
Preface

“The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted to remain children all our lives.”-ALBERT EINSTEIN

Why a “coloring book” for writers? When I came up with the name, I wanted to evoke that time during your childhood when creativity was the norm and you had the right to do whatever you wanted. You grabbed a coloring book, and a set of crayons, and off you went. Blue elephants, pink zebras, and red palm trees. Sure, you were told to color inside the lines, but it was okay if you strayed. No one was watching you. No one was judging you. You lost yourself in the simple joy of pure creativity. This book is designed to reignite that childhood passion and spur you on to create with abandon.

And yet, while pure creative abandon is a wonderful place to play, there is also work to be done. This book will help you organize your ideas so that you can refer to them at any time during the process. There are several exercises designed to keep your internal editor helping you organize all of your ideas, recognizing patterns and symbols in your story, and analyzing your story structure so you can plug any gaping plot holes. It’s a balancing act.

You Are an Artist

I’m here to remind you that you are an artist. Your keyboard is your paintbrush, and you render characters and worlds with the color of your words. Your paint with the colors of human emotions: the bold primary colors in a fast-moving action scene or the delicate pastels of a heartfelt, emotional exchange between characters at odds with each other. There is a vast spectrum to call upon when you paint pictures with words, which will draw your reader into your unique story world. But the task of creating these stories is daunting. I am a visual thinker, and I found that, when I tried to translate the movie I saw in my mind’s eye using just words, it was very frustrating. I created visual clues to help me “see” the story elements on paper first, allowing me to organize and tell the story more effectively. I’m pleased to share these strategies with you.

I also wanted to create a unique learning experience—to take you through the elements of storytelling using paper, scissors, glue, and colored pencils. Studies in the science of Haptics show that the more you interact with new information, the more you retain what you learned. You'll cut out paper dolls, make a map of your character's inner and outer worlds, and use a new set of symbols to design your plot. I really want these exercises to be meaningful to you. So be prepared to get your hands dirty.

When you look at these exercises, you might be puzzled, as the first two sections have very little to do with writing. But the exercises focus on planning and dreaming up your story. When I start a new project, I find that my ideas are all over the place—sometimes I see scenes, hear bits of dialogue, or meet new characters. My rational mind wants me to sit down and get all this stuff organized, while my dreaming mind just wants to keep on dreaming. The exercises in this book will keep both sides of your brain happy and productive, giving you room to experiment, while keeping track of all the ideas that come to you. You may be writing novels, screenplays, memoirs, web series, or television series, or any project that can be described as “long-form narrative.” When you start a project, you may not know what the final format will be. You may intend to write a screenplay but decide that it really needs to be a novel. That is just fine. This system is designed to allow you great flexibility with the key storytelling elements and to address formatting later in the process.

You will explore your story idea, gain insight into your character's fears and yearnings, and unearth patterns of conflict and tension BEFORE you start writing. It's a lot to ask, to try something new, but I've worked with several writers who have been pleasantly surprised when they tried the exercises. After completing the initial planning phase, and setting your story in motion, the events will unfold organically and your character's actions and reactions will ring true because you got to know her at such a deep level. This work will motivate you and build your confidence because you know ahead of time that you have everything you need to tell an amazing story that your readers won't want to put down.

Helping You Keep It All Together

I should warn you that I'm a bit of an organization geek, so I'm going to give you a system for keeping all of your story elements and ideas in one place. We all live busy lives, and have to fit our writing time in wherever possible. We often don't have the time to work on our projects every day, which makes it difficult to maintain close focus on your story. The system organizes your completed worksheets and journal entries in one binder.

I wrote this book for writers who care about readers, and who want to tell great stories. I have met writers who focus on ideas, and on creating something unique by breaking all the rules. They create their art to please themselves, and that's just fine if you never show your work to anyone else. However, if you are a writer who hopes to sell your work to readers, I'm warning you ahead of time that you are in for a lot of hard work.

I promise you, if you stick with this system and give it your best shot, new vistas will open up and the writing will get better. I love writers, and I love the writing process. I hate watching writers struggle and feel frustrated. It is my sincere hope that this workbook will fire your imagination and boost your confidence. I salute you and your desire to be successful.

The Gender And Pronoun Issue

When I talk about the main character in your story, I will use “she” in this book. I'll stay away from the “he/she” issue and the “their” business, as it's just really awkward. I'll do the same for other characters, too.

Setting the Benchmark

I'm a big fan of goal setting, so here are our guiding principles as we work through the coloring book. This book is designed to help you create:

1. A fascinating and complex main character filled with inner conflict and unfulfilled yearnings, at odds with her circumstances and with the other people in her life.
2. A focused, unique premise, showcasing a story world filled with specific sensory details that make this world come to life for your readers, allowing them to get lost in your story.
3. A plot that moves the audience through the story, manipulating their perception of time, slowing and speeding up as necessary for your story to unfold.
4. Writing that balances the needs of the plot and allows your unique voice to be heard.

