bow. What a creature you are. You shall be mine.

“Have you had a pleasant journey here sir?” lowering her eyes and blushing as she spied the animal lust in his eyes. I must get away from here.

“Perfect thank you,” he replied, “and all the more so for finding you at the end of it.” Her blush became redder as it turned to anger. How could you do this to me, father?

Another device writers often use to assist in character development is by explaining the drivers that make a character behave as they do, for example, by flashing back to a former time where the reader can see that character experiencing the influences that are now being expressed. Flashback has become remarkably popular in fiction writing but it is a tool that needs careful handling and it can easily be overused. If you are going to use it, then it is recommended that you just start a new scene already flashed back – preamble usually becomes irritating to the reader – and make sure the scene is powerful or you can lose the pace of your story very easily. Build the flashback scene primarily with dialogue, not narrative, to keep it alive and vivid.

In fact, though some writers handle flashbacks very well, some writers eschew flashbacks at all costs and go to some lengths to create alternatives. With careful handling you can create the same effect as a flashback by narrated thoughts of a character or by well-worked dialogue. For example;

Tara’s mind flicked back to the cupboard under the stairs she’d so often been locked in as a child. How she’d hated that. How could her own Mum have so devalued her as person? She was ill, Tara reminded herself, the counsellor’s words echoing over and over. It wasn’t about me. Here she was with this wonderful man, and she needed to believe she was worthy of his love.

Or

“I’m guessing you had a pretty tough childhood,” Jack offered.

“Not the best,” Tara replied, a wry but humourless smile lifting one side of her mouth. “Spent a lot of it locked in the cupboard under the stairs.”

“That still hurts?”

“She couldn’t help herself ... She wasn’t well, my Mum ... I’ve spent a lot of time with counsellors since, but I still can’t quite convince myself that it wasn’t about me. I still have trouble believing in myself.”

“At least I believe in you,” Jack whispered, taking her in his arms.

Let the words flow

Now you are ready to write and should find that the words can pour forth quite freely. Just let them flow onto the paper without worrying too much about reworking sentences or paragraphs to make them conform to the plan. Just get it down. Once you have written all the paragraphs of the scene you can come back and rework each with reference to your planning, making sure that the flow is not damaged by your reworking. You should find that your story goes together smoothly and easily using this approach.



After you have written each day's work, read it aloud. Speak your dialogue out loud too. Get someone else to take the other part and read the dialogue as if you were the actual characters talking. Only by putting it out in the air are you likely to be able to groom it to an extent that it sounds totally natural and free of the awkwardness that just wouldn't be present in normal speech. Do a first edit straight after each days writing, but leave the more major edit to the end. You will learn more about how to go about that in the next book.

