

GLOSSARY OF WRITING TERMS

Compiled by Rob Sanders

-A-

Agent—also known as a Literary Agent. A professional who works on behalf of an author, illustrator, or author/illustrator in dealing with publishers and often with others involved in promoting the work of the individual.

Alliteration—repetition of sounds in two or more stressed syllables (also see: *Assonance* and *Consonance*).

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/alliteration-and-asonancefabulous-fun.html>.

Antagonist—a character who is opposed to, struggles against, or competes with the protagonist (main character). Not only might the main character have a human antagonist, he/she might also have to fight against an internal struggle, the weather or another force of nature, and so on.

Anthropomorphism—giving human characteristics to non-human things, usually animals.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/anthropomorphic-main-characters.html>.

Assonance—takes place when two or more words close to one another repeat the same vowel sound but start with different consonant sounds. Examples: We **l**ight **f**ire on the mountain; I feel depressed and **r**est**l**ess; **G**o and **m**ow the lawn. Sometimes called *vowel rhyme*.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/alliteration-and-asonancefabulous-fun.html>.

Attempts/Failures—refers to the main character's/protagonist's attempts to solve his/her problem. The attempts/failures make up the rising action of the story. Often each attempt is funnier, bigger, or more dramatic than the one before, and each often ends with a more spectacular, hilarious, or gut-wrenching failure. The attempts/failures help us relate to and bond with the main character. They also help underscore the importance of the main character's goal in the story.

Attributes—describing the qualities and/or characteristics of people, places, things, ideas, and objects. Attributes could include size, color, shape, movement/action, symmetry, texture, number, composition, smell, taste, function, location, habitat, direction, orientation, temperature, weight, age, and so on. Attributes are more than adjectives. Attributes seek to describe with details, while adjectives are usually used to merely list characteristics.

-B-

Back matter—The back matter comes after the text of the book. Back matter can be found in fiction, but it is a hallmark of nonfiction and may include author's note, maps, bibliography, glossary, photographs, and more.

Backstory—the events that occur before, lead up to, or precede the actual plot of the story. Most backstory is not needed for the story to be told. (But the backstory may be necessary for the writer to know to write the story.) Only tell the backstory information that is essential for the plot; and that moves the plot forward.

-C-

Category—Designates kinds of books. A category speaks to the age group focus, design, length, etc. of a book but does not indicate its content.

- **Board Books**—A sub-category of picture books. A type of book printed on thick paperboard which is used for the cover and interior pages. Durable and intended for young children. Some board books are written specifically for board book publication, others are concept books, and many others are reprints of existing picture books.
- **Chapter Books**—Intended for readers 7-10 years of age. Often the first books with chapters encountered by readers. Tells the story primarily through prose rather than pictures, but unlike novels for older readers, chapter books are often highly illustrated.
- **Concept Books**—A sub-category of picture books. Explores a concept (color, numbers, shapes, and so on) rather than telling a story. In a way, many concept books can be thought of as nonfiction for the very young.
- **Graphic Novels**—Features the use of graphic art in a narrative form. The graphic novel usually has a lengthy and complex storyline similar to that of a standard of novel. Typically bound in longer and more durable formats than traditional comic books. Like a novel, a graphic novel features a story with a beginning, middle, and end.
- **Middle Grade Novels**—Usually for readers 8-12; generally 30,000-50,000 words; no profanity, graphic violence, or sexuality; protagonist usually around 10 years of age, though more complex books may have an older protagonist. Focus is often on friends, family, the character's immediate world and relationship to it. Often written in third person; usually ends with hope.
- **Picture Books**—A book made up of text and illustrations. Often the illustrations are as important—or more important than—the words that tell the story. Traditionally 32 pages long, though some are longer. Feature illustrations on every page or every spread. Most picture books are written for younger children. Word counts vary widely. Many picture books are 500 words or less, with some being wordless or nearly wordless. Nonfiction picture books generally have longer word counts and sometimes approach 1200-1500 words.
- **Young Adult Novels**—Usually for readers 13-18; generally 50,000-70,000 words; profanity, graphic violence, romance and sexuality are allowable, but not required; protagonist often 16-17 years of age, but can be up to 18 (though usually not in college). Main characters discover how they fit into the world beyond their friends and family; often, they're taking first steps into adult relationships and responsibilities. Main characters often spend time reflecting and analyzing. Often written in first person.

