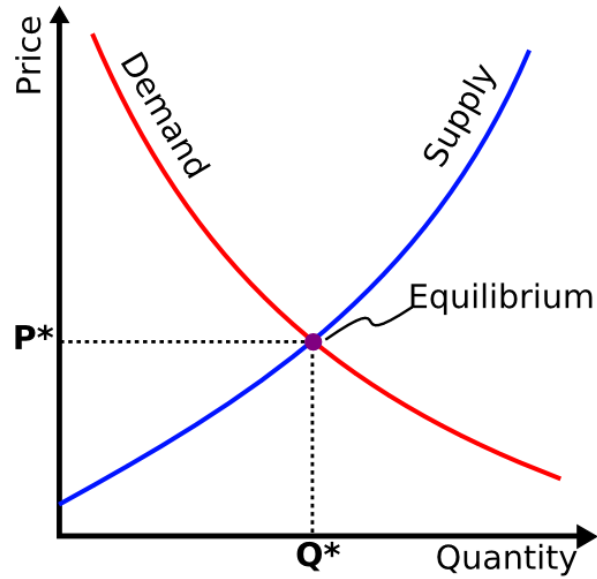
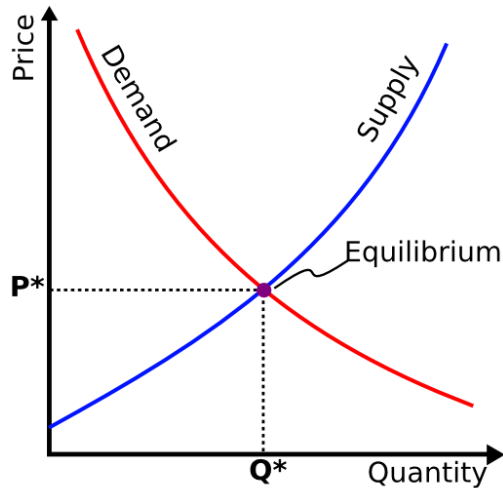


# ECONOMY



A very important report by

Annalisa Parent



When it comes to the economy, what you've got to understand is the relationship between supply and demand. The price of any commodity is determined by the relationship between its supply and its demand.

Whenever there is a surplus of a good...

Uh, wait. Wrong book.

When we talk about economy in *writing*, what we're really talking about is being economical.

We often equate economical with penny-pinching, and to be sure that is one means of economy.

When we use the term in writing, however, we mean: the opposite of being profligate or wasteful.

You are *not* the prodigal son, here. You're the son who stayed home.

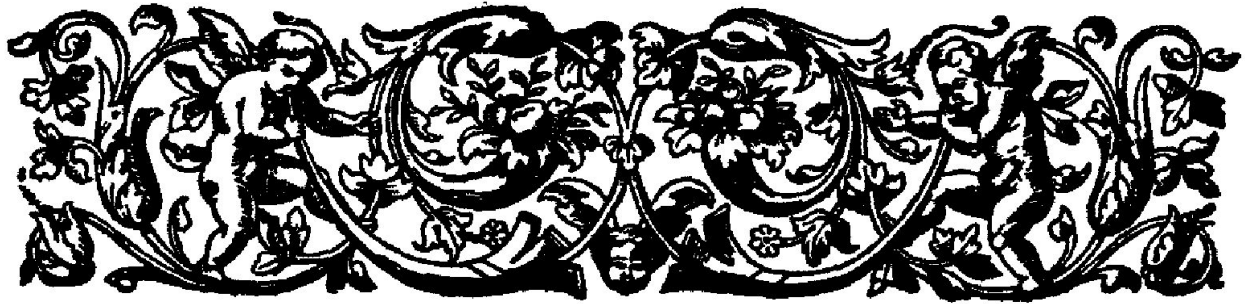
(I'll take Biblical References for \$2000, Alex.)

In other words, don't be wasteful.

*Great, got it. What aren't we wasting, again?*

When one is economical in writing, one uses one's space wisely, like in a poem, or as if this is your last piece of paper and bit of ink to get your message out into the world. An economical writer is one who does not overuse words, who does not use two words when one will do.

