

SEVEN STEPS TO WRITING SUCCESS

Name



Step 1: Plan for Success



Step 2: Sizzling Starts



Step 3: Tightening Tension

by
Jen McVeity

STEP 1:

Plan for Success



What Authors Say . . .

"A book plan is like a skeleton. All the framework is in place, but you might not recognise the live result if you met it in the flesh. However, what would you be without a skeleton? (Clue - not a pretty sight...)"

Sally Odgers

"It is the ability to put ourselves in the place of another that makes us truly human. This is why stories are so important."

Paul Jennings

"I wrote my first book in our dunny down the backyard. It was the only peaceful place where I could daydream. Books need more THINKING about than writing!"

Jackie French

"Preparation plus opportunity equals luck."

Phil Kettle

"The best place to start is with the characters... my best characters are part real world crossed with something unexpected... like the loud and obnoxious goldfish... often stolen from parts of my own character or that of someone I know... I am confident that once I have the character the rest will flow. Then some times it happens exactly the opposite way around. Idea first and then the character emerges."

Terry Denton

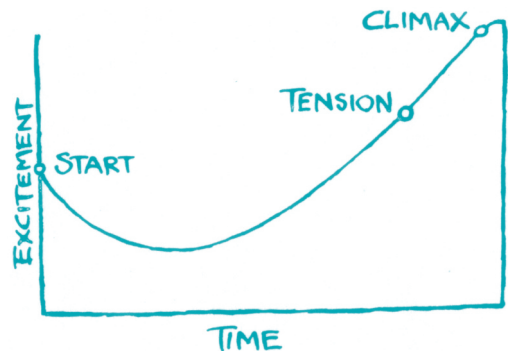
STEP 1: PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Have You Heard the One About...?

Ever told a joke that falls really flat? Eeeek! Well, here's the cure. Jokes often fail because we don't get the basic structure right.

Good jokes - and good stories - follow the same plan. This is what it looks like.

1. **Start with a bang** - this usually has the main character in an action scene.
2. **Back fill** - the Who, What, Why is filled in while the action unfolds.
3. **The main problem is introduced.**
4. **Then come even more problems** - things get very bad indeed.
5. **Tension scene** - where the hero/heroine fights against incredible odds.
6. **Climax** - amazingly, wonderfully they win!



Ready to tell a great joke?

Right, search your memory, internet files or ask friends for a good joke.

Warning, quick one-liner jokes like 'knock knock' jokes won't work. You are looking for jokes that have a 'story' structure. *e.g. Three men were stranded on a desert island. They were a Frenchman, an Australian and an Irishman...*

Oh - and all jokes should be clean!

Practise up at home. Now, get brave, get set - and tell your joke to the class.

My favourite joke is the one about...

Never Ending Ideas List

Most stories have the following:

1. **Heroine/Hero** (e.g. burnt out athlete, computer nerd girl, ant-sized superhero)
2. **Villain** (e.g. girl bully, mad dog, mean coach, weird witch)
3. **Problem** (e.g. too shy, something stolen, a bully, money needed, bad haircut)
4. **Setting** (e.g. the beach, the year 2240, planet Mica, a bee's hive)
5. **Sidekick** (e.g. bratty younger brother, faithful friend, talking rabbit)
6. **Animal** (e.g. farting dog, claustrophobic goldfish, intelligent alien mouse)



Here's an easy way to create a story - using other people to help. Form groups of six people. For five minutes you each write as fast as you can.

- Person 1 - lists every hero/heroine they can think up.
- Person 2 - lists villains
- Person 3 - lists problems... and so on. You get the idea.

Here is my list of _____

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

TV Tuition

Can you tell a story in 30 seconds? Impossible? No! TV ads do this every day.

Next time you watch TV, see if you can find an ad which tells a mini story. Copy it onto a tape or DVD and bring it to share in class.

For instance:

1. Opening scene: A woman is driving down a street.
2. The next scene cuts to three small kids playing with a ball on the side of the road.
3. Cut back to the woman, driving the car. She's busy talking to her husband.
4. Cut to one of the kids. The ball slips out of his hands and rolls towards the street.
5. Cut to woman busy talking. The tension builds for we fear the children will chase the ball.
6. Oh no, the smallest kid runs after the ball. He takes one step onto the road.
7. The woman suddenly sees him. She slams on her brakes. The child is so close. Can she possibly stop?
8. Yes. The car stops easily. The child is safe!
9. And then comes the voiceover. 'Trust only Teasdale's Trusty Tyres.'