Character—an individual (usually a human) in a story. Characters can be animals (see: *Anthropomorphism*); or objects (see: *Personification*).

Character-driven story—describes stories where the emphasis is on characterization, inner conflict, and relationships. Such stories can have a goal that is more internal, such as changing an attitude or healing from inner wound.

Circular ending—ending the story in the same way that you began it or ending where you began. For instance, with the same onomatopoeia, same phrase, same details, and so on. A circular ending may also help us track the character's evolution during a story.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

Climax—the turning point of the story that leads to a change either for the better or for the worse for the protagonist. In a comedy (and in most picture books), the protagonist positively faces his obstacles and there is a great chance that things will turn out well.

Concept—the general notion or idea behind a piece of writing.

Conflict—the problem/situation the protagonist/main character must face/deal with and overcome.

Consonance—repetitive sounds produced by consonants within a sentence or phrase. This repetition often takes place in quick succession such as in *pitter-patter*. The words *chuckle*, *fickle*, and *kick* have a common interior consonant sound (/ck/). Consonance is used in both poetry and prose.

Conventions—commonly accepted rules of edited American English (e.g., spelling, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence structure).

Cover letter—a letter that accompanies a manuscript submission. Since picture book writers usually submit their entire manuscript, they often use cover letters more than query letters. A cover letter generally has three components—a connection or reason you chose to write to the person who is receiving the letter, a short pitch of the story, and a bit of the author's credentials, experience, and so on.

-D-

Dark moment of the soul/Dark moment—the culmination of the rising action when the protagonist/main character has tried repeatedly to solve his/her problem and failed every time, and all hope now seems lost. The dark moment precedes the climax.

Defining terms in context—defining a word within the context of writing. For instance: *The Smack Down, an exciting wrestling event, occurs once a month at the arena.* OR *That yellow flowering shrub is a forsythia.*

Defining terms in parentheses—this technique can add sentence variety while also providing a definition. For instance: *The in-the-park homerun (a homerun where the ball never leaves the playing field) won the game.*

Denouement—the final resolution of the intricacies of a plot. The *ah-h-h-h* moment at the end of a story. The denouement may also be an unexpected twist or surprise.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/07/heart-gravitas-denouement.html>.

Dialogue (purposeful)— dialogue that moves the action of the story forward, adds details, gives insight into characters, and so on. Writers should avoid chit-chat or he-said-she-said writing with long sections of dialogue. A good rule of thumb is to insert action or details between each exchange of dialogue.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-vs-voice.html> and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-tags.html>.

Draft—preliminary version of a piece of writing that may need editing and revision of details, organization, and conventions.

Dummy—a mock-up of a book that allows the writer to place text (and sometimes the illustrations) in order to examine the flow of the story. A dummy can also help a writer see if page turns are working, on which pages text might be too heavy, and/or if any part of the story is getting too much or too little attention. See:

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/its-all-about-dummy-dummy.html>

-E-

Edit—to correct or “clean up” a draft. Usually includes correcting spelling, word usage, capitalization, and punctuation.

Elevator Pitch—See *Logline*.

Explode the moment— this type of writing has been described by Barry Lane in his books *The Revisers Toolbox* and *After the End*. Think of how a snapshot freezes a moment in time with all the details of that moment captured for all to see. NOTE: This technique is also called Snapshot Writing.

Exposition—the introduction of a manuscript that presents the setting (time and place), characters (protagonist and antagonist), and the basic conflict; it also establishes the mood or atmosphere of the story. Exposition is also a word for narrative summary used anywhere in the manuscript

-F-

Falling (descending) action— coming just after the climax and before the conclusion, the falling action signifies that the main action is over, the climax has come, and the story is heading towards the end. All loose ends in the story need to be wrapped up during the falling action.

