

# OUTLINING WORKSHOP: (The Organics of Outlining)

## SUMMARY By Ellen Byron

### IMPORTANT NOTE: USE WHAT WORKS FOR YOU! IGNORE WHAT DOESN'T!

*Dame Agatha said there are 5 Ws and an H: Who, what, where, when, why... and how*

1. Building Blocks – remember the image and how it relates to dramatic tension. Each “block” (*chapter*) advances the plot, subplot, or emotional world of the characters.
  - a. Another structure for an analogy - think of a wave and the tension of it building until it crashes – and how this cycle continually repeats itself.
2. Write a “logline” for your idea. You can make it a couple of lines.
3. Ask yourself, “What Happens Next?” Repeatedly asking and answering this question will keep moving your story forward, with “what happens next” leading to “and then...”
4. Look for discoveries and obstacles.
5. Choose a b-story (subplot). Write it down in a line or two: beginning, middle, end.
6. Create a list of suspects, what they’re hiding, and their relationship to each other.
7. Figure out the “why” – motive. (Note: you may discover this as you’re outlining.)
8. Write a 1-2-page synopsis. Take the logline and step it out by asking yourself, “What happens next?”
9. Create Document #1 – “NOTES ON (Project name)”
  - a. includes all the following:
    - i. Characters who will be in the book, existing and new
    - ii. Suspects – means, motive, opportunity.
    - iii. Attitudes towards each other
    - iv. Who wants what from whom?
    - v. A secret about each of them that either informs their character or the story.
  - b. Ongoing:
    - i. Research
    - ii. Add lines, notes, ideas.
    - iii. subplots

10. Blow out synopsis to build your story by doing a Beat Sheet.
  - a. Lay out all the plot points you can think of for your main story.
  - b. Lay out brief plot points for subplots.

11. Create Document #2 –title it “CHAPTER OUTLINE for....”

This will be what I call your “fluid outline.” Why? when you’re writing, you’ll discover what’s missing; what works; what doesn’t. I’ve added subplots, new plot points, and new characters as I write a draft.

12. Start turning your Beat Sheet into chapters, incorporating notes, dialogue, subplots, etc. from document #1. Grow each chapter by asking what happens next? What’s the next obstacle? What’s the next discovery or surprise? End each chapter on a hook to the next chapter – an “uh oh,” a question, a character’s internal conflict. My outline is usually 30-40 pages, but it’s totally rough, full of unfinished sentences, snippets of dialogue, and even story points with question marks.
13. When this “fluid outline” is done, save it as a copy titled “----- Cutting (or original) Outline.” Sometimes I simply print out the chapter outline and work off a hard copy. But sometimes I’ll cut and past the chapter notes into my draft, work off them, then delete any detritus. My cutting outline shrinks with each chapter I write. (NOTE: I generally end up with three documents. 1) my notes doc. 2) My cutting/original outline. 3) My working outline.)
14. Start writing your draft. You’ll discover new thing as you go, hence the organics of it. Chapter breaks and timing may change, hence “fluid” outline. Go with it – but “recalibrate.” Look ahead and if the changes affect future developments adjust them. Do the same in reverse. Think of GPS and how it constantly recalibrates based on traffic or a turn you make – but it still gets you to your destination.

### ADVICE

1. Think “yes and” instead of “yes but.”
2. Don’t be a prisoner of your outline.
3. Think of your outline as a first draft.
4. If you can, avoid the term “shitty” first draft. For me, it’s like the term gives me permission not to work as hard. But that’s just me.
5. Write for 15 minutes a day, if you get stuck.
6. Buy Jess Lourey’s book, REWRITE YOUR LIFE.
7. Do your best to avoid shmuck bait.
8. Do something mindless to open your mind. And...

9. Think of an outline as a To Do List (thanks, Tucson SinC chapter!)
10. Some writers pants a few chapters, then outline what's coming next. Others reverse engineer, pantsing a draft, then creating an outline from what they wrote to identify what's missing. If you're torn between processes, those are other ways to go.

## **MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL...**

**There's no right or wrong. There's only what works for you.**