

The Big Idea

You have an idea for a novel that follows you to bed, and it's all you can think of during your morning shower. So, how do you start?

Write by the seat of your pants or make an outline?

Ragtime Dudes
3 New York Dandies



Some authors start with a story synopsis or treatment (aka writing by the seat of your pants). Others outline the plot and scenes for the whole book first.

Seat of the pants synopsis

Jules finds his best friends Mo and Bryce at brunch in a fancy restaurant. Bryce's family is important. Jules informs them that the Irish community is after them over sleeping with an Irish girl.

They discuss the problem and convince Jules that it will blow over, and bring him into a discussion that they have been having about the impending opening of the St. Louis World's Fair.

The Irish problem doesn't go away and maybe her cousin is an Irish boxer. But Bryce has tickets to Broadway and doesn't want to waste them. (In April 1904 Beau Brummell is playing on Broadway) J or M say "Better than some Irish pugilist catching you there."

"Oh, those Micks would never look for me"

Above is what I used to develop my novel about 3 NY dandies who went to the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis.

Below is an example of how the same story might be outlined instead.

Others Outline

Some authors write detailed outlines.

Example:

- I. Motivation to leave NY
 - A. Threat of Irish boxers
 - B. Dismisses the risk
 - C. Risk becomes real
 - D. Decide to hide out at World's Fair
- II. Entrain for St. Louis
 - A. Meet promiscuous Jones sisters on train

Start writing the first draft.



- Maintain your creativity by writing **every** day.
- Put each chapter in its own Word document.
- Set a daily goal and keep or exceed it.
- It's okay to write chapters out of order.
- Don't edit chapters of first draft before you get to the end — just make notes.
- Stay off social media during writing hours.

Whatever you do, don't talk about your story. Talking before you've finished your first draft. (weakens creative impulse, flips a switch and mind says oh I've already done this). The time to talk is when you're trying to pitch the finished book. Devote your energy to writing the first draft straight to the end.

Press ever onward

You can always edit
a bad page.

You can't edit a
blank page.

— Jodi Picoult



Narrator Point of View

- First person: I/my
- Third person: he/she
- Omniscient: God-like narrator outside the story.

The Book's Voice and Tone

- The right narrator choice can draw readers into the character

First Person example



“Where’s Gizmo?”

“Over here!” I looked up from my drafting table. I was working on schematics for a line of radar installations along the DMZ, no-man’s-land that served as a buffer between the North and South Korean armies.

“Gizmo,” my staff sergeant said, “I don’t know what the hell you did, but they want your ass at headquarters, pronto.”

I made a quick stop at the barracks, where I kept a fresh-pressed uniform and spit-shined shoes ready in case of an inspection. Whatever HQ wanted, I’d be better off showing up with sharp creases and polished brass rather than ink stains on my cuffs.

When I arrived, I was put in a small room that held only an empty desk and two chairs. By this point, I'd been stationed in Korea almost two years. I got along well with my fellow airmen and noncom superiors and made friends with my tinkering.

The war ended before I even got there. An armistice was signed and the US began shipping GIs home. But not me. The Air Force had invested in my engineering training and intended to use it. They flew me to Seoul and assigned me to a group building airfields, flight control towers, and radar installations. My God! I had been only eighteen years old when they started me drawing electrical schematics for South Korea's defense.

I waited in that empty room for an hour, watching dust motes drift through the sunlight streaming in the window. Why had I been told to get here "pronto?" Waiting heightened my anxiety. I tried to remember anything I'd done wrong—at least, anything the Air Force might know about. I drew a blank.

Finally, the door opened. A naval commander entered, carrying a blue folder tucked under his elbow. He closed the door and locked it.

What a Navy man was doing on an Air Force base, I couldn't imagine. But I breathed a sigh of relief. I wasn't here for a reprimand. I stood and saluted.

He sat down at the desk and pointed to the other chair. "Take a seat, Carson."