Figurative language—language used to produce images in readers’ minds and to express ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways. The opposite of *literal language*, figurative language requires the reader to do more “figuring out” to understand the writer’s meaning. Figurative language may include similes, metaphors, hyperbole, alliteration, personification, idioms, onomatopoeias, and so on.

Focus—staying focused on one central idea and excluding extraneous information.

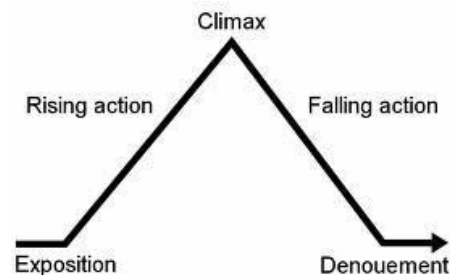
Foot—the basic unit of metric measurement; number of stressed beats per line.

Foreshadowing—to show or indicate beforehand.

Forward momentum—the feeling that a plot is pulling the readers forward, causing them to turn pages and continue to read.

Freytag's Pyramid—a dramatic structure diagram showing rising action on the left side of the pyramid, up to the apex (which represents the climax), and falling action on the right side of the pyramid leading to the conclusion and denouement of the story.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/10/dramatic-structurefreytags-pyramid.html>.



-G-

Genre—Categories or designations of types of literature. The genre often gives you some insight into the content or focus of a book.

- **Fiction**—Any type of writing that uses a plot and characters that an author creates entirely or almost entirely from their imagination.
 - **Fantasy and Science Fiction**—Involves the use of imagination, worlds of magic and myth, or stories set in other worlds or on other planets.
 - **Historical Fiction**—Set in a time period from the past and conveys information about that period or a specific historical event while telling a character's story.
 - **Literary Fiction**—Works that are said to hold literary merit, contrasted with popular or commercial works. The terms is fluid and may apply to many different genres.
 - **Realistic Fiction**—Set in modern times and with a modern situation. The character, setting, and problem may be relatable to the reader, or they may introduce the reader to new cultures, communities, orientations, and so on.
- **Nonfiction**—Any writing that represents factual accounts of past or current events. The content is true and not invented. (NOTE: The five categories below are from the work of Melissa Stewart.)
 - **Traditional**—Typically called “all about” books, these books give an overview of a topic in clear and straightforward language. A great place to begin to understand a topic.

- o **Browsable**—These books have short blocks of text and are heavily illustrated. Readers can skip around in the book or read it cover to cover. Often high-interest topics.
- o **Narrative**—Often includes biographies and historical events in chronological order with real characters, scenes, and a narrative arc.
- o **Expository**—Identified by its rich language and strong voice, these books often have innovative formats and narrowly focused topics. Often focused on STEM topics.
- o **Active**—Highly interactive, often give readers step-by-step instructions, teach a skill, or help readers engage in an activity. Includes cookbooks, craft books, how-to guides, etc.
- **Poetry and Verse**—Characterized by condensed language and imagery. Distilled, rhythmic expression of imaginative thoughts and concepts. Includes rhyming poems with a metrical form, nonrhyming, free verse, structured poems, and more.
- **Traditional Literature**—Includes folktales, fairytales, myths, legends, fables, and any other types of stories passed down through generations.

Golden thread—a technique where a recurring theme, phrase, or set of words flows throughout a piece of writing. The thread helps “tie” together the writing and gives a feeling of completeness. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/golden-thread.html>.

-H-

Hook—often the opening sentence or statement that is meant to capture the attention of the reader immediately and prompt them to read on. The hook may be the first line of any piece of writing, including various genre, a query letter, a cover letter, and/or a synopsis.

Hyperbole—an exaggeration or extravagant statement or figure of speech that is not intended to be taken literally (such as: *The pizza was so hot it burned my tongue off!*)

-I-

Idiom—a figure of speech in which the meaning cannot be understood simply from the actual meaning of the words (for instance: *Keep tabs on him.* OR *It's raining cats and dogs.*).