**SECRET SAUCE:** Use as few words as possible to convey your idea.



## AUTHOR PROFILE

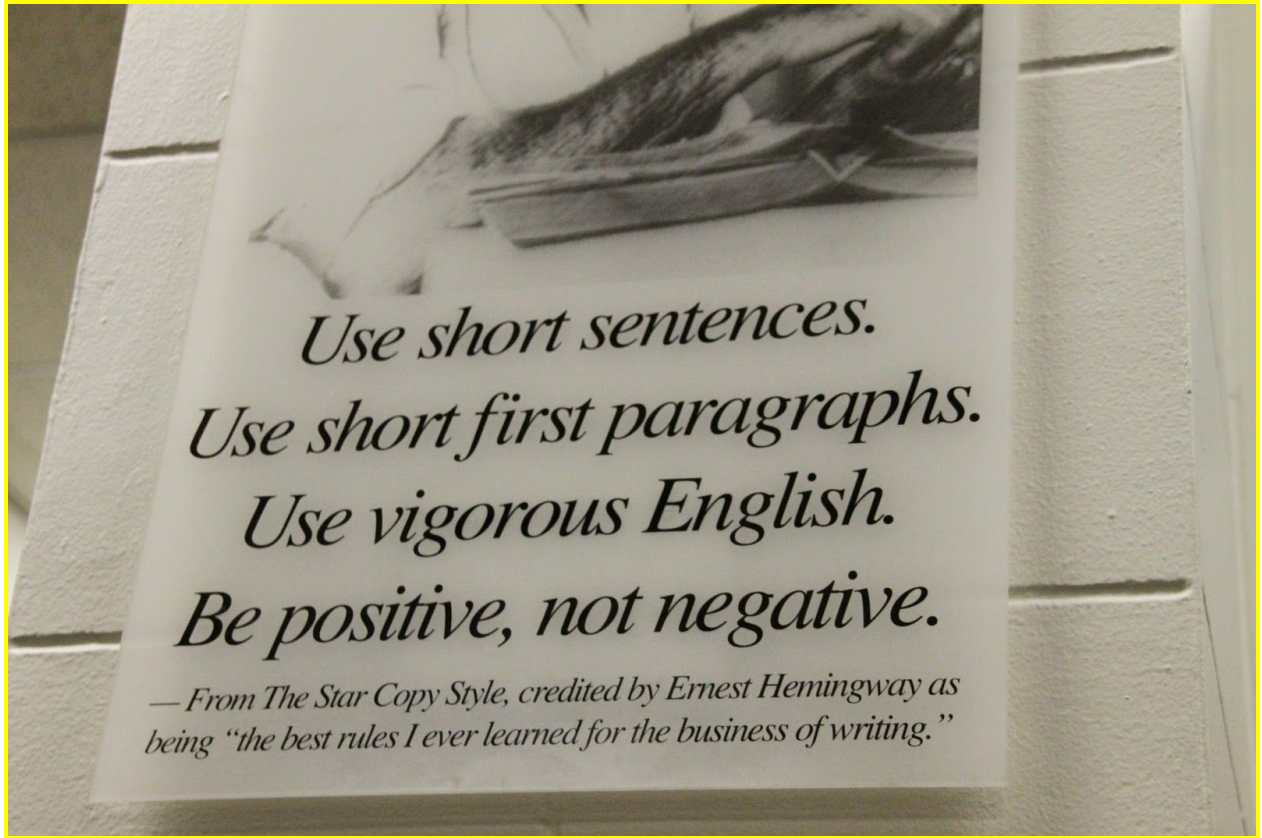
Let's take a look at Hemingway for a moment. Here is an author who is known for his brevity.

He never uses two words when one will do. He could be the poster child of economy.

How did he learn this important skill?

Journalism.

Before he was a famous author, Hemingway was a reporter at the Kansas City Star.



*Photo I took while touring the Kansas City Star as a Reynolds Fellow*

Back in the days before digital news, print newspapers only had so much space--they were limited by the size of the paper, see?

Journalists write in a special form called the inverted pyramid; this form ranks information by importance, placing what is most important at the beginning of an article, and least important last. Part of the reason for this organization is reader interest. (Most newspaper readers don't read the full article.) However, it's also in the interest of space. Back in the day the editor would start chopping off from the bottom up. This system meant that the most essential information would always be printed.

