

Courtesy of Cait London

<http://caitlondon.com>

CaitLondon@Twitter.com

E-Newsletter: [caitlondon-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:caitlondon-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

✉ <mailto:cait@yahoogroups.com>



### ***TWENTY TOP TIPS***

***THE BIGGEST TIP OF ALL: DO NOT "FIND" TIME. MAKE IT. THINK POSITIVE, BE AGGRESSIVE. Mind set is everything.***

1. SELF MOTIVATE; learn to use your personal carrots and triggers.
2. When Writing to Sell: Consider Your Individual Time Frames vs Your Attention Span
3. Protect Your Writing Time. Prepare in advance and avoid Vampires.
4. Edit off/away from Biological "Up" Time\*
5. Work for self-reliance.
6. Block number of pages on a calendar
7. Focus on the Story's Theme/Thread Throughout; keep notes on it.
8. Finish the Piece! A completed project is truly your graduation certificate.
9. Prepare Yourself Psychologically. Be your own best friend with affirmations.
10. Get Away, Experience Life
11. Cut the Umbilical Cord. Send Your Piece into the Cruel World.
12. Keep Lists of Agents/Publishers, ref: Market Talk below \*
13. Keep Databases, lists of ideas/character names/story ideas.\*
14. Network in Person and Private, Talk with Other Writers \*
15. Do Not Do As Others Do. You are an individual; weigh advice and choose only for your needs.
16. Write Business Letters and Mail Them on Regular Designated Day\*
17. Use Ring Notebooks with Replacement Paper (if non-computer)
18. Do Not Compare Yourself to Other Writers
19. History Lessons: Know that you did the best you could, made the right choice, given the tools/knowledge at the time.
20. Learn to say "no."

\*Busy Work

## Pre-Plotting and Plotting

### INTRO:

We're focusing on plots, not characterization, or writing style and narrative and dialogue, but just plots. If you do not have a plot, someone will notice, probably an editor.

I began writing without plot knowledge, my characters driving the story. I had to learn plotting to make my story telling and all the ideas I had within me, effective. There is no right way, and everyone has their own, and with experience, you'll develop this, too.

### ***Plotting, according to me, has two parts in it:***

1. Pre-Plotting
2. Plotting or logistics of the novel

What is a novel? To paraphrase Webster's: it is invented, it is prose, it is long and complex, it deals with human experience through a connected series of events.

Remember: connected.

1. Notes: watch the number of elements and main characters.



### ***WHAT DO YOU WANT TO WRITE?***

2. Consider who you are and what are your strengths, your weaknesses?

- \* Endurance level, short versus long writer
- \* Determine the weight of the research required to complete the book.
- \* High dialogue
- \* Action personality
- \* Humor



### **HOW TO GET IDEAS:**

- \* People, reception areas
  - \* Microfished Newspapers
  - \* CD Rom's/Bartlett's Famous Quotations/Hobby Groups
  - \* What's What/Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things/Uncle John's Bathroom Reader
  - \* Following Trails, i.e. researched fur trading trails and one led to another
  - \* Travel.
  - \* Music/Ballads/Country Music
  - \* Wall Street Journal/Newspapers/Magazines
  - \* Visiting local points of interest, i.e. the Paint Caf\_, and Renaissance.
- Caution: infringement thing. Be careful when designing your story that you are not leaving yourself open for problems.
- \* Words, single words. Names bring a certain reaction. Get a baby name book.
  - \* Playing the Versus game, i.e. Honor vs. Loyalty, any human trait, i.e. greed vs. Honor, survival vs. Truth. Make a list of these traits.
  - \* Playing the What If Game

- \* Dreaming the impossible, an everyday housewife wants to be an astronaut
- \* Murder or crimes of violence. Robbery. Why? Who stands to benefit?
- \* An incident that had profound affects on lives.
- \* My personal favorite: taking a long car trip.



### **THE DEPENDABLE NUGGETS: i.e.**

- \* a love-triangle, 2 women, one man.
- \* The butler did it.
- \* a newly discovered planet with a rich source of miblionic, a necessary power source for intergallactic space ships, interplanetary war to control it
- \* one spouse's long term poisoning of the other
- \* territorial disputes of water and land
- \* historical preservation society fighting a shopping mall development
- \* survivor's guilt
- \* adult illiteracy
- \* spousal abuse

### ***MORE--***

1. Devices and Dilemmas: My favorites are the "Ticking Clock" and Character out on a limb, or a combination of both.
2. Keep in mind that all plots are based on revenge, possession and escape.
3. Keep a database of your ideas. "Toy Box" Just single paragraph or sentence ideas.
4. Develop a theme that you can work with. A theme may be good over evil, but a central idea that holds through the book. You cling to it, nourish it and prove it.