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/idioms-familiar-wise-and-fun-sayings.html>.

Insider vocabulary—vocabulary associated with a certain job, hobby, sport, and so on. For instance, ballet has its own set of vocabulary, as does skateboarding, soccer, and instant messaging. The use of some insider vocabulary (and the inclusion of necessary definitions) can add interest and variety to writing.

Interactive book—books that allow for interaction and participation. Participation can range from feeling textures and pressing buttons with sounds to play with, moving parts, pop-ups, flaps, pull tabs, and so on. Other books (such as *PRESS HERE* by Herve Tullet), ask the reader to move the book (or themselves) and in so doing, the book becomes interactive.

Internal dialogue—the character’s inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions. You can also think of internal dialogue as that little voice that is always playing in a character’s head. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/internal-dialogue.html>

-J-

-K-

-L-

Leave room for the illustrator—allowing space within the telling of a story for the illustrator to show his/her half of the story; not overly stating the details of a story; writing an active manuscript that can be illustrated. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/illustrations-other-half-of-story.html>

Logline—a short summary of your work that can usually be stated in one to two sentences. The logline conveys the premise of the work and also includes the emotional aspect that will hook the reader. Also called Pitch or Elevator Pitch.

-M-

Main character—See: *Protagonist*

Meaningful list (or purposeful list)—meaningful lists include details, move action along, or otherwise enhance writing. (For instance: *Twelve Clydesdale horses, two Dalmatians, and four firefighters rode Engine #49 in the parade.*)

Metaphor—a comparison of two different things that does NOT use *like* or *as*. (For instance: *The sun is an orange basketball bouncing through the sky.*)

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/similes-and-metaphorscomparisons-r-us.html>.

Meter—basic rhythmic structure of a verse or lines of verse.

Modifier—a word, phrase, or sentence that limits or qualifies the sense of another word, phrase, or sentence. Often modifiers are two hyphenated words used to qualify something about another word or phrase. (For instance: *Jake was a first-time award winner.*)

Moral/lesson ending—when a moral or lesson ends a story. A moral/lesson ending may be obvious and stated (for instance: *I sure learned a lesson that day, and from now on I will think before I speak*) or it may be implied and subtle. NOTE: Picture books generally avoid being preachy, didactic, or moralistic. The readers may imply lessons or morals from what they read, without the writer overtly stating them.

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

-N-

-O-

Onomatopoeia—the use of words that sound like the noise they make. Also known as sound effects (such as *cuckoo* or *boom*).

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/onomatopoeias-i-love-sound-of-it.html>.

Own voices—the term originated as a hashtag by Corinne Duyvis to identify diverse books written by members of that same diverse group. Diverse books mirror the world, with a special focus on amplified stories about historically excluded identities and groups of people. For instance, if you are writing a story with a main character who is part of a marginalized group, you are part of the marginalized group.

-P-

Pacing—the reader’s sense of how quickly a story progresses. The rate of pacing can change throughout a story—from fast to slow and vice versa. Pacing can communicate tone, emotion, and more. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/bit-about-pacing.html>.

Page turn—often associated with picture books, the term refers to the strategies used to entice the reader to turn the page and continue reading. Some tools that might be used to create a page turn include an ellipsis or dash, a question, an incomplete sentence, a suspenseful moment, a scene change, and so on. An illustration may also create a page turn opportunity.

PAL—P.A.L. (PAL) stands for “Published and Listed.” This is term used by SCBWI. The SCBWI PAL list is a global index that includes the largest trade publishers and imprints as well as small independent publishing houses. PAL also refers to a level of membership open to those whose books, articles, poems, stories, illustrations, photographs, films, television or electronic media for children have been commercially published by one of the designated PAL publishers listed in the SCBWI Market Surveys.