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Hemingway, like so many others who had newspapers as a training ground, learned to economize. There was only so much space; he needed to use it wisely.

Today with our word processing programs and online articles, these considerations are less important. In general, we can take as much room as we need--and so people

### FILL THE SPACE

The art of being concise has been lost in many ways due to these new publishing media, and this shift has led to an increase in sloppy writing.

Sloppy writing loses clarity and your message gets lost in too many words.



Don't want to be a Sloppy Joe?

Write as if you've got limited space, and see how your writing improves.

## ***On Being a Character***

*Wait, didn't we already see that section?*

I told you you were smart. Stick with me.

### ***The Rainbow bridge from balance to economy***

In the previous section we talked about the importance of *balance* in character types. Closely related: what elements the plot needs to move it forward. This is where *economy* comes in.

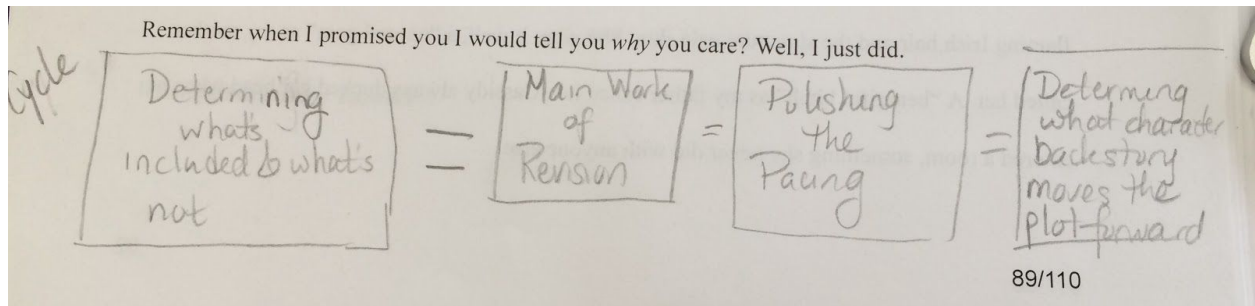
SECRET SAUCE: When it comes to characters, we only tell the backstory that moves the plot forward.

As authors we need to know the whole life story of our characters; we need to understand why they do what they do, who they are, where they came from, and where they're headed. But in the revision, when we're considering pacing, we only include what moves the plot forward.

Considering economy in the revision of character arcs means considering what's included and what's not.

The work of what's included and what's not is the main work of revision, which for pantsers is all about polishing the pacing. Which, in turn, is why this aspect of character belongs in the pacing section, not the character section.

Aaaaah. Vortex. Here's a little something for you visual learners:



Remember when I promised you I would tell you *why* you care? Well, I just did. It's all about...

### ***Being economical with your time***

When you're drafting a character, you might know whether she is flat or round. Being a pantser, though, you already know that anything and everything may change in the drafting--including who's round and who's flat.



No sense hiring a bathroom remodel in the Pantone color of the year, only to discover you hate it and you're out 20K. *What?*



In other words, don't get too attached to an idea before you've fully explored it. There are aspects of character which are great to consider *once you know the characters* very, very well, once you've set them in motion, and seen what they do, where they go. Waiting to consider some of these aspects until the revision stage can help you to avoid getting lost in the rabbit hole of sitting around thinking about the characters and making them fit somewhere.

Many a writer has gotten lost in the trap of *thinking* about writing in the drafting stages, rather than writing in an order, with a method, that will allow the answers to those questions unfold when they need to.

### ***What Makes a Page Turner?***

REMEMBER: The reader turns pages, and continues to turn pages in the interest of answering a question.

What kind of question?

Details about setting? No.

Character appearance? No.

We can use these *symbolically* to move the plot forward, but no one cares about the fabric on the sofa *unless* it serves a purpose. (Red is boring. Blood-stained is intriguing.)

The kind of questions we're talking about here are about the central desires of your characters and of the plot.

Every single word should serve the purpose of answering a question. Yes, this idea is similar to the one presented in the introduction to the pacing section, with one important distinction: I'm going to tell you about the exception to the rule. And then I am going to tell you why the exception isn't an exception at all.

The envelope, please. And the exception is...comedy.

***ENTER Professor Parent [STAGE RIGHT]***

Comedy can be used well and effectively to break up the tension in your piece, to give your reader a break, as it were.

