

TEACHING ADVANCED STORY WRITING
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Writing a fictional story based on the advanced student writer's personal experiences seems to logically parallel the simplified and truncated writing requirements for *Content Standards, California Department of Education*. It reads, in part:

Students write narratives in which they relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience. Describe setting, characters, and events in coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea.

Students who are beyond fourth grade can also benefit from writing a solid story with a beginning, middle and ending with necessary elements under each of those three parts. From children's stories to comics to the Bible and the great classics, all well-told stories have three parts with certain elements under each section. The story begins by setting up an **OBJECTIVE** or goal. The middle shows various **OBSTACLES** that prevent reaching the goal. The ending tells how it turned out, or the **OUTCOME**.

So the 3 parts of a story are: Beginning (Objective), the Middle (Obstacles) and Ending (Outcome). This is the structure which holds all other elements or ingredients in place.

With this foundation, let's define a story as being about a **sympathetic main character** with **strong motivation**, who encounters a **problem leading to various Obstacles which have to be cleared to reach the goal and resolve the problem in the Outcome**.

Before starting to write, the author should consider the story elements to be included under each of the three anchor points, as:

- 1. CONCEPT OR IDEA:** In a simple sentence of a few words, what's this story about?
- 2. CHARACTER:** Who is the motivated main character for whom readers will care?
- 3. SITUATION:** What changed situation presents a problem for this character?
- 4. OBJECTIVE:** What goal must the main character reach in order to resolve the problem?
- 5. MOTIVE:** What strong reason drives the character to risk everything to achieve the goal?
- 6. OBSTACLES:** Who and/or what prevents the character from reaching the objective?
- 7. STORY QUESTION:** Will the main character achieve his/her goal?
- 8. OUTCOME:** How does it end, and does it answer the story question either yes or no?
- 9. THEME:** What life lesson does the character learn, or what does the story say about life?

BEGINNING: OBJECTIVE, OR WHAT DOES THE MAIN CHARACTER WANT?

1. SITUATION: Set up an opening set of circumstances that are changed by introducing an intriguing main character with action. Promptly hit him with a story problem leading to an **OBJECTIVE** with **Obstacles** standing in the way of the resolving the problem in the **Outcome**. Feed in brief, bite-size descriptions of the characters, locale and sensory details that will help readers visualize the events as they happen.

2. MOTIVE: Give the main character a strong reason to go for the objective.

3. CONFLICT: The heart of a story is conflict, including person versus person, person vs. self or person vs. environment. The latter includes everything not in the first two. Try for all three kinds of conflict in a story.

4. ELEMENTS: Besides those listed above (description, place, etc) Include dangers or risk, plus time, stakes, character flaws, theme, etc.

5. STORY QUESTION: Ask: "Will the main character achieve his/her goal?" Avoid a negative answer.

6. DECISION: A story's beginning ends when the focal character chooses to go for the goal in spite of obstacles. This decision provides a smooth transition to the middle of the story.

MIDDLE: OBSTACLES OR WHAT PREVENTS REACHING THE OBJECTIVE?

1. The middle begins with the main character taking the first step to achieve the goal and encounters various **OBSTACLES**, including an adversary. The initial effort fails.

2. The main character tries again in spite of complications that increase suspense about the outcome. This second effort may seem about to succeed, but it eventually fails, resulting in a still worse situation. Complications, trial and failure can continue to fill the word or length requirement for the narrative.

3. The middle of a story ends with a crisis where an unexpected development (plot point) makes it seem impossible for the character to reach the objective. Writers call this a Dark Moment.

ENDING: OUTCOME OR HOW DOES IT TURN OUT?

The ending has three parts:

1. Crisis: In facing disaster, the main character has two choices. One is hard; the other is easy. The character makes the right moral choice and acts on it in a valiant effort to reach the goal.

2. Climax: This high point of the story shows how the main character's final effort is rewarded by clearing the last obstacle.

3. Conclusion: The story ends by showing that the character reached the objective. There are rewards and punishments. The main character is somehow changed because of the story's experience, and he learns some truth or value from which readers can benefit.

For detailed instructions, read
Lee Roddy's "How to Write a Story"
Published by the Institute for Excellence in Writing
Or log on to the author's web site: www.leeroddybooks.com