It's amazing how even a 30 second ad can start with action, build great tension and end with a bang.

What are your favourite 'story' ads?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



STEP 2:

Sizzling Starts



What Authors Say . . .

"Always cut out your first three paragraphs. They are only seeds for your mind to tend. Begin the story with the seedling instead. It's much stronger."

Rose Insera

"Stories have to hook the reader quickly. I sometimes rewrite opening scenes dozens of times. Dialogue often works as the reader is immediately aware of character."

Libby Gleeson

"Expect lots of false starts, until the rhythm of an idea takes over."

Hazel Edwards

"I used to waste a lot of time trying to write the perfect first chapter of a novel. Then, months later, I found I would have to re-write it anyway. So now I just get going and come back to polish the beginning when I am finished the whole story."

James Moloney

"Story beginnings: The whole story is there in that opening sentence or paragraph."

Garry Disher

STEP 2: SIZZLING STARTS

Five Minute Fast Starts

Pen ready and brain buzzing? Here's the challenge. Write five fantastic story starts in five minutes. (Yes, it is possible!) Your teacher will time you. Here are the topics. Ready, set...write!

1. Write the start to a ghost story – starring a dog with three legs.

2. A man dies, wearing purple – but he hates the colour purple.

3. All the kids are at school – but not one teacher.



4. Lucy, who never listens, gets trapped in a lion's cage.

5. The wedding that didn't work.

Start With a Bang

Ever noticed how movies have THE best, most exciting starts? That's because they know the start is vital to hook the viewer in.

Action movies (e.g. Star Wars) have starts which are really fast moving. The quieter 'backfill' scenes, which explain the details, usually come second.

Tape the start of one of your favourite movies and share it with the class. See if you can figure out how they make the viewer really want to keep watching.

List the movies with the most exciting starts.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Top (NOT!) Starts

In real life we get to know people slowly.

- We meet them at a party and know they are good at having fun.
- We see them cuddle their dog and figure out they love animals.
- They share their lunch, so we see they are generous.

Yet, sometimes, when we write stories, we try to tell our readers EVERYTHING about our character on the first page. e.g. *Jane was a tall girl with blond hair and strong white teeth. She liked to play basketball and worked hard at school and always did her homework....*

It's called an 'information dump' and it's not exactly exciting.....



STEP 3:

Tightening Tension



What Authors Say . . .

"If you're bored with your story, STOP! Rip it up and start again. If YOU think your story's boring, who else will like it?"

Krista Bell

"You don't fight dragons with languid sentences."

Garry Disher

"Every part of the story contributes to the dramatic tension. As tension increases, grammar and language change: sentences become shorter, words chosen are simpler."

Libby Gleeson

"Tension scenes need to move fast, but they also need elbow room. Don't skip over the details. Your readers want to know how the heli rotors flashed, what the bushfire smelled like, how the enemy looked close up and exactly how the giant insects clicked their feelers."

Sally Odgers

"Sometimes I find myself sitting on the edge of my seat and panicking as I write tension scenes. "Get a grip," I tell myself, "you're just making it up!"

Jen McVeity

STEP 3: TIGHTENING TENSION

Being Brave and Being There

To write convincingly, you have to make your reader feel they are actually there - racing the volcano lava, struggling in the raging river, dying of thirst in the desert.

Pick one of the following topics:

- A storm at sea.
- A car crash.
- Caught in a bush fire.

Find three other people who want to write on your topic. Pick one person to write. This person will be your scribe. The rest of you will be brainstorming frantically.

Now remember the five senses?

- See
- Hear
- Touch
- Smell
- Taste
- Feelings (We added this one in just for writers.)

Ready?

For one minute, everyone calls to their scribe what they 'see'.

For the next minute, everyone says what they 'hear'.

Minute three is what they 'touch'.....

For instance a ski race might include this:

- See =** crowd, bright parkas, ski gates, snow on trees, ice patches...
- Hear =** people cheering, countdown 3,2,1, schuss of skis on snow...
- Touch =** cold boots, shoulders hitting ski gates, prickly wool cap, tight goggles...
- Feelings =** afraid, excited, talking too quickly, tightness in chest.