Shakespeare was on to this trick, and all of his tragedies contain comic moments. (Notice I said tragedies there. Yes, all of his *tragedies* include comedy. Isn't that inconsistent? Read on.)

Let's consider Hamlet. The Prince has gone mad, and has been sent to England. Upon his return to Denmark, he finds a grave digger, digging a grave. (What else would he be doing?)

Word play and avoiding the question in a "who's on first" fashion ensues.

(I have a strong preference for the BBC's 2009 adaptation starring David Tennant. If you're looking to revisit this classic, which I strongly recommend, I advise checking out this version.)

This scene does *a lot*, but for the sake of economy, I'm going to focus on three major roles this scene plays in the larger context of the play.

LAERTES (Aside) Me thinkest there may have been some punny type insider jokes in that sentence.

First, the scene provides comic relief for the reader. Why does Shakespeare do that? In other words: why is that even worth noting? At this point in the play, we've just come from some

really heavy material, and we're about to launch into a sharp spike that will lead to the climax. This scene acts like a buffer between two emotionally intense parts of the play.

Shakespeare has in mind the reader experience, and gives the reader a break before getting even more intense than the play has been up until this point. It's a clever little nest to prepare the reader, like a calm before the storm. He has balanced emotional intensity with a little pit stop at the Comedy Club.

Secondly, in Yorick (one of the dead guys whose skull is tossed from the grave during the digging), we have a symbol that serves the overall themes of the play. Yorick is the court jester on whose back Hamlet rode as a child.

In this moment, Hamlet comes to terms with the ephemeral nature of life. Hamlet looks at this skull and reflects on the lips he used to kiss, lips that are no longer there.

This realization helps him to come to terms with the question he's been grappling with for the entire play. (No, not "to be or not to be," silly: whether or not to kill his uncle for avenge his father's death.)

Here we have an excellent example of economy: Shakespeare uses Hamlet's confrontation with a skull not only as comic relief to balance emotional intensity, *but* he also uses it as a turning point in the action, small though it may be.

Shakespeare has killed two partridges with one pebble (or something like that) in this moment, by having this one scene serve multiple purposes. That concept lies at the heart of economy.

But, wait, there's more.

Why does Shakespeare have staying power? Because we are deeply in love with Middle English? No. Because his stories, though over 500 years old, still strike a chord in what it means to be human. They ring with authenticity.

Want proof? By having the jester serve as the catalyst for the climax of the play--the murder, the main tragedy--he hints at the enigmatic intertwining of comedy and tragedy. Who cares? Isn't this all English Professor-y stuff?

Not really. Shakespeare has gotten to the essential nature to what it is to be human. Have you ever seen someone laugh at a funeral? Or cry while laughing? This quandary, this seeming disparity, is at the core of the human experience, and by digging into it, Shakespeare has made the reader feel some of the ambiguous angst that has plagued Hamlet throughout the play.

This is A+++ level stuff from a writing standpoint. (Obviously, it's Shakespeare.) But it's something to aspire to as writers, to try on, and work through.

Every scene, every moment, every word should help to move *something* along: theme, plot, character arc--and if you can kill two or more roadrunners with one rock? Bonus points.

### ***Economy in the exposition***

Ok, so we all want to be the next Shakespeare, and we're probably not going to get there (At least, I'm not) but here are a few tips you can try to get yourself a little closer to touching the threads on the hem of the robe of greatness.

Pacing is important throughout your novel, but if I had to choose a time when it's most important, I would say the exposition.

The exposition is an area where many beginning writers fall flat. Why?

It's usually because these writers wait too long to give us the problem. The temptation for beginning writers is to give too much back story in the exposition. You want to tell us how the two best friends met and what color hair they have and the description of the bench that they're sitting on in the park in the city. You get the idea.

Remember the secret sauce about backstory? Well, here's the skinny: you, the author, need to know your characters' entire histories. You need to know your characters as well as, or better

than, your best friends. But at the end of the day, there is very little that you need to share with your reader.

Finding this balance is one of the main challenges of pacing. Yes, we need to understand your characters. No, we don't need an entire FBI file on them.

The same goes for setting and any kind of physical description. We need to know we're in the woods. We probably don't need the 411 on tree bark.

