

My Outlining Process

Find the method that works best for *you!* This may take a few novels.

- Don't write a thing—not a word of the story. Unless it's the opening scene and must Get Out.
- Write the outline first.
- It's ok if it's rough.
- Make sure it has a plot structure that adheres to genre and story archetype expectations.
- Include the end.

Aim for about 20 scenes. Include:

- Conflicts
 - Things the characters must do or overcome
 - Problems, dilemmas, struggles
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- 3- 4 pages is fine

Think of an outline as a granite slab that must be chiseled at to give it form.

- characters emerge
 - more conflict arises
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- Read it over
 - Try to 'see it,' hear their voices, see the scenes
 - Ask, "is there enough 'there *there?*' Is there enough story?"
 - Is there enough conflict?
 - What will the characters learn about themselves and or life?
 - What's the point of the story? (This will emerge into a theme or two later.)
 - Close the laptop.
 - Let the story percolate for a day or two.
 - Add more scenes, characters, and rising action as needed.
 - Complete sentences not needed.

When the story must come out:

- the outline becomes my rough draft
 - ideas emerge and are added to the outline.
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- The outline is always a page or two after the rough draft.
 - Cross off scenes as they are written.
 - Add to outline as needed. That way you don't forget that fab idea that popped into your head as you were writing.

- The outline is a working document. It ought to help avoid writer's block, show you what to write next, and show you the way to the end.

Pacing and plot snags

- Move from scene A to scene C so that it adds to the novel's plot and characterizations in a logical and pace-keeping way.
- Review your character arcs and/or character archetypes. Fill in the gaps.

* Historical fiction often is about events that span years or decades. That outline is more extensive because it is necessary to align plot with real events that make up the rising action.

- Don't get rid of the outline until after the last chapter of your rough draft is complete.

*I think linearly. I write linearly. Some writers skip ahead to write a chapter that they really want to write but I have BIG rule about this.

THE BIG RULE

If I want to skip ahead to write the 'exciting' chapter, then I seriously rethink and rewrite the chapter I'm currently writing. Because if the chapter is boring for me, the writer, to write, then it's going to be really boring for the reader to read.

Every chapter should be compelling to write and read. Or the writer didn't do their job.

- Each scene is a step along the way that must be fun to read and write.
- There should be no boring chapters. No boring scenes.

What kind of outline will work for you?