

A BEGINNER'S STORYTELLING COURSE

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Module - 1

What Makes a Story a Story?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Understand the essential ingredients that separate a story from a sequence of events.

THE CORE IDEA

A story is not: “A man woke up, went to work, came home, and slept.” That's a report. A story begins when something changes.

A simple formula: Someone wants something + Something stands in the way + They must act to get it. That's storytelling.

THE STORY ENGINE

- Character — Who is it about?
- Desire — What do they want?
- Conflict — What prevents them from getting it?
- Change — How are they different by the end?

Finding the Story?

CORE CONCEPTS

Topic: A subject or theme in the abstract (e.g. betrayal, grief, ambition). No direction, no specific people, no events yet.

Idea: A topic with a spark of specificity attached but still directionless. Could become many different stories.

Premise: An idea with a specific protagonist, a specific want, and a specific obstacle. This is the point where a story becomes tellable.

EXAMPLE

Topic: Betrayal

Idea: What if someone was betrayed by their business partner?

Premise: A woman discovers that the partner she trusted for a decade has been secretly selling her formulas to a rival and she has three days to stop a merger that will make it legal

EXAMPLE

Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone

Topic/Theme: Magic

Idea: What if Magic existed around us but we simply couldn't see.

Premise: An orphaned boy of eleven learns that he is a wizard and admitted to a school for wizards, where he gets entangled in a mystery of a magic stone sought by an evil wizard who had killed his parents.

Character/Protagonist: Harry Potter

Desire/Goal: To understand who he is and find his place in the wizarding world.

Conflict: A hidden dark wizard trying to obtain the stone to regain his form.

Stakes: The return of the said Dark Wizard.

Underlying Themes: Identity, friendship, courage, and a mother's love.

COMMON BEGINNER MISTAKES

- Writing events without a goal.
- Characters drifting through scenes.
- No conflict. Without conflict, there is no story.

TEST YOUR IDEA

- Can this sustain conflict for 300+ pages and not just one scene?
- Does the protagonist's want create unavoidable obstacles, not convenient ones?
- Would this story change if you swapped the protagonist for someone else?

TEST YOUR IDEA

- If you can summarize your idea in one word, it's still a topic.
- A premise should answer: who wants what, and what's stopping them?
- Would this story change if you swapped the protagonist for someone else?

SELF ASSESSMENT

- ☐ I can state my story's premise in one sentence.
- ☐ My premise names a specific protagonist, not "someone."
- ☐ My premise includes a concrete want, not a vague feeling.
- ☐ My premise includes an obstacle that makes the want difficult.

EXERCISE

1. Write your topic in one word.

2. Turn it into an idea (a "what if").

3. Turn it into a premise (protagonist + want + obstacle).

4. Create three story ideas using: “Someone wants ____ but ____.” Example: “A retired teacher wants to reconnect with his son but discovers the son refuses to answer his calls.” Write three of your own.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What recent challenge in your own life could become a story if you changed the details and characters?