Perfect rhyme—rhyme between two words or phrases, satisfying the following conditions: (1) the stressed vowel sound in both words must be identical, as well as any subsequent sounds. For example: *sky* and *high*; *skylight* and *highlight*. (2) The articulation that precedes the vowel sound must differ. For example, *green* and *spleen* is perfect rhyme, while *leave* and *believe* is not. All words in rhyme strive for perfect rhyme.

Personification—giving human characteristics to non-human, inanimate objects. (For instance: *The car wipers batted away tears.* OR *The tree stretched its arms to the sky.*)

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/personificationgiving-legs-to-words.html>.

Picture Book—a book in which the illustrations are as important as (or even more important than) the words that tell the story. Picture books are generally 32 pages long, although they can be longer or shorter. In picture books, there are illustrations on every page or on every pair of facing pages. Most picture books are written for young children, but there are exceptions.

Pitch—see *Logline*.

Plot—the sequence of events that happens to the protagonist (main character) in the timeline of the story.

Plot Clock—created by Joyce Sweeney and Jamie Morris, this plotting strategy is more circular, than linear. To learn more about the Plot Clock read the posts listed below. Think of the Plot Clock as a circle divided into four equal quadrants making up four acts. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2012/05/plot-clock-another-planning-tool.html>, <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/08/plot-clock-in-picture-books.html>, and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/08/plot-clock.html>

Plot-driven books—describes stories where the emphasis is more on plot twists, external conflict, and action rather than characters. Often the story goals are more external such as obtaining and accomplishing something, winning, escaping, or changing a situation.

Plot point—a story event that spins the action in a new, unexpected direction. Plot points serve to keep the action moving forward and to keep the story fresh. Plot points raise the stakes for the protagonist as the story moves toward the climax.

Point of view (POV)—the way a story is told and who tells it. The two most common POVs used are first-person POV (when the narrator speaks as “I” and is the protagonist/main character in the story) and third-person POV (when the narrative uses “he,” “she,” “they,” etc. It can be third-person subjective, which creates an intimate connection between reader and narrator, or it can be more limited or objective, where the narrator seems to stand outside the story.) An omniscient narrator who sees all and knows all can often work in a picture book as well. Point of view can also refer to the perspective from which the story is told. For instance, “The Princess and the Pea” could be told from the perspective of the princess, or the prince, or the queen, or the pea, and so on.

Problem—the situation or challenge (no matter how big or small) that the protagonist must successfully solve/resolve (most often by himself/herself) for the story to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Prose—the ordinary form of spoken or written language, without meter; not poetry or verse.

Protanganist—the main or leading character, hero, or heroine. The protanganist possesses a problem to be solved, actively works to solve the problem himself/herself, and ultimately does solve the problem (at least in most picture books). See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/finding-great-main-characters.html>, <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/flawed-main-characters.html>, <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/relatable-main-characters.html>, and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/06/active-main-characters.html>

-Q-

Query letter—a formal letter sent to magazine editors, literary agents, editors, and/or publishing houses. The query is designed to “sell” your manuscript, concept, or idea to a publishing

decision-maker. Often, it will summarize plot and character details, along with conveying background information about the writer.

-R-

Raising the stakes—increasing what is at stake for the protagonist; making things worse for the protagonist. Raising the stakes is usually done in degrees, step by step. (See: Rising action)

Repetition (purposeful)—using a word, phrase, or sentence (such as *Crash! Bang! Boom!* OR *But the best was yet to come*) several times to intentionally add interest to a story, to move the action along, or to allow the reader to participate by repeating the word or phrase. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/lists-rule-of-three-and-repetition.html>.

Resolution—the point in the plot when the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist is resolved and/or the problem is solved. There are often unexpected incidents that make the final outcome suspenseful.

Revise—to alter something already written in order to improve, change, or clarify. Revision is a more involved process than editing since the writer is looking not for minor errors to correct, but ways to improve the writing and story as a whole.

Rhyme—matching similarity in sounds in two or more words, especially when the accented vowel and the consonants that follow are all the same. (For instance: *mall/fall*; *core/more*, *babble/dabble*.) Picture book authors strive for perfect (exact) rhyme (see: Perfect rhyme). See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/04/rhyming-poems-in-picture-books.html>.