The Six Senses of Tension Scenes

See

Hear

Touch

Smell

Taste

Feelings

A Trial Story

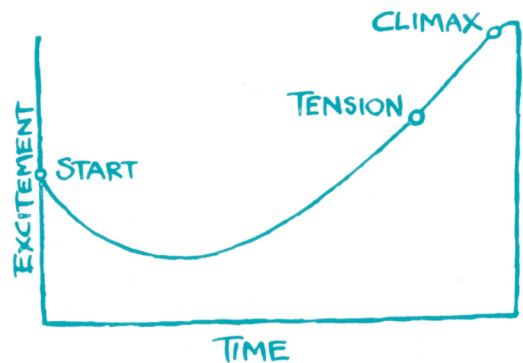
So let's see how brilliant you are now! You are going to create a story using the first three of the *Seven Steps*.

Step 1: Plan for Success

Remember the Never Ending Ideas List?

Get together with your group and repeat that exercise all over again.

Somewhere from all those ideas you should get a story that interests you. It doesn't have to be the same as the others in your group.



So, what is your story plan? Use point form to help you plan in the spaces below.

1. Your story has to start with action. Where will the start take place? What will happen?

2. Back fill. No boring information dump now, just tell us the vital Who, What and Why. This can happen during the action start. (ie. at the same time as Step 1.)

3. The main problem is introduced. What happens? Who does it happen to?

4. Now comes even more problems. Things get very bad indeed.

5. Here comes the tension scene where hero/heroine fights against incredible odds. Can you build the excitement up? Make your character really suffer or scared.

6. Climax – amazingly, wonderfully they win! You MUST know what your ending will be before you write the story.

Step 2: Sizzling Start.

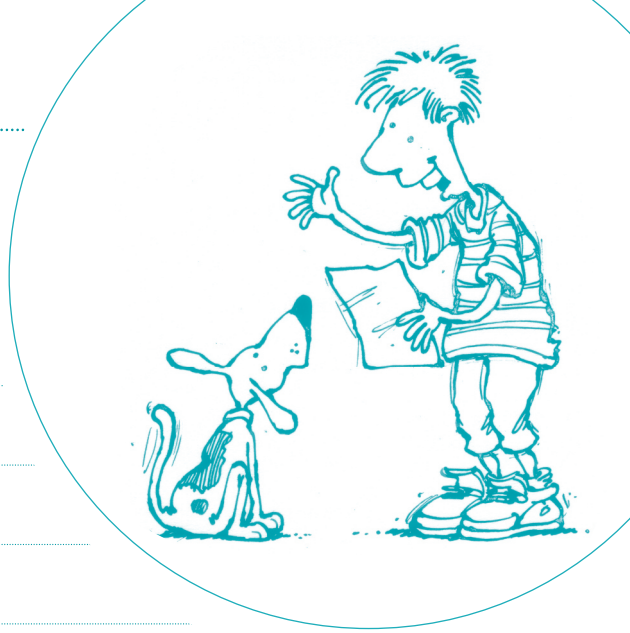
Right, now write the first sentences to your story. The start has to be brilliant!

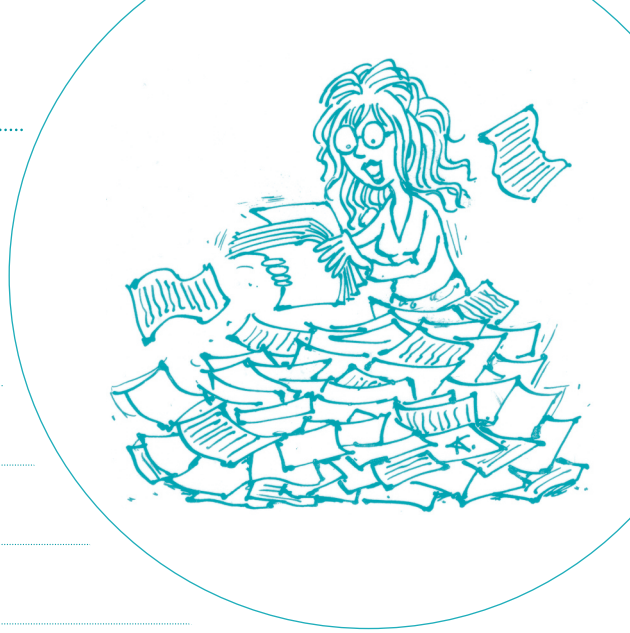
Step 3: Tightening Tension

Get together with your group once more. Ask them to help brainstorm all the detail of the tension scene here. (Of course, you will have to help them with THEIR scenes too.)

What did your characters:

See	Smell
Hear	Taste





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seven steps
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