He laid the blue folder on the desk and opened it. "I am Commander . . . Smith."

I noticed the standard military name tag which should have been on the right breast of his uniform was absent. Between that and the hesitation, I smelled “Military Intelligence,” an oxymoron in any GI’s mind.

He took a retractable pen from his inside jacket pocket and clicked it. “I have a few questions.”

I leaned forward to glimpse what was in that folder, but my chair was too far away for me to see.

He then asked me a lot of nonsense questions: Which factory had my father worked at during World War II? When had my mother’s parents emigrated from Sweden? Had either of my parents attended a communist party meeting?

“I don’t think they would do that.” But how the hell did he expect me to know if they did? I was just a kid back then.

Strangely enough, he didn’t write any of this down. He just made check marks on the sheets inside his folder, as if my answers were already there.

After another ten minutes of inane questions, he unlocked the door and told me to return to my duty station. I went back to work and gave no more thought to the matter.

As you see from the above example, the first person voice not only tells the story, but allows the reader to see the character’s internal reactions, thoughts, and fears. The disadvantage of first person is that you can only ever show internal thoughts of one character.

Stay with one Character throughout a scene

- Avoid head-hopping
(internal thoughts of more than
1 character in the same scene)
- Start a new chapter or scene when you have:
 - a sudden change in time or day
 - or location
 - or point of view character.



Third person lets you show internal reactions of various characters—Called POV character, But only have one POV per scene. If you share the thoughts of more than one, it's called head-hopping and confuses the reader as to who is narrating the scene.

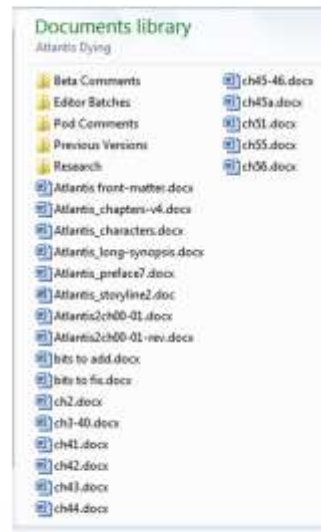
Instead, start a new chapter or scene when you want to show another character's perspective.

Also try to establish who is POV character in the first sentence.

Tip: Mark scene breaks in a consistent manner (***) so in later drafts you'll can find them with ease.

Stay Organized

- Create a folder for novel
- Keep everything about novel in that folder
- Make subfolders for research, previous versions, etc.
- For the first and second drafts, put each chapter in its own Word document.
- **Back up files daily**



Second Draft

Writing is rewriting

– Ernest Hemingway



The saying has been attributed to Hemingway. He may or may not have said that, but the hard truth is that you're going to revise your novel over and over again. Hemingway rewrote the ending of *Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he was satisfied. For simplicity, I'll discuss four drafts, but in reality, expect to do many more revisions.

Second Draft



- Your first draft is done. Great!
- Now, join a writer group that exchange chapters and critique each other's work.
- Read *Self-editing for Fiction Writers* (Browne & King) and clean up each of your chapters before submitting it to the pod.
- Start at chapter one and submit each chapter in sequential order.
- Accept or reject the pod's suggestions as you wish and make appropriate edits to your chapter files.

Story Structure

Examples:

- 3 act structure
- 7 part Hero's Journey
- 9 to 11 beats
- Readers have expectations for certain genres
 - *Writer's Digest* has many genre specific books:
How to Write Action Adventure Novels, How to Write Mysteries, Romance, etc.
- In 2nd draft look at structural points (beats) in the story and rearrange scenes as necessary



Image: vecteezy.com

Each story has a structure . Two common structures: the 3 act story, or the 7 step hero's journey.

There are many different story structures, some specific to certain genre.

Within those acts or steps are beats. See graph on next slide.

At 2nd draft is the point you can begin see where the story beats fall and make adjustments by moving scene or chapters around.