SECRET SAUCE: If the detail doesn't help to move the story along, don't include it.

The problem for us pansters is that, for the most part, we're not going to know what helps to move the story along until we're able to see the story. And we can't see the story until we've finished at least one draft. (If you're anything like me it might take you several drafts to decide on the final plot arc.)

You can't make detail decisions until you've completed the final plot arc.

Again, that is why I say that pacing happens in the revision phase.

Here's an example. A beginning writer might be tempted to start a story off telling us how a couple met, how they fell in love, and how their relationship eventually went sour when one of them committed some egregious error. (leaving underwear on the floor perhaps?) We might get

a lead up to who's at fault, with multiple perspectives on how the characters got to where they are now.

Why is it tempting for beginning writers to start a novel this way? Easy. That's how we, as writers, start a story. When we first meet our characters and begin to get to know them, we see their origins, their physicality. Like meeting a new person, we start to get to know them slowly over time.

However--and this is very important--you're not going to write your characters' story in real time. Your job as an author is to be a *storyteller*. Storytellers are engaging. Storytellers mesmerize us. Storytellers could keep you enthralled for an hour telling you about some guy who couldn't open the mayonnaise jar.

***Can you show us an example, please?***

Here's a moment where a *storyteller* might start the story:

“I want a divorce,” David said. He flicked the turn signal to turn into our drive, like any other Sunday afternoon.

“What?” I asked. I ran my hands over the soft, blue silk of my best church dress.

I tried to focus on his words as he put the car in park, but all I could think of was the trunk full of groceries, and that the ice cream must be melting by now.



Now, I just wrote that on the fly. Nobody's calling me on the phone offering me prize money and round trip tickets to Stockholm--nor will they--but it does illustrate a couple of tricks you can implement in your writing to help move the story forward *and* include the appropriate balance of backstory.

### 1) **Include backstory in scene**

This couple has been married long enough to have a routine, to own a suburban home (presumably) Do we need to know how long they've been married or what prompted the desire for divorce? Maybe, but not *now*.

See? That's pacing. We release the information *slowly*, over time. We're *building*.

### 2) **Include characterization in scene**

He drives in this relationship. His behavior is alpha; her behavior is submissive. We can tell a lot about their relationship by the limited action we've seen so far.

She wears silk to church. Do you have an idea of the kind of person who wears silk vs., say, jeans and a Tshirt? We don't need to say she's stuffy or prissy or repressed, but we can guess some of those things by what she's wearing.

Can we verify our suspicions? No. But that mystery *also* compels us to keep reading.

### 3) **Start the scene *in media res***

*in media res* means in the middle of the action. I didn't lead up with backstory. I just got to the heart of the matter. This won't work all the time, and it's very easy to overdo--so use it sparingly--but it can be *very* effective when done right.

(If we're making secret sauce, *in media res* is jalepeno--a little bit goes a long way.

Nearly every action film begins *in media res*, usually with some type of action-packed chase scene. Why? It gets your attention. It's an effective hook.

#### **4) Assume your reader is smart enough to fill in the blanks.**

Where does this couple live? Is it a big house or a small house? Is she a brunette or blonde?

*You* probably see all the details. Some writers really, really, *really* want to share, like a five-year-old who can't *wait* to tell you about the frog she's caught.

Play nicely, writer friend.

Take your turn. Give your reader a chance to play too. Your reader has an imagination and wants to use it. If you give away every single detail, you're not giving your reader the chance to join in the fun.

So, assume your reader is smart enough to fill in some of the blanks, and give them the opportunity to do so.

#### **5) Allow some room for your reader to ask questions.**

What kind of a guy asks for a divorce after church? Was there something at church that was the final trigger? Leave some of the tension for the rest of the story. Answer your reader's questions later. That's the purpose of the rest of the chapter, and indeed the rest of the book.

## 6) Use symbols to create tension

Using symbols is one of the most complicated techniques of all, and when a writer *tries* to do it, it often feels forced.

Remember when I said “don’t call yourself a writer if you refuse to be a reader?” Here’s where the reading pays off.

If you’ve ever tried to learn a second language, you know that reading in that second language is difficult *but* that over time, it is one of the most powerful tools for developing fluency.