Rhythm—refers to the speed, intensity, and tone of a piece of writing. Think of this as the heart rate or heartbeat of the story. (All stories can have rhythm, but rhythm is especially a part of poetry and rhyming stories.)

Rising (ascending) action—the place in the plot where the basic conflict is brewing and the reader is beginning to feel the increasing tension associated with the conflict. The basic conflict is further complicated by the introduction of obstacles frustrating the protagonist. Picture book writers often think of the rising action as containing the protagonist's attempts and failures to solve his/her problem.

Rule of three—using words, phrases, sounds, etc. in groups of three. Three of anything seems to provide a pleasing, comforting feel for the reader. This rule could refer to repeating a sound three times (*Whack! Whack! Whack!*), three details (*She was hungry. She was tired. She was lonely*), or even three attempts/scenes of the main character attempting to solve his/her problem. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/lists-rule-of-three-and-repetition.html>.

-S-

Scansion—the metrical analysis of verse. Rhyme should “scan” smoothly and not cause the reader to lose the meter; nor should it otherwise interrupt the flow of the piece.

Scene—the basic building block of longer fiction. Generally, a scene will take place in one location and involve a character in pursuit of a goal, meeting obstacles to that goal based on the agenda of another character or the force of a natural phenomenon, like a hurricane. The outcome of a scene will often propel a character into further action in the story.

Sensory details—using the five senses—hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching—in one’s writing. Sensory details add a concrete dimension to a story, which invites a reader to participate using their own knowledge and personal experience.

Sentence fragment (purposeful)—a meaningful sentence fragment can add sentence variety to a piece of writing and add emphasis to an idea. *I was done. Over it. Finished.* Sentence fragments are intentional and should appear in a limited number in a piece of writing. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/sentence-variety.html>.

Sentence variety—literally varying the length, structure, and complexity of sentences. Sentence variety can change the mood, tone, and pace of a story and add interest for the reader. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/sentence-variety.html> and <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/373814-this-sentence-has-five-words-here-are-five-more-words>.

Setting—the world of the story. The setting is the location where and timeframe during which the action of a narrative takes place. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/settings.html> and <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2012/04/lack-of-setting.html>

Shouting caps—writing a word or phrase in all capital letters. This technique can add interest, communicate emotions, and emphasize a word or phrase. Shouting caps may be part of dialogue but does not have to be. (For instance: *I saw the moving van pull away. YES! YES! YES! My dream had finally come true.*)

Show don’t tell— instead of explaining the reader what has happened, the writer DEMONSTRATES what has happened with details. Instead of “She was angry,” the author could write: “The old woman flung her cane into the air and let out a blood-curdling scream.”

Signature—A signature (sig) is a sheet of paper printed with four or more pages of a book. It is folded to the approximate final page size and to put the pages in numerical order. The more common signature impositions are 4, 8, 16, 32, and 64 pages, which are formed by folding the sheet in half one or more times. Less common are 12, 20, 24, and 36 page signatures, which require more complicated folding patterns.

Simile—a comparison of two dissimilar things using *like* or *as* in the comparison. (For instance: *The clouds were fluffy like cotton candy.* OR *He was as smelly as a trashcan.*) See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/03/similes-and-metaphorscomparisons-r-us.html>.

Slice-of-life story—focuses on the details in a moment of a character’s life but often without plot or conflict. A story where there might not be anything at stake for the character. While there might occasionally be a slice-of-life story that is worthy of publication (or that is published), most need to be fully developed, plotted, and written into a story.

Snapshot writing—this type of writing has been described by Barry Lane in his books *The Revisers Toolbox* and *After the End*. Think of how a snapshot freezes a moment in time with all the details of that moment captured for all to see. Snapshot writing does the same thing. It freezes the moment and helps the reader see all the details before moving on. NOTE: This technique is also called Exploding the Moment.