Proper Pacing Holds Reader

Three Act Structure



If we were to graph the beats in a story we would see it rise and key points, but even when the pace lessens, the overall arc continues to rise toward the climax. Below is a “beat sheet” an outline marked with percentages of the text at which certain beats should occur to hold the reader’s interest and keep the turning pages.

Story Beats

ACTS & STAGES	
Act I	
Stage 1: Setup	10%
Turning Point 1: Opportunity	11-19%
Stage 2: New Situation	
Turning Point 2: Change of Plans	20-25%
Act II	
Stage 3: Progress	
Turning Point 3: Point of No Return	37%
Stage 4: Complications & Higher Stakes	50%
Turning Point 4: Major Setback	75%
Act III	
Stage 5: Final Push	
Turning Point 5: Climax	88-98%
Stage 6: Aftermath	



Pacing within scenes via sentence length



- Three fun-loving New York dandies have been accused by the family of an Irish colleen of dallying with her.
- Her mother's cousin, a former boxing champ are trying to find them.

In this excerpt from *Ragtime Dudes at the World's Fair* longer sentences in the beginning paragraphs ease us into the scene introducing the characters and setting, but as the tension mounts, shorter sentences quicken the pace.

Finn and Bird worked their way through Greenwich Village, downing pints and questioning patrons of neighborhood taverns. Both men were boxers, former stars in their respective weight classes. Finn was a bantamweight whose pinpoint accuracy left many an opponent battered and defeated. Bird had once been the heavyweight champion. His eighty-four inch reach and powerhouse punch scored numerous knockouts.

Bird wasn't his name in the ring. He'd acquired that moniker after breaking his nose so many times that it whistled when he exhaled. To avoid ridicule, he tended to breathe through his mouth. This, combined with the fact that he'd withstood far too many blows to the head, gave the impression of mental dullness. Punchy though he was, Bird had Finn as his protector. A six-foot-one giant guarded by a scrappy five-foot-seven rooster might seem like a vaudeville act, but one sharp look from Finn stopped any laughter.

Finn, hardened by the numerous street fights of his youth, had made an honest living the only way he knew how—with his fists. Fortunately, he'd left the sport before he ended up like Bird. His shoulders sloped more than Bird's, but the muscles banding his arms still commanded respect. He lacked Bird's long reach, so he'd made his reputation by getting in close with quick, fast jabs.

The tavern owner came over to where Finn and Bird were talking with some of his regulars. "You Pinkertons?"

Finn's dark eyes darted to the man, and he stepped protectively in front of Bird. "Do we look like detectives?"

"None I ever saw, but word in the neighborhood is you been asking a lot of questions. I won't have you bothering my customers."

Bird fumbled in his jacket pocket and brought out a folded newspaper clipping.

"Cousin's daughter. . . marry. . . must." A tremor in his hand caused the paper to shake.

Finn pulled out a chair. "Here, Bird, sit down before you fall down."

"Is he drunk?" the owner said.

"No, sometimes his legs get weak. Too many years in the ring."

The tavern owner apprised Bird. "I recognize him from somewhere."

"You do. This is Goliath McGwig-an."

"But you just called him Bird—"

"His friends can call him Bird. You call him Champ."

"Right. Champ. But you still haven't explained what you're doing here."

Finn took the newspaper clipping from Bird and showed it around. "We're looking for these three dandies. They probably have a reputation for dallying with 'good' girls."

One of the patrons pointed to Bridget. "I've seen her. She used to come around the Village. Haven't seen much of her lately."

Finn closed on him. Old habit. "What about the men? Was she with them?"

"Sometimes, but more often with others."

Bird stood and grabbed the man's shirt, nearly lifting him off the ground. "You?"

"Hey, you pugs, none of that in here," the owner said.

"Sure, sure." Finn pried Bird's fingers from the man's shirt.

