

Plotting Tips

Not everyone thinks in straight lines. I'm a spatial person. I've directed plays, and I've made sure that 25 people moving on stage at the same time didn't bump into each other. Ideas for stories and scenes come to me higgledy-piggledy, which is why I jump into writing things and then realize I need a plan later.

Other people see their stories or scenes as a steady progression of events. They can picture how their characters are going to move through their story from beginning through middle to the end.

On the next few pages are a couple of story organizers that you might find useful depending on your style of writing.

The first story organizer is what I've called the "brain dump." This is a good one to use when you can see certain scenes in your story clearly but aren't exactly sure in what order they are going to occur.

Starting at the top of the page, write your scene ideas in the boxes on the page. Make sure to leave some blank ones for the parts of the story you don't know yet. And don't worry if you don't have the exact order of the scenes figured out yet. Just write them down so you don't forget your ideas.

Once you have jotted down your scene ideas, take a pencil and connect the blocks with a line in an order that makes sense to you right now. If you change your mind later that's okay—that's why you are using a pencil.

You might have the beginning of the story figured out really well, but aren't too sure about what will happen later. That's okay. Once you start writing your story, new scenes will come to you. Jot them down on the page as you think of them, so they don't get lost. You can connect them later when you start to write that part of the story.

If your story is short, one page might be enough. If you plan to write something bigger, you will need more pages. You can download more here: <http://wrightingwords.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/brain-dump-worksheet.pdf>

Basic Rule of Plotting

While you are working on your story, remember the basic rule of plotting: trouble, trouble, trouble. Your character needs to have problems to overcome. Readers like to hang out with characters who get in trouble and struggle out of it, and then get in more trouble. The story planner on page 28 reminds you to keep trouble in mind while you write your story. Here's a link so you can download and print more copies: <http://wriotingwords.wordpress.com/character-sketch-template/story-planner/>

Story Planning

The story planner also reminds you of the basic pattern of a good story. You need a short introduction and then something has to happen to cause a problem for your main character. Sometimes the character is in trouble right at the beginning of the story. Chapter 9 discusses various methods for getting your story off to a good start.

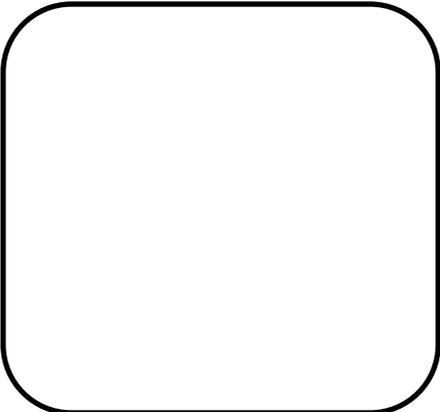
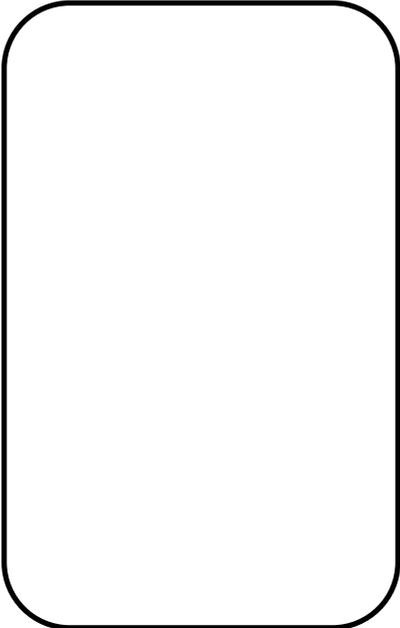
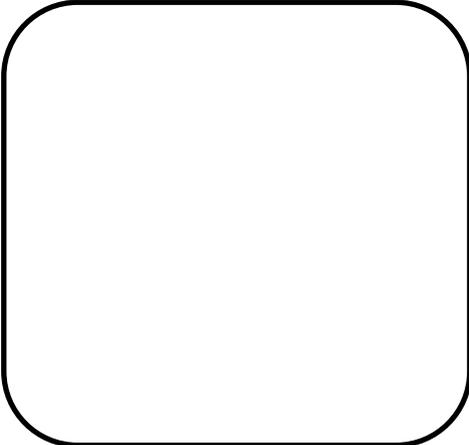
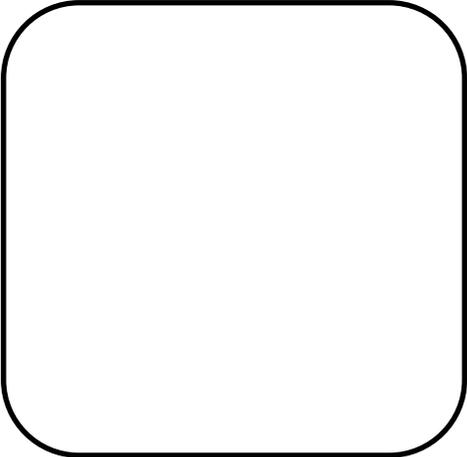
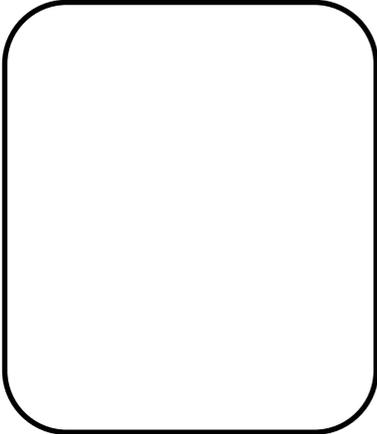
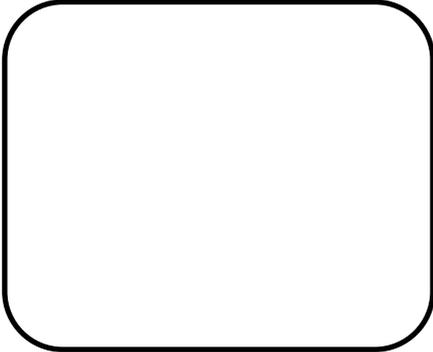
Once your character has a problem to solve, it's a good idea to make things a little worse. Make it hard for the character to solve the problem. Think about how solving one problem can lead to a bigger problem.

Just before the end you need an exciting moment when everything is at risk for your character. This doesn't necessarily mean that your character has to find herself trapped in a cage of wild tigers to make things exciting. She might have overcome a lot of obstacles and finally find herself facing the last big one—making the field hockey flick that wins the game, singing solo in front of an audience, standing up to a bully, telling her father that she lied.

Whatever happens here needs to be important. It needs to be the one event that shows what the character has learned throughout the rest of the story. After this event, the character's world returns to normal—except for one thing. The character has learned something from all his or her struggles that will make a difference to how he or she handles what happens next in life.

In the next chapter, I'm going to introduce you to a great plotting device that works for bigger projects.

BRAIN DUMP WORKSHEET



Story Planner

Main Characters	Setting
The Beginning of the story	The Main Character (MC) has a problem
The MC has more trouble	... and more trouble
MC solves the problem—the most exciting part of the story	The story ends—The MC learns something, others are helped