Specific nouns—all authors use nouns (names of people, places, and things) in their writing. Good writers make the nouns specific. Instead of *store*, they write *grocery store*. Great writers use even more specific nouns. Instead of *grocery store*, they write *Winn Dixie*. Instead of *dog*, they write *Yorkie*. These specific nouns add details to the writing and show the reader what the author is writing about. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/09/secrets-to-specific-nouns-and-vivid.html>.

Speech tags—something that labels a bit of dialogue, says who’s speaking, and sometimes tells *how* they’re speaking. Also called an *identifier*. While it is fine to use *said* as a speech tag, there are other verbs that might more vividly describe what is happening—such as: screamed, whispered, whined, or purred.

Spread—Two facing pages of a book.

Stakes (Raising the stakes)—what the protagonist stands to lose if he/she doesn’t solve the central problem presented in the plot. Stakes create tension. If the stakes are low, then the tension is weak. Stakes need to climb higher and higher throughout the rising action of a story. Often, stakes are referred to as public (how the world or community around the character stands to be impacted by the events of the story) or private (how the protagonist stands to be impacted on both a practical and emotional level.) (See: Problem.)

Start in the middle—avoiding backstory and launching a story where the action begins; immersing the reader immediately into the story. As an example, think of how *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White begins: “Papa, where are you going with that ax?” See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/start-in-middle.html>

Stilted language—stiff, artificially formal word choices and sentence structures.

Subplot—a secondary strand of plot that supports and/or connects to the main plot. Subplots often involve supporting characters. Subplots take up less of the action and have fewer significant events occur. Note: Subplots are generally not used in picture books due to their short length and the age of the target audience.

Support (supporting details)—details that work to support the topic sentence or provide more detail about the topic sentence and also make the main idea stronger. Supporting details could be facts, personal experiences, examples, descriptions (using similes, alliteration, and other figurative language), or arguments for or against something. In every case, supporting details should directly connect with the topic sentence of your paragraph.

Supporting characters—other characters in a story in addition to the protagonist and antagonist. A supporting character must have a reason to exist. Too many supporting characters can overly complicate a plot.

Surprise ending—surprise endings (also known as twisted endings) are unexpected and can catch the reader off guard. The surprise ending may include irony or cause the reader to reevaluate the story. The writer must be careful to make the ending logical even though surprising. (For instance, introducing a character or superhero suddenly in order to solve the story's problem may not seem logical to the reader.)

See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/02/effective-endings.html>.

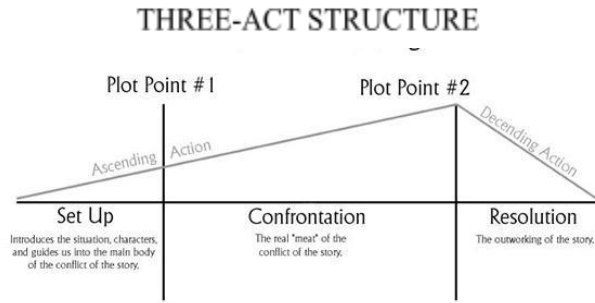
Synopsis—The purpose of the synopsis is to hook the reader (an agent or editor), give them an overview of the entire story, and whet their appetite to read your full manuscript. Basically, a synopsis tells the who, what, where, when, and why of the story. The main character's problem or goal should be conveyed immediately and what's at stake for the character should be explained. Include the inciting incident which sparks the main conflict of your story, a couple of major plots points which build tension, the climax, and (unlike a blurb) the story's resolution, which brings your narrative arc to a close. The synopsis should be written in third person, present tense.

-T-

Theme—the central idea(s) or message(s) explored by a literary work; what the author is trying to tell the reader. For example, the belief in the ultimate good in people, or that things are not always what they seem. Some fiction contains advanced themes like the need for equality, or the universal desire for acceptance, while other stories may have no theme, or a very shallow one.

Three-act structure—often used in screenwriting. Act One is the Set Up and includes an Inciting Incident that leads to the first turning point of the story. Act Two includes Confrontation/Development with trials and errors and attempts and failures to solve the problem of the story. Turning Point 2 concludes Act Two and seems to make the situation even worse (the dark moment). Act Three moves quickly taking us to the Resolution of the story and all the way to the end.