These goals may seem lofty, but if you are willing to do the work required to write a great story, why not shoot for the stars? Now that we've set our goals, let's get to work on meeting them.

Introduction

“Novels begin, not on the page, but in meditation and day-dreaming — in thinking, not writing.”—JOYCE CAROL OATES

Congratulations! You’ve decided it’s time to take on another long-form narrative project—be it a novel, a screenplay, a video game, a memoir, or a web series. No matter what final form your project takes, the initial stages of creating your masterwork are daunting. Here are a just few of the moving parts you must juggle: character, setting, dialogue, point of view, plot turns, and reversals. Every time I ventured down this path, the beginning was so exciting. My mind was flooded with images, bits of dialogue, and character information, but it showed up at random, with no sense of order. I saw parts of the middle, and then a bit from almost the end, then stuff from the beginning.

What to do? First I stressed out, thinking that I had to jot every little idea down, only to end with ideas scattered all over the place. And then I remembered, “Hey, you’re a television producer. You need to look at this like a production.” That light bulb helped me step back and look at the whole story-telling process and not just the writing. Beautiful writing is the end product, but there is a whole lot of work that needs to be done before you focus on that aspect of your project. When you produce a television show, the process consists of three distinct stages: pre-production, production, and post-production.

Pre-production:

In this phase is planning, and anticipating potential problems is the name of the game—lots of scheming, dreaming, and tossing ideas around, developing your story elements. In television production, you want to do as much planning on paper as you can before you go into the studio or to the location. Once you have actors and a camera crew, the clock is ticking and the costs are mounting. You cannot afford to waste time. You need to be organized, and you need to be prepared to handle anything that might go wrong. Not only do you have to plan where to shoot the scene, you have to figure out where will the crew park How will you get your equipment to the location? And what about permits and insurance? Television production isn’t always glamorous. Like writing, it requires lots of hard work

The first section of the *Writer's Coloring Book* focuses on mental pre-production. In Chapter One, “Character Sketch,” we get to know the main character of your story. In the spirit of the child’s coloring book, I chose another childhood favorite: paper dolls. I know it sounds corny, but when I studied acting, a teacher described a technique where the actor builds her character from the outside in, beginning with costume. What did it feel like to wear those clothes? Why did the character wear that coat?

While preparing for the role of George Smiley in “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy,” Gary Oldman told an interviewer that he took a long time looking for just the right pair of glasses. He said he felt that George Smiley was like an owl that saw everything. Once he discovered the exact pair of glasses, it helped him gain access into Smiley’s psyche.

The character sketch you create isn’t like any other character bio that you may have come across, because the questions are posed to your character—not to you. Many writers have a hard time distinguishing themselves from their characters. These exercises show you how your character will react to the events in the story, which will be different from how you would react in the same circumstances. You will also hear your character’s voice in conversation with other characters, and this is an important key to creating dialogue that sounds and feels right for the character.

I’ve provided a variety of “paper dolls” or character models to choose from, as well as clothing and hairstyles. You will cut out the character you’ve chosen, dress them up, and use colored pencils to color in their hair color and costume. While you do this, your character will come to life. You may hear bits of dialogue, sense certain mannerisms—these new insights will filter up from your personal unconscious. You’ll feel like a kid again, letting your imagination run free, and you’ll discover where your character leads you and what she wants to reveal to you.

The next section, titled “Character Mapping,” was inspired by the work of Carl Jung, the groundbreaking psychologist. He created the term *collective unconscious*, and his explorations of his own psyche and the psyches of his patients laid the groundwork for expanding the study of human psychology. He invented the concepts of both the archetypes of the collective unconscious, and the archetypes of the personal unconscious. We will use these ideas to understand your main character’s unique personality.

Jung used mandalas as a way to explore various issues, and taught his patients how to use them. The work you do in this section comes together in the next chapter when you will build a story world mandala.

This map helps you see your story elements mapped on one piece of paper. This will fire up your imagination, and your inner pattern recognition software will discover all sorts of connections and possibilities for more conflict, new subplots, and plot twists and turns. It will give you a gauge to see whether your plot maximizes all these different potentials. It's not to create a set formula for the plot—far from it—but to see the myriad ways your plot could unfold depending on the choices you make.

From this exercise, you'll be asked to write a "Focus Paragraph," the mission statement for your project. The focus paragraph will consider your character's inner story as well as the outer plot. This will serve as your road map to get you started on the "production" phase, your first draft.

Production

Now that you've done the homework, you're ready to write that first, deeply emotional draft of your story. In the "Write Fast for Story" section, you'll learn how to do this quickly, without bothering with special formatting, so you screenwriters and stage play writers, don't fret. This draft is for your eyes and your heart only. You'll write your story in chronological order to see how your character changes over the course of the story. New characters will show up and start talking, and the story may take several detours along the way. It's all part of the creative process. Because of all the planning you put in before you started writing, more and more ideas will bubble up from your personal unconscious.

