

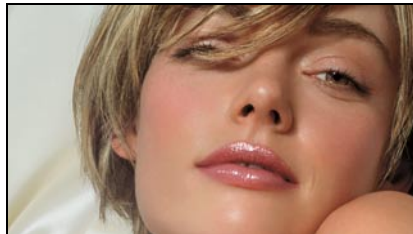
The 3 Things You Must Learn to Write Killer Stories

#1 What Successful Stories Do

Form Follows Function

Can't Talk About Parts Without Talking About Purpose

- Waxes
- Oils
- Pigments
- Emollients



A story is **WHAT IT DOES!**

What killer stories do is **ENTERTAIN** and **MOVE** the reader—they generate reader **EMOTIONS**

- **Sympathy**, rooting, the justice equation & inequity
- **Suspense**, hope, worry, anxiety, stress dread, horror
- **Curiosity**, puzzlement, mystery, intrigue
- **Surprise**, novelty, unpredictability
- **Wonder**, wow, spectacle, awe
- **Wanna**, wish-fulfillment, envy, attraction
- **Humor**, smile, chuckle, laugh
- **Insight**, aha! factoids, new ideas, how to do something, the right way to act

Consolation,
triumph, joy, relief, comfort

Hope
Poignancy

Set of effects → Genre

#2 Story Parts & Principles

What are the elements you have to work with?
How do they work to create the desired emotional effects?

THE 5 PARTS

Setting	Character	Problem	Plot	Text
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SETTING: Environments that are interesting, feel real, and evoke the killer emotions.

CHARACTER: People that are interesting and who evoke our sympathy, antipathy, and moral distress.

PROBLEM: The story **begins when** the problem is raised; it **ends when** it's solved. Problem factors:

- Type:
 - Happiness** = THREAT TO or OPPORTUNITY FOR some aspect of happiness (sometimes called lack)
 - Mystery** = PUZZLING QUESTIONS the reader and character want to find answers to
- Source: External and/or Internal
- Initiation: Who starts the problem?
- Intensifiers: Significant, specific, immediate, probable threats

PLOT: what the hero decides to do to solve the problem, the attempt to solve the problem, the obstacles faced, and the result of the attempt. Surprises, twists, revelations.

TEXT: Strategies that make the story VIVID & CLEAR, allowing the reader to have the necessary perceptions and thoughts to evoke the situation which in turn evokes the emotions. Strategies that make reading delightful—visual access, poetic imagery, structure, rhythm, etc.

#3 The Creative Process

1. CAPTURE THE ZING

Nothing in, nothing out

You must **FEED** your **IMAGINATION**

Eat up life and other stories, **stay on the lookout**, and **capture** the things that carry current.

5 Types of Zing

1. Intriguing **SETTINGS**: cool, dangerous, wondrous, new etc.
2. Interesting **CHARACTERS**: delightful, scary, larger-than-life etc.
3. Compelling **PROBLEMS**: situations, threats, dilemmas, mysteries
4. Gripping **PLOTS**: structures, conflicts, surprises, turns, arcs
5. Vivid, clear, & delightful **TEXT** strategies and techniques

Zings are **almost always small**. Don't look for the ONE killer idea. The killer story is usually made up of a bunch of smaller zings.

Key Sources: other stories, snippets of life, people, research, making new juxtapositions, creative Q&A.

2. ASK CREATIVE QUESTIONS

Focus on how 4 story parts work & your yearnings for certain effects as you develop. You don't have a story until you have answers for all 4 parts. Get more than one zing idea for each part.

When struggling, look at how other authors solved the problem.

3. GENERATE OPTIONS & ANSWERS

There is no one right option. Search for 2nd and 3rd good answers, try new things.

Summary—Sketches, Bullets, Mind maps, Interviews, Snippets, Scenes, Outlines of all varieties, Drawings.