### ***A THEME IS THE CONNECTION.***



### ***UNDERSTANDING THE GIVENS:***

1. Your story will twist and turn. A new avenue will present itself, a character will emerge, a character will change. A character must change from the beginning of the book to the end.
2. Tip: Do not forget that subcharacters can be parakeets, dogs, cats, etc.
3. Expect to edit many times before finishing. Do not expect that great hook line to flop out on the page. Nor the first great lead chapter. Hook lines, the first dialogue in the book, may come to an author when he is completing the book.
4. Do not stop on the first chapter, editing it into perfection. This can't occur. You do not have character development, the plot can change. The first chapter is only the foundation where you will start. It will change.
5. If your publisher, or that market is strict on word length, DETERMINE THE WORD LENGTH of the completed mss. Your count will be different from a publisher's, but try to get close. When a publisher's needs are specific, that means watch it. Check out tips for basics on this one.
6. In a fiction novel, you are not a history, nor a technical teacher. Use historical facts, but do not bog the novel down with them. If you want to write a history or a technical book to demonstrate your love of the subject, do so. Do not try to package it into the Great American Novel. Use your knowledge of the subject as a background, a canvas upon which to set the characters in motion across it. Make the characters live, focus on them. Make a clear decision to go for the story, staying with the theme, and not your favorite subjects.
7. Writing to sell: Slot that book into a definite genre. It is a mystery, a sci-fi, a futuristic, a romance, and so on. Each genre is divided, i.e. a mystery is either a detective, a cozy, a hobbyist, and so forth. Romances can be anything. But it is the length that is important and that the publishers know exactly what market you are targeting. If you self publish, you also need to know who you are marketing to. Know the jargon: i.e. in mysteries, a "red herring." In romances, "a secret baby."
8. If you complete the plot, you have accomplished more than if you did nothing.
9. There are no new plots. All work is based on revenge, possession and escape, or a combination of.
10. A story has a heartbeat to it, just like music. It has a rhythm, action/rest, dialogue/narration. When you are tapped into that heartbeat, you've got a good book. So go for feel.



## **YOU HAVE YOUR IDEA:**

1. !! Start working on Titles. Working titles keep the writer in the book, anchored to it. They may/may not be used in the final product.
2. Make a list of all the things you want to occur in the book, freewheeling and remembering that for every action, there is a reaction. This is very important and the basis of your story. Some writers do this on index cards. There is software that is based on the index card system, and I've tried software demos. The best was Collaborator 3, but the old fashioned method is best. If you're determined to try one, try Collaborator.
3. Make a list of potential characters, what they look like, what are their goals/conflicts and motivations. What are their needs? What are their fears? Fear of failure? Fear of death? What drives them? What makes them happy? What do they look like? What is their past? Keep in mind heritages and traditions, dislike of-dirt, animal fur, talkative people, etc.
4. Have an idea of the mood of the book. Fast moving, emotionally tense, humorous, dark, swirling.



## ***To Begin Laying Out Your Plot***

A plot is a series of incidents, each escalating the intensity of the story's dynamics.

1. All main characters must be introduced in the first of the book.
2. Never forget action, reaction and twists. Every time an action is taken, there is a reaction. A twist develops when an unexpected reaction occurs, commonly called dropping a dead body through the roof.
3. Never forget beginning, middle and end.
4. Be practical. Do the logistics. If a publisher wants no more than 400 pages, it is critical to meet that goal. Each chapter should be around 20 pages. Perhaps add a prologue or an epilogue.
5. The structure of a plot is based on a circle. Or a path with an end. All questions that are asked in the beginning, must be answered at the end.
6. The end must resolve all questions/conflicts posed.

### **THREE YELLOW BRICK ROADS:**

There are many ways to develop a concept, a synopsis, an outline. Plot presentation can be a paragraph, 2 pages, several pages, or intense and many pages. Editors have their own preferences. I often write an intense plot, something I can work with, and present a simplistic one for the editor and contract purposes. Whatever you must do for the publisher, create a device that you can work with. Here are three ways:

#### **Yellow Brick #1:**

1. Determine how many chapters you will have, using the above formula. Make a vertical line of numbers, i.e. 10, or use ten yellow pad pages, numbering them 1-10. Write a simple paragraph for each chapter. The first chapters are the set up: what do the characters look like, what is the problem/dilemma and conflicts. The last chapter contains the resolve. The middle chapters involve deepening relationships/conflicts/ mystery/challenge. Understand the shape of the story, i.e. a mystery ends quickly, a romance comes down to a soft, slow ending. Both may start fast, i.e. the blood on the drawing room floor or a startling incident to get the book off to a fast pace.  
\* Using the list you have made, what you want to occur in the story, begin to place them within the boundaries of those ten pages. Keep in mind conflict and goals and that the plot is on two levels: What incidents happen to propel the story, each becoming more intense, and what is happening in the relationships of the characters. Every time there is an incident, a character (s) reacts.

