

Indireads Guide for Authors

Essential Elements of a Novella

This document offers a basic guide to first-time authors to help them create a dynamic and readable story. It may be used by anyone interested in learning what elements go into the development of a novella.

I. Characters

Creating a character should be a complex process, not merely a matter of describing their physical appearances or backgrounds. People are multi-layered and multi-dimensional, and it is essential for the author to understand and convey what character traits their main protagonists will have. These traits are NOT to be listed in the novella itself, but should drive the plot, the dialogue, the conflict and the resolution.

For instance, an assertive woman from a conservative family may chafe against the restrictions in her life, and as a result, the author must consider what her reactions to, for instance, an arranged marriage might be.

These profiles are normally written in detail, and often memorized by authors, so that they understand their characters well enough to use them as a tool to carry the plot forward.

A good character profile should include the following:

- a. Physical description
- b. Background/history
- c. Tragedies/successes in life
- d. Character traits

Is she/he stubborn, malleable, independent, sweet, mature, young, etc.

- e. Mannerisms

His/her traits will lend themselves to his/her outward mannerisms. A self-confident man, for instance, may be in the habit of lounging around, with his hands in his

pockets. A control freak may be in the habit of biting his/her nails

f. Language/speech patterns

Based on their backgrounds, a character may use certain words regularly, or say things in a certain way.

g. Internal Conflicts

E.g., lack of self-confidence, guilt, anger, jealousy, envy, over-confidence—these are normally linked to tragedies or successes, and their backgrounds

h. External Conflicts

E.g., Abuse, neglect, personal tragedy, heavy responsibilities, burdens, etc.

i. Purpose

Each character must be introduced into the book for a purpose. This purpose can even be comedic relief, or just background flavor.

II. Plot

The plot of a story should be written as a broad-based idea of what actually happens in a story – what are the twists, how will the characters move from point A to point B in the story, and what happens along the way. This will certainly include the Conflict, and the Resolution of the story itself.

Every element in a book must, in some way or the other, affect the plot. If a scene, a dialogue or a character are not advancing the plot in any way, consider removing that element from the book altogether.

III. Scenes

Scenes are used to propel a plot forward. Scenes are decided by actions that need to be taken, or events that must come to pass, in order to make the plot of the book happen. They may or may not include the main protagonists.

Writing scene capsules should include a description of the location; the author should know which protagonists will be involved or introduced, and each scene **MUST** have a logical

purpose to its inclusion in the book.

Sample Scene Capsule

X is rushing to work, and decides to take a shortcut. She hasn't been in this part of the city before, and gets lost, ending up outside a seedy joint in a strange neighborhood. She enters the bar for directions, and encounters Y, who will later play a pivotal role in X's financial dilemma.

The conversation is brief, and Y is annoying and sleazy, but she ends up taking Y with her so that she can return to a main road.

IV. Conflict

The conflict of the story may be either internal, external or both. It is essential to have conflict in order to bring interest to the story. Conflict should NOT happen suddenly, but should build up over the course of various scenes before conflict is introduced.

Conflict should affect different protagonists in different ways. Keep in mind how each character reacts to the conflict, and ensure that this is clearly articulated in the book.

V. Resolution

Resolution can be found in several ways, involving one or all of the protagonists. This should ideally be only towards the end of the novel.

VI. Histories

Character backgrounds do not have to be revealed at once. A single chapter or section on a character's background reads more like a business profile than a part of the character.

Backgrounds can be revealed in bits and pieces, in dialogues, in scenes, even in the conflict itself. This also adds depth to each scene, and keeps facts fresh in a reader's mind.

VII. Dialogue

Dialogue is heavily driven by a character's personality traits. A character will react to a dialogue based on the kind of person they are. A person may be articulate, nervous, well-read or naïve, and these things should be apparent in the dialogue.

As with scenes, dialogues **MUST** serve a purpose. They must be used to move the plot forward, and should be a large part of a novel. Unlike a short story, or full-length novel, a novella cannot afford large introspective passages. A person's feelings, emotions, ideas, etc., can be and should be revealed via dialogue.

Consider also, the age, the background and the motives of the person speaking, and modify the conversation accordingly.

Sample Dialogue based on Personality

a. Shy, unassuming girl:

“H...hello. Is anyone sitting here? Would you mind...?”
She hovered nervously by the chair, not touching it.

b. Bold, self-confident woman;

“Is anyone sitting here?” She walked up to the chair and put her hand on it. *“I just need the chair for a moment. I'll return it as soon as I am done.”* She gave him a sweet smile, confident that he wouldn't refuse.

c. Angry, introverted woman:

“I'm taking this chair.” Not waiting for an answer, she pulled the empty chair towards her.

d. Polite, genteel woman:

“Hi. I don't mean to intrude, but would you mind if I borrowed this chair for a moment?”

In most instances, it helps to describe a person's thoughts or actions as they speak.

VIII. Language

An author's tools are words. If you do not have a strong grasp of the English language, you will be unable to create a strong plot. If you are unsure of how to describe something, or how to use a phrase, please use thesauruses, dictionaries and grammatical guides to help you along.

Indireads encourages authors to take any courses or read any books that will further strengthen writing skills. Keep in mind that creative writing differs greatly from business, marketing or academic works.

Please also avoid the overuse of the following words (in the narrative—dialogue is a different matter) wherever possible:

even, just, only, suddenly, yet, all these x years, sure, surely, definitely, for sure, too

The rule of thumb should be, if the sentence does not lose its meaning without these words, then they are unnecessary.

IX. Relevance

Adding relevance to your novel entails using local references from books, movies, poetry, television, radio, music, even advertising, that your readers will identify with. These could appear in dialogue, or in the narrative, and could be used to describe a place, or in a metaphor, i.e., *as cloying as the barfi from Dhaka Bakery*.

X. Research

If you are writing about unfamiliar places or cultures, make sure you research those elements before adding them to your books. This may be something that can be done on the Internet, but where possible, sending out questionnaires or actually interviewing people with the requisite knowledge will provide you with a strong foundation to work with.

Writing a novel without background information will often mean that holes appear in the story itself. The best process for writing a book should be to get all your elements in place, know your characters inside out, and have a broad outline of the story. While scenes and plots even characters may be modified as you write, a strong foundation will reduce chances of re-writes and editorial changes.