Drafts—Exploratory, Partial, or Final; False starts; Half-bakes

Use summary tools, but remember:
the majority of the invention comes as you draft

5 Creative Guidelines

Creativity = Posing Problems & Coming up with Options

1. Make enough TIME

- a. Keep your furnace **HOT** with focused, consistent hours!
- b. End session with a question to maximize production

2. Follow your ZING--what you care about and believe in

- a. Actively hunt zing, specify the methods you'll use
- b. Capture: write down, hardcopy, softcopy
- c. Start anywhere zing is—character, problem, idea, image, etc.
- d. Play it by gut and ear as you write—no Procrustean beds

3. Practice FARMER'S FAITH

- a. There's no one shot, stories develop by accretion
- b. Trust the process—ideas **WILL** come
- c. Spread lots of manure: crap fertilizes the garden of your mind
- d. Cherish the dummies--a long list of stupids is what you need
- e. Often only way to write good story is to write bad one first

4. Embrace WRITER'S BLOCK—it's a gift

- a. Expect the writer's trance to come **AND** go
- b. At the end of your invention → Zing, Creative Q&A
- c. 3 grunt issue: unclear, unbelievable, boring → Zing, Q&A
- d. Perfection stress → Produce piles of manure
- e. Overwhelmed → Break your work into baby-steps

5. Keep yourself ON THE MOVE—don't dither!

- a. Writing a story is like hiking to a place nobody's ever been before—you cannot know the path until you travel it
- b. There's power in making decisions; make a choice and run with it to see if it works--take 1, take 2, take 3...
- c. Write as fast as you can
- d. Many of the best ideas only come as you're writing. With stories lightning strikes when you're on the move
- e. "The best story in your head is **NEVER** as good as the crappy one you have on paper" ~James Maxey

Problem & Plot

Characters

- Who all the people involved?
- Who is in danger, threatened, has most to lose?

What is the problem?

- Happiness
 - Threat/Danger
 - Lack/Opportunity
- Mystery
- What is character trying to obtain or retain?

Lacks & Threats to

- Physical
- Social
- Self-worth
- Possession
- Freedom

Key points for structure?

- Beginning (act 1): how does MC gets involved with problem? Why CAN'T MC ignore?
- Middle (act 2): What happens in cycle? What makes situation gets worse until situation is dire and plan is in shambles?
- End (act 3): What is last attempt?
- What surprises are in each act?

What are common patterns for this type of problem?

How does it progress & intensify?

- What we thought was the problem isn't, peel back layers
- Problem becomes more complicated
- Stakes become larger and wider in scope
- Plans begin to come apart, unforeseen factors, surprises, wrong assumptions, antagonist's adaptations, change in nature of the problem, mistaken initial diagnosis
- Specific, immediate, probable, significant
- Can I create a dilemma?

Character

Goals & motives

- What does character want?
- What's the motive?
- How can I twist it?

What's interesting?

- Larger-than-life
- Special skill or power
- Special experience, history
- Beauty, wish-fulfillment
- Humor
- Outrageousness, eccentricity, oddness
- Purposeful
- Mysterious (secrets)
- Dangerous

- Has story problem

Who builds sympathy?

- On the right side (given context)
- Likeable
- Getting wrong end of deal

Who builds antipathy?

What's dominant impression?

- Swain: Gender + Age + Manner + Vocation
- Modifications
- Tags

What are points of conflict between characters?

- Antagonists - Protagonists
- Characters with own selves—character flaws and handicaps
- Those on same “team”

Setting

Looking for

- Dangers/Threats
- Conflicts & limitations to character
- Mysteries, odd, peculiar, or surprising
- Cool!

Areas

- Geography, climate
- Government, War, Religion
- Food
- Pleasure, entertainment
- Shelter

- Technology
- Stories (local and large)
- Culture, Social values
- History
- Genre

Magic or SF Tech?

- Powers (cool!)
- Limitations
- Surprises
- Ramifications
- Dangers
- Technical - Mystical

Monsters and Aliens?

- Goals
- Biology, sexual reproduction, niche, energy source
- Social organization
- Cool! Surprises
- Technical – Mystical

What are points of conflict with setting?

Draft

- Are beginnings, middles, & ends compelling?
- What have others done that I might use and adapt?
- Are scenes clear and vivid?
- Is it believable?
- Interesting on every page?

Whole

What else?