Bird exhaled forcefully through his nose. It made a sharp tweet.

Several of the men sniggered. Finn whirled around, ready to clock any one of them.

"Not me," the man said, tucking his shirt back into his pants. "She fancied dandies like them in the picture."

Character development

- ❖ Dialogue
- ❖ Actions
- ❖ Thoughts

- What people say and do are how we know them. The same can be used to make reader love or hate a character.
- What a character thinks is a novel's advantage.

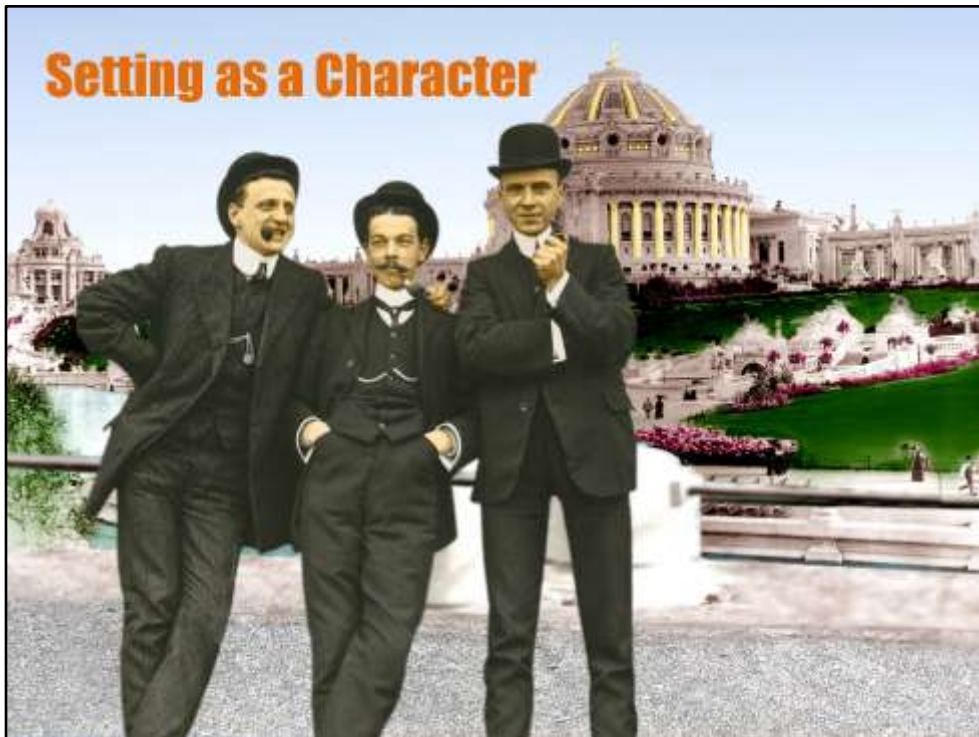
Character's thoughts

- Interior monologue: Keep passages short. If your character has a lot to think about break it up with physical activity.



In Lancelot's Grail, Alura ponders her situation while making a pudding.

Alura has a long passage of introspection trying to figure a way out of her current situation. I found an old English recipe and had her perform its steps while she thought. This broke the monologue into short paragraphs separated by physical actions



In some cases, the setting can be a character in and of itself.

The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was the largest world's fair in history, covering 2 square miles. There were over 1,500 buildings on the fairgrounds. The twelve largest exhibition halls, called palaces, occupied 135 acres. A setting so rich provided endless opportunities for my story's protagonists in *Ragtime Dudes at the World's Fair*.

The novelist's goal is to let the reader become absorbed in the story.



Don't draw the reader out of the story by calling attention to your writing technique.

Dialogue Don'ts

“Do you love me?” Marsha asked.

“Don't ask me that,” John replied.

“It's a simple question,” Marsha snapped.

“Without a simple answer,” John sighed.

This outdated method of attributing the speaker in dialogue actually weakens the writing, subconsciously distracting the reader from the importance of what the character is saying.