Not only are you learning vocabulary, but you’re learning syntax: how words go together.

When you read (in general, no need to read in a second language, but hey, whatever floats your boat.), you become fluent in literary devices, you no longer have to think about them or try to use them, they become part of your lexicon.

Here’s what I was going for in this lil snippet:

### **The husband puts the car in park**

He puts a stop to things.

Lame? Too much of a stretch? Too English-y?

Consider this: I wrote the piece. I could have had him start the car. They could have been leaving for church. Consider the implications of *that* juxtaposition. He’s starting something as he’s asking for another thing to end? *Totally* different feeling.

I’m thinking he’s having an affair.

Let's look at another symbol:



**The ice cream is melting**

Just like their relationship, it's fading away, slipping out of her fingers. It's out of her reach. She can't stop it.

At least for now. We don't know what happens when she opens the car door--for the ice cream *or* for her marriage. There's potential there, and that potential creates tension.

(So now it's a symbol *and* a tension builder. Remember the 2 birds thing?)

Further, the groceries indicate a future (at least of eating together) that they no longer have. The ice cream is part of those groceries, of that future, and it's melting away, slowly, in the car that's heating up under a blazing sun, a car that's stagnated in the driveway of their marriage...

Ok, that got melodramatic fast. My funny business up there ^^ is an excellent illustration of why less is more (See Clarity), why the first image did better work than the mumbo jumbo I just wrote.

### **A note about the process.**

When I wrote that passage I wasn't thinking of the elements I would use. I just set out to write a paragraph that would address elements a storyteller carries around. Once I finished, I analyzed what I had done and laid it out for you so you could do it. (Don't you hate those books where they show you awesome examples, and then give you no clue why it's so awesome or how to do it on your own?)

I'm not telling you about my process so you will send me fan mail to tell me how amazing I am; I am telling you that so you can see that *you can do it too*.

Years and years of reading widely have increased my knowledge base. I can draw from it, just as any reader-*cum*-writer can.

I wouldn't be writing this book and doing the work I do if I didn't believe that the writing process can be taught, and I don't want this moment to escape with the illusion that I am some kind of word magician. There's no magic here, only lots of years of trying and failing, and reading--and those are easily acquired if you're willing to put in the effort.

## Your turn

Look at the list of elements I pulled from the air. Choose a scene from your novel, and rewrite it, implementing some of these techniques.

### *The start of something beautiful*

Remember in the plotting section how I talked about using the plot arc for the novel as a whole, for each character, for each chapter, and for each scene? Well, every time you have a new beginning, the start of a new plot arc, you're going to implement some of these tricks I've just used. Now don't always use the same ones. You need to mix it up, but jumping straight to the problem, getting into tension as quickly as possible is important.

You want to get your readers invested in your story quickly. We want them to start asking questions right away.

#### **Recipe:** FOR SUCCESS:

Grab one of your favorite books off the shelf.

Read the first line of every chapter.

What do they all have in common?

Attention grabbers.  
(If the book is worth its salt!)




What do those attention grabbers do, in other words, how do they achieve the goal of getting the reader invested? How can you use that same technique (note that I am not asking you to plagiarize, but model) in your own writing?

**Recipe:** FOR SUCCESS:

So, I just wrote a scene on the fly about two characters I'd never met before.

Think about a moment you've been having a hard time with, especially one where you felt like you were bogged down in backstory.

Rewrite that scene or moment, and start by dropping your characters into scene with no introduction.



Let me know how it works for you in the next Q & A session.



## *Remember the Weaving?*

I've compared writing to a lot of things in this book, but one of the major threads is weaving or knitting. (Get it? Threads? I crack myself up. Ok, moving on.)



Why is a story called a yarn?

Well, in this day in age, few of us make clothing from yarn out of necessity (it's more of a hobby), and even fewer of us make our own yarn.

Therefore it's reasonable for most of us that the process of spinning yarn is a lost art.



The Fort at #4 in Charlestown, NH

Annalisa's hometown

It just so happens I grew up in a small town with a Colonial past and a living museum, so let me digress. If you've ever played with yarn, you noticed it's made up of smaller threads. These are spun on a spinning wheel, or can be hand spun. To make yarn, one twirls and twirls threads together until they stick together in a cohesive whole. Sounds like story-telling, right? Many threads, woven together, one cohesive whole.