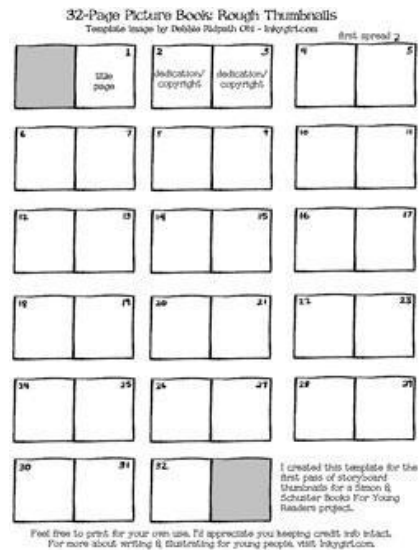
See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/01/screenplay-approach.html>.



Throughline—Originally a screenwriting/television writing technique, throughlines were adapted for use in novels by Melanie Anne Phillips and Chris Huntley. A throughline helps hold a story together from beginning to end and provides a sense of completeness/wholeness to a piece of writing. Throughlines may be related to/focus on theme, character, plot, motif, mood, language, and so on. See:

<http://terribleminds.com/ramble/2012/03/14/shot-through-the-heart-your-storys-throughline/>

Thumbnail—a thumbnail is a one-page view of an entire book. Illustrators often begin their work with small, rough sketches. A writer can also use a thumbnail to map out the plot of the story and to ensure no part of the plot is getting too much or too little attention. (The attached thumbnail example was created by Debbie Ohi.)



Transitions—words and phrases that move the reader from sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, idea to idea, or time to time. Examples of transitional words and phrases include: *suddenly*, *out of the blue*, and *within minutes*. Onomatopoeias, ellipses, alliterations, questions, and other techniques may also be used as transitions. Writers should be cautioned to not overuse any transition word or phrase, especially the common *then*, *first*, *next*, and *finally*. See:

<http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/transitions-and-time-compression.html>.

Use binocular vision—this term used in the writings of Barry Lane reminds writers to clarify and focus their writing. Just as a pair of binoculars has to be focused in order to clearly see, so writing has to be focused with additional details to focus the reader on what the writer is trying to communicate.

-V-

Verse—non-rhyming poetic writing.

Vivid verbs—choosing verbs that accurately describe the action in a story. For instance, an author may write that “the boy sat down”, when actually the boy *pounced*, *slumped*, or *perched*. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/09/secrets-to-specific-nouns-and-vivid.html>.

Voice—the feeling of personality that a writer brings to a piece represented in words. Writing with voice can show the author’s personality and that the author is writing honestly and from the heart. Voice helps the reader “see” the person behind the writing and feel what the writer is feeling. Voice adds style and flavor to an individual’s writing. Voice is not limited to the author’s voice but also speaks to the voice of the main character. See: <http://robsanderswrites.blogspot.com/2011/05/dialogue-vs-voice.html>.

-W-

Whispered parenthesis—after saying something, a person sometimes raises a hand to his/her mouth to whisper his/her true feelings behind the raised hands. Katie Wood Ray introduced the idea of whispered parenthesis in writing. Placing those behind-the-hand comments within parenthesis can be one way to add voice to writing. For instance: *I’m sorry, little brother. I’ll never do it again (until no one is looking)*. NOTE: Also known as *Thought shot*.

Write-for-hire—generally associated with writing assignments made by a publisher where the publisher maintains the copyright and the writer is paid a flat fee for the work. This work is often part of a series of books that originate with the publisher and the work may come with a specified format or other guidelines and often requires working on a short deadline.

Word count—refers to the number of words included in a manuscript. Usually does not include art notes, backmatter, or any other non-story related words. There is no single specified number of words required for any genre, and the number of words often varies depending on the story, the editor, and so on. To learn some general word counts for a various works, see *Category* in this document.

-X-

-Y-

-Z-