Dialogue: Just use said

“Do you love me?” Marsha said.

“Don’t ask me that,” John said.

“It’s a simple question,” Marsha said.

“Without a simple answer,” John said.

By just using said, the reader becomes inured to it and treats it like “the,” a word so expected that it doesn’t distract.

Even so, when there are only two characters in a scene you can drop said once the flow of conversation is established, as in the example below.

With two speakers use fewer said

“John, do you love me?” Marsha said.

“Don’t ask me that.”

“It’s a simple question.”

“Without a simple answer.”

Alternate where said appears

Frank said, “Drop your gun and raise your hands.”

“Drop your gun and raise your hands,” Frank said.

“Drop your gun,” Frank said, “and keep your hands where I can see them.”

Frank leveled his shotgun at the bandit. “Drop your gun or I’ll drop you where you stand.”

You can add variety by alternating where said appears, beginning , middle, or end of the sentence.

When you preface dialogue with a physical action (as in the fourth example above) then you can drop said and rely on the character’s action to identify who is speaking.

Show, Don't Tell

“Do you love me or not?” Marsha said.

John studied his shoe tops.

“You owe me the truth!”

He glanced at the door, calculating how many steps it would take him.

She slammed her hand on the kitchen counter.

“Look at me when I’m talking.”

The adage Show don't tell is most often about how you convey a character's emotion.

Beware of the word felt. John felt. Marsha felt. *This* is telling instead of showing.

One way to show emotion is to write about their physical manifestations.

In the above exchange, there is no need to tell the reader out right “John hated confrontation.” His silence communicates it.

John not answering her is a message in itself.

Next, his interior calculation is as effective as any explanation you could write about how he is feeling.

Finally, her physical action of slamming her hand on the counter, speaks volumes about her state of mind.

Resist the Urge to Explain

John stormed out **because** he was fed up.

“Don’t bother coming back!”
Marsha said **angrily**.

“The left side of the boat is port,
the right is starboard.”

“I know that, I’m the Captain.”



Some writers believe the reader won't get it unless they're hit over the head. That's disingenuous to your reader. Search for the word "because." Is what follows explaining what was just shown? Then delete because and the remainder of the sentence and see if it stands alone.

Adverbs (ly) in speaker attributes should be eliminated. The dialogue should be enough to convey the emotion. If it doesn't, rewrite stronger dialogue.

In the final example, when one character tells another character something they both already know as a device for passing didactic information to the reader usually just looks ridiculous such as telling a boat captain which side of a ship is which.