That's great. We've figured out how to make yarn, and weave, and knit, and we can watch countless youtube videos if that's what we want to get into. But the pattern or recipe for writing is far less straightforward. That doesn't mean that having some kind of a visual or a map isn't helpful; it just means there isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all.

For me as a novelist the interweaving of the plot lines is the most difficult part to conceptualize, the part where my head can spin, and I want to give up. I struggled for a long time before I came up with a system that works for me.

Here is the challenge as I saw it: You've got the protagonist's character arc, and the plot arc, and the thematic arc, and the Second Main character's arc (dynamic), and the antagonist's arc (dynamic) and and and. How does a writer balance all of that? Figure out when things happen?

We need these multiple story arcs to create the kind of complexity that keeps the reader turning pages. Anytime that we fold the conflict in on itself, we're creating a page turner. (Not only do the characters have internal conflict, but they're in conflict with each other.)

The caution here, though, is not to create so much chaos that it's confusing and overwhelming. But how do you do that?

SECRET SAUCE: The revision stage is a good time to revisit character wants and think about how they support the advancement of the plot.

One of the things that makes revision hard is that we're juggling all these character Arcs with plot arcs *and* trying to get the pacing down

## ***Climb Every Mountain***

If you can think about different stories, all of their plot diagrams look different.

In order to keep pacing going, each arc needs to have a separate moment of climax.

When I wrote my first novel, I had a hard time, during the drafting phase, keeping track of what happens where, and whether or not the tension was a consistent ebb and flow throughout.

I am a visual person, so I needed a way to represent this for myself. I struggled for a long time, and did lots of wonky things, like draw all over the entire wall of my office (*that* was fun to erase).

Eventually I came up with a system that worked for me. I am going to share it and the process of putting it together with you in video form in this module. If my system works for you, great. Let it be a starting point. If you want to create your own system, great. If you have the kind of amazing brain that can store all of your character arcs in one place, great. Do that.

The important thing here is that you are monitoring the level of tension in your manuscript, and tracking it. Systems and diagrams and *whatever* are not the objective here. Clarity in the author's mind that the novel is intact is.

### ***How to End a Chapter***

I spoke before about beginnings, and grabbing your reader, well the ending is just as important.

Each chapter and scene works through a major conflict, moves the narrative forward, and then presents a new problem.

When I was a kid, my brother and I thought the song “There’s a hole in the bucket” by Harry Belafonte was hilarious.” Poor Henry.

There’s a hole in the bucket, Dear Liza  
So fix it Dear Henry  
With What shall I fix it?  
A stick.

The stick is too long (problem)  
Cut it (solution)  
With what shall I cut it? (problem)  
An ax (solution)  
The ax is dull (problem)  
Sharpen it (solution)

The song goes on and on like this in a pattern of problem/solution. This structure is a good example for your scenes and chapters. Will Henry ever fix the bucket? Let's keep turning pages and see. What makes us turn pages? There's a new problem.

While we're talking about kid stuff, the picture book series that started with "If you give a mouse a cookie" is entirely based on this premise. Just keep presenting problems in quick succession.

Now, a picture book is 32 pages. You haven't got much room for long narrative, but the takeaway for you is to always have in view what the next problem will be, and present it before the scene or chapter is over.

Again, take a look at a favorite book. How does the author end a chapter, and what can you take away from this experience?

The trick of pacing is to get all of these elements in without coming across as formulaic. This is not a checklist or plug and play. It's story.

***Make it complicated. Don't make it complicated.***

A word about conflicting headings. One element that makes writing feel difficult is conflicting advice. When you feel overwhelmed by this, remember the cooking analogy in the mindset section. It's a standard tradition to have turkey and stuffing at thanksgiving, right? But I bet your turkey, and the neighbor's turkey look and taste and smell a little different. You still both made turkey--different recipe, different spices, different technique.

Remember that writing is like cooking. Once you know how to make a dish, you can vary it, substitute, try different spices. But many of us the first time around with a new dish, stick closely to the recipe and only vary it later.

When it comes to writing, follow the rules to start, but use your instincts that you get from rich reading as well. As you grow as a writer, you'll be able to improvise more, know which rules to follow and which rules to break, and when to do which.