Put your characters on the line. Force them to make choices at every turn. Give them grief, make them work for you. Make their lives tough.

\* The point of no return must occur somewhere in the middle of the book. It is essential to establish this point at which a character has to make a decision to move forward and thus propel the story.

\* The end must satisfy the questions posed in the beginning.

#### **Yellow Brick #2:**

Lay out 4 long blocks, equal sized. This is a screenwriter's paradigm. The first block is used for the introduction, the dilemma, the character's. The end is the final resolution of the story. The center, where the middle two blocks join is the point of no return. The blocks on either side are used to build and heighten the story. Using your list, place each event in a logical order, taking care to check action and reaction.

#### **Yellow Brick Road #3:**

Freewheel. Write the story in a story form, again posing and satisfying all questions, creating a middle and an end. This is easier, and in my opinion more for the person who has an understanding of the itemized chapters. "When the story opens/begins" is a wonderful tag to get you off and running.

The Next Step, If You Want to Take it Now

I do this at the writing stage, but some people like to do it at the plotting stage. Each chapter can be divided into two scenes. More than four and you're in trouble. There are definite points at which stories must end and begin. Chapter endings and beginnings are very important; they can be for mood change, time break, or different POV.



## Editing the Plot Line:

1. Have you used the items on your list; do you have action/reaction?
2. Is your plot presented in clean, concise language, present tense? Check the ly's.
3. Are the conflicts strong?
4. Are your characters working for you?
5. Did you introduce the major characters at the start of the book, or build a hole for them.
6. Did you keep to the theme?
7. Is each scene critical to building tension in the book?
8. Have you resolved all questions posed in the beginning of the book?
9. Critical: Do you have too much going on, too many elements?
10. Keep the plot moving and clean.
11. Watching the pacing.

### \*A Word about Pacing

Pacing is critical. Too much action and you lose the reader, too little-the same thing. Each scene and plot point must be more intense. But you can't throw too much at the reader all at once, you have to play him and let him work. The pacing should quicken as the book progresses.

Another kind of pacing: If you are using a Ticking Clock in your story, you might well develop a matrix, i.e. the Oregon Trail and a nine-month pregnancy to keep the timeline of notable geographical points straight. If I am doing a historical, I research and build a matrix for events in that area, and also world events, listing dates.

12. Do the characters change in the journey?
13. Is the antagonist equal in weight to the protagonist?
14. If a romance, are the protagonists a balanced match?



## Style, Impact Writing

Style and impact are often two topics overlooked in workshop presentations. Let's look into the fine tuning of your style and writing for impact.

1. Structuring a paragraph: Carefully consider the sentences within a paragraph. Place them in a logical order, the last leading to the next paragraph. I do a lot of paragraph considering and moving sentences to be more orderly.
2. "Never use a big word when a small one serves the need." I used to have a software package that checked how many syllables in a word and another to check how many times I'd used a phrase. It counted the use of a particular word. A big word is jarring in fiction. Let those readers cruise on through your work, without dealing with big words.
3. Check the use of have had/passive voice.
4. That old live-by-the-rule: longer sentences for narrative and shorter ones for impact.
5. Check the use of some. Always pinpoint when you can.
6. Check usage of I am vs. I'm. "I'm going to town," serves the purpose. But "I am going to town," makes a statement. If the character is a bit angry, the writer can show this by the second phrase. Don't vs. do not is also a good example.
7. Make dialogue serve as the reader's insight. "Don't look at me like that." "You're nervous, of course. Your hand is shaking." Dialogue phrases like this move the book quickly and omit the need for a narrative description. Publishers are counting words more than ever now, so make that dialogue work for you.
8. Check your verbs. Make them as powerful as you can. Dialogue is also great for using atypical verbs to spike reader interest.
9. If short or one word sentences fit, use them. Proper isn't always creative.
10. Use the senses to trigger memories and give insight to the character, i.e. He ran his thumb over the window sill. The chipped layers of paint reminded him of the old woman's face.
11. Check the use of prepositional phrases. Stick to 2 or 3 at a maximum. More than that and you're looking at 2 sentences. Use Grammatik.
12. Do not edit the life out of your work. And don't let someone else do it, either.



CaitLondon@Twitter.com

<http://caitlondon.com>