Resist the Urge to Repeat

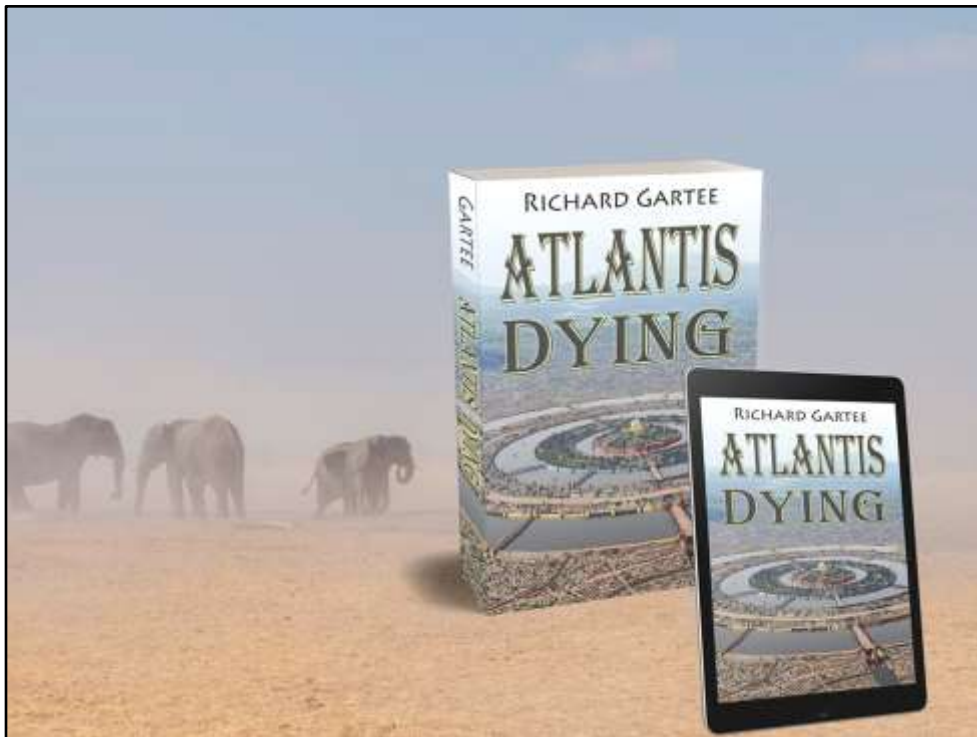
Repeat
Repeat

- Avoid repeating ideas or conversations.
- Don't feel the need to keep driving a point home.
- Readers get it the first time.
- Exception: a person many, many chapters ago may need a slight reintroduction:
 - “You remember my sister's boy, Nash?”

Take It Easy on Your Reader

- Too many characters
- Too many names
- Names too similar
- Breakup long-winded dialogue with physical action or other character's comments
- Even serious novels can use a humorous interlude

Similar to advice on long monologues, when one character must give a long-speech, break it up with minor physical action every few sentences. Cough, Sneeze, take a sip of water, or let another character interrupt with a question or comment.



My novel *Atlantis Dying* is about a serious subject climate change. It is set 5,500 years ago in Atlantis, which means the characters needed ancient sounding names. But when we read, our brain sounds out a word's pronunciation as if talking to ourselves. So I chose character names that sounded ancient, but on the page appear understandable: King Theop, First Consul Darmon, his wife Hathora.

Second, even a serious drama can use an occasional bit of humor.

In a tense scene, Darmon and Hathora are in the outlands looking at canals the barons had dug which are hastening the expanding desert when they are accosted by mercenaries. After Hathora escapes, Darmon gives a threatening speech about the king sending military forces should anything happen to he and his wife.

The thugs turn and flee. Darmon is congratulating him self on his excellent speech, when he turns and sees the reason the men ran off is that Hathora is astride an elephant charging the men. Ending a tense scene with a bit of comic relief.

Third Draft: beta readers

- Merge all your individual chapters into a single manuscript and find 1 or 2 beta readers.
- Give them your story and ask for comments on specific areas. Put a page of questions at the end.
- After they've read it, weigh the beta readers' comments, revise, cut, or add scenes.
- You can send any new chapters or scenes to your pod for review. But be sure to tell them where in the story the new section fits.

Joining a Pod is highly recommended, but one thing the pod doesn't do well, is see the book as a whole. That's where Beta readers come in. WAG has a Beta reader coordinator who will match your genre with a reader. Find the link on the WAG website.

Take a break

- Put your finished novel aside for two weeks, so you will see it with fresh eyes.
- During the break, use your time to find a professional editor.
- Types of editing:
 - Developmental editing
 - Line editing
 - Copy editing



Developmental Editor

- Reads and offers guidance on a book as it is being written. More common in nonfiction.
- Probably not affordable for indy published novelists.

Line Editing

- Line editors subtly massage the language of the manuscript and make suggestions to strengthen the story.
- Line editor may offer a “Diagnostic Report” saving you from hiring a developmental editor.

You can find editors listed on WAG, FWA, and Writer's Digest websites. Check the acknowledgements section of your favorite books where authors often mentions their editor, then Google the editor. Many also work freelance.

