

## ByteNoise

### Tips for writing good fiction

*Warning:* This article contains spoilers for The Matrix, Being John Malkovich and Kissing Jessica Stein in the form of examples of premises.

It's true that everyone should develop their own unique writing style. It's also true that what works for some people won't work for others. For example, some people find it easiest to work out stepsheets before they write a single word of their first draft, whereas others like to write aimlessly before working out which story they've written, and then rewriting it appropriately.

However, there are some things that are generally accepted to make some stories more interesting than others. For example, a story with conflict will undoubtedly work better than one without.

Out of all the fiction writing guides I've read, these are the points that most of their authors agree on:

**Premise** Your story should prove something, and only one thing. To take some examples from films, it might prove that Neo is The One (as The Matrix did), that trying to have an affair will make Craig Schwartz suffer for eternity (as Being John Malkovich did), or that Jessica Stein and Helen Cooper aren't ideal partners (as Kissing Jessica Stein did). The premise doesn't need to be a universal truth, only something true for your story's characters.

**Cause and effect** Everything that happens in your story should result in something else happening. If it's not related to the plot or character growth, cut it out. This is why knowing your story's premise before you start can help, if that's what works for you.

Conversely, everything that happens in your story should be the result of something else happening. Important characters should only be introduced at the very beginning, what they get up to should seem logical based on what they've already done, and anything resembling a *deus ex machina* should be avoided at all costs.

**Slowly rising conflict** The story should start off with an interesting predicament, which escalates with stronger conflicts and bigger obstacles in the protagonist's path as the story progresses. The story should continue to progress this way until the tension becomes unbearable and the climax ensues.

**A growing protagonist** Your protagonist should be quite different by the end of the story. The events of the story should have affected them on a deep level. If they haven't, are you sure the story is worth telling?

**Use of many senses** Although people mainly imagine things happening by picturing them, it can improve your story to show the [sounds](#), smells, temperatures and various other stimuli of the scene that's in your head. This helps to get the scene across to the reader in a more complete form, drawing them further into your world. Thankfully, you don't need to worry about this until you start to rewrite the story, but make sure you remember it before you consider your story finished.

There's a lot that I've missed out, such as creating believable characters, setting the tone from the very beginning, and

making sure that no other protagonist would have been suitable for the story, but that's what fully fledged books are for. This writeup is just to set you off in the (hopefully) right direction.

Disclaimer: these are just ideas I've read in books. I'm not a published author, and I could even have misinterpreted what I've read. If you're an aspiring writer, take what I've said with a pinch of salt.

## References:

- James N. Frey: [How to Write a Damn Good Novel](#)
- Ronald B. Tobias: Twenty Master Plots and How to Build Them
- (I'd also recommend Nancy Kress: Beginnings, Middles and Ends)

(OK, some people are wondering why I've given examples from screenplays rather than novels. The reason is simply that it's much more likely that you've seen the same Hollywood films that I have, whereas I haven't read many books that are considered classics or otherwise very popular. With the exception of using many senses, the ideas presented here should work in short stories, novels, screenplays or any other form of fiction. However, as I said earlier, this is just a basic guide and shouldn't be taken as authoritative in any way.)