I offer techniques on how to challenge yourself and crank out more words in each writing session than you ever thought possible. Speed is a key component of this process, as it allows you to see your story unfold in real time. Your job is to catch as much detail as you can. You will banish your internal editor and lose yourself in the story. How to keep that internal editor at bay? Keep reminding yourself that you'll "fix it in post."

Post-Production

Once you've written the first draft, we'll move on to "post-production," or what I call the "Plot by Design" section. This is where your internal editor gets to have her say. I used the word *design* for a reason, this is where you begin to think about your audience or your reader. What do you want them to see first? Do you want to tell your character's story from the beginning? Or do you want to use non-linear storytelling tech

niques, starting close to the end and then backtracking to the beginning? Do you want to use someone other than your main character as the narrator? Do you want to add additional point-of-view characters to the main story? Are there subplots you want to explore?

Does this sound manipulative? I hope so. Because that's what your readers want. They want to ride the emotional roller coaster with your character. How you present each part of your story will determine the highs and lows of that ride.

Planning the Next Big Revision

I believe in the adage that “writing is re-writing.” In this section, I'll introduce you to the master scene profile (MSP). This tool will simplify the arduous task of re-writing by breaking it into manageable pieces so you won't feel overwhelmed. The MSP helps you examine your story one scene at a time, identifying the details that will make your scene pop off the page. You will not only be able to track basic “housekeeping” elements such as location and time, but also answer important questions that will bring your scene to life: What is the mood at this location? Are there distinct objects in the room? Why is my character here? What does she hope to accomplish? What gets in her way? What will she feel?

You will fill out one MSP for each scene in your project. It sounds like a lot of forms to complete, but it's a way to trick that part of your mind that balks at the thought of another re-write. Shuffling through forms and changing their order is simpler than scrolling through a huge, rambling document.

In “Writing Slow(ly) for Style,” I have special worksheets that get to the nitty gritty of “the writing.” (I know, you were wondering when we were going to get to this, weren't you?) You'll explore dialogue, subtext, body language, and inner monologue. You will convey these elements in language that engages while moving the narrative forward. Here, you become the director of the movie that is unfolding in your reader's mind. Your word choices and sentence constructions are your “camera,” rendering scenes using close-ups, wide shots, and fast cuts.

I've broken down the process into a manageable system that helps keep your left brain happy because it's organized and focused, but also sparks your right brain and expands your imagination to see how far you can take your story. Let's stretch those creative muscles, fulfill your inner vision, and conjure up a story that speaks to your heart and to the hearts of your readers. But before we start, you need to gather some supplies.

Supply List

- A one inch binder
- A three-hole punch
- Looseleaf paper or a journal
- A set of at least twelve colored pencils
- At least one manila folder
- A glue stick
- Scissors
- Glitter (if you are so inclined)
- Pens and pencils

I'm a big fan of Scrivener (the text for this book was created in a Scrivener project), which is organized by binders, and there are folders in the binders. But I'd like you to get a real-life one-inch binder. The worksheets in this book are designed to be printed on your own printer, and then you can use the three-hole punch to put them in your binder. You can take your binder wherever you do your writing. You'll use the manila folder to create your story world mandala, your story's brain trust on paper.

I designed this process so you can use your hands, pick out your colors, and interact with your writing project as an art project. I encourage you to scribble, doodle, and make your own unique mark on these pages. This is your workshop, your tool shed, and your laboratory for story creation.

Determining Your Writing Strategy

Are you a “pantser” or a “plotter,” or even the hybrid “plotser”? If you are a pantser (writers who don't plan ahead and who write “by the seat of their pants,” also known as “organic” writers), I suggest you create a character sketch and a story world mandala. This prep work will make you feel confident that you have everything you need to get started. For those of you who consider yourself a “plotter” (a writer who outlines everything before you start writing) there are some special tools in chapter four that let you plot, plan, and outline to your heart's content.

Are you a “drafter”? That's what I'm calling those of you who are starting a story from scratch. In here, you will find everything you need to get the process started, write that first draft, and then mold and shape your plot until you're ready to revise it.

Are you a “troubleshooter”? This is the label for the writer who already has a draft (either pantsed or plotted), but it's just not right. You might

have received feedback from your initial readers that was, shall we say, less than glowing. First off, I congratulate you for finishing your draft and for being willing to take a long, hard, honest look at your manuscript in hopes of making it better. I encourage you to read through the text and the exercises, and do the ones you feel will help you zero in on your story's problems. I'll make references along the way to specific items that you might find helpful in this process. Okay, now that the introductions are over, let's get to work.