A company named The Editorial Department has a stable of freelance editors and will match you with one.

The Diagnostic Report

- The editor may suggest you make further revisions before starting line editing.
 - This may hurt. You thought your baby was perfect.
- But after the dust settles, remember you chose them for their expertise and are paying them a lot of money.
- So, swallow your pride and make changes suggested by your editor or tell them why not.

Copy Editing

- Copy editing is done on manuscripts that are final, that will no longer be rewritten or changed by the author.
- It's meant to correct syntax, grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as maintain internal consistency of style.

Line editors may do some copy editing in the process of line editing, but that's not their mission, and will not substitute for copy editing. However, online tools such as ProWriting Aid or Grammarly may catch most errors.

Read like a reader

- 2 week break is over.
- Print out your finished manuscript or save it as a PDF to read it on a tablet.
- The idea is to read it in a different form from how you've seen it in a word processor.
- Keep notes of things you want to change but resist the urge to fix them until you're through.
- Clean up anything you noted and send manuscript to your editor.

Fourth Draft (editor edits)

- Your editor may edit the entire manuscript in a single pass, but often they do it in batches of a certain number of pages or chapters.
- Work with your editor to get the book you want.
 - Tell them where you want the characters or plot to go in a certain direction and why.

Final and proof

- When all of the editing is finished, put manuscript in a drawer to rest, again.
- Reread it beginning to end, and make minor corrections.
- Have it proofread by someone else.

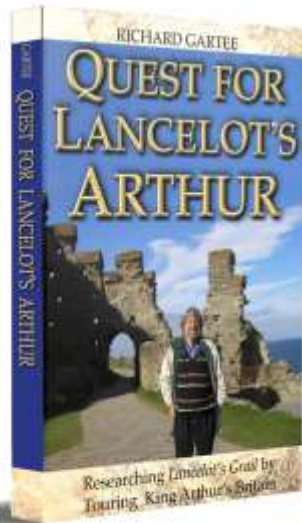
Now, it's ready to go out into the world.

Have the final draft proofread by someone other than yourself. You are too familiar and will overlook things.

If you are submitting to an agent or publisher have your manuscript proofed before you submit it.

If you are self-publishing, then I recommend you wait until after it is typeset so the proofreader sees it exactly as it will appear in print and can catch typesetting artifacts such as misplaced hyphenation or poor word-wrap.

These Tips Apply to Nonfiction, too



- Structure
- Voice
- Pacing
- Setting
- Humor
- even Dialogue

Although we have used example from novels, most of these tips apply to nonfiction as well.... even dialogue? Yes. Use of dialogue in memoirs can liven up a book. Here is the opening of my nonfiction travel memoir, *Quest for Lancelot's Arthur*:

“What is the purpose of your visit?” asked the immigration officer, a diminutive woman in a navy-blue uniform who spoke with a thick brogue.

I was standing in the airport terminal in Glasgow, Scotland, on my way to England to research background information for my novel, *Lancelot's Grail*. I didn't want to use the word “work” because saying work to an immigration officer anywhere in the world raises a whole set of issues you don't want to get into.

“Well, I'm interested in King Arthur. I'm going to tour around Britain.”

“But why did you come *here*?”

I looked at her, completely befuddled. “Because this is where the plane landed?”

www.gartee.com to learn more



Recommended resources

[Self-editing for Fiction Writers](#), Renni Browne & Dave King

[Characters and Viewpoint](#), Orson Scot Card

[Description and Setting](#), Ron Rozelle

[How to Write Best-selling Fiction](#) (audio book), James Bell

[Effective Editing How to Take Your Writing to the Next Level](#)
(audio book), Molly McCowan

[The Hero With a Thousand Faces](#), Joseph Campbell

[ProWriting Aid](#) or [Grammarly](#) (online editing tools)

[Writer's Digest](#) many genre specific books

[AutoCrit](#) (recommended by an attendee)