

Beginnings

A Day in the Life of (15 minutes)

Today we will look at ways to start a novel and get this show on the road.

We'll need a volunteer or two to tell the story of their day so far.

- We are all going to pretend that our volunteers' goal throughout the day has been to make it to this gathering to learn about novel writing.
- We'll think of some sort of an antagonist from their day and some supporting characters.
- Even if we have to make it up, we'll make sure their day has an inciting incident and a climax!
- We'll mark out the events of our volunteers' day on the **plot rollercoaster**.

In remembering your own day, do you sometimes jump around?

Many people don't even start at the beginning. Real life has this funny thing about it where you always try to start from the beginning, but when you tell a story you can start wherever you want!

Where Does It Begin? (25 minutes)

You can:

- Start at the beginning.*

Stories can start at the set-up, before anything has happened. Stories like this often begin with some phrase like 'once upon a time,' or 'long ago,' or a description of the protagonist going about his/her/its normal life.

- Start at your inciting incident.*

When a story starts at the inciting incident, we first meet the protagonist experiencing that event that sets the ball rolling for the story. Then the author will go back and describe what led up to the incident.

- Start in medias res (in the middle of things).*

This is also the pattern for the story starting with the climax, falling action, or resolution. We call those kinds of beginnings in media res, meaning 'in the middle of things' in Latin. When you start here, you throw a whole lot of information at the reader as though they were familiar with the story, then you jump backwards in time to explain. Think of movies that start when the villain's sword is raised over the hero's head and then the scene cuts to a time when the hero was at his desk and it says 'three years earlier' at the bottom of the screen.

- Start at the end.*

The final way you can start a novel is at the end. This is tricky, since you can't give all the details away. You can tell the reader how things end up, but leave enough mystery for them to keep reading.

Recall the beginning of a favorite novel. Can you identify which type of beginning the author used and how this "set up" the plot for the rest of the book?

What are some examples of each type of beginning from novels you have read?

Where Does it Begin? (20 minutes)

Now let's try to start the story of our volunteers' days from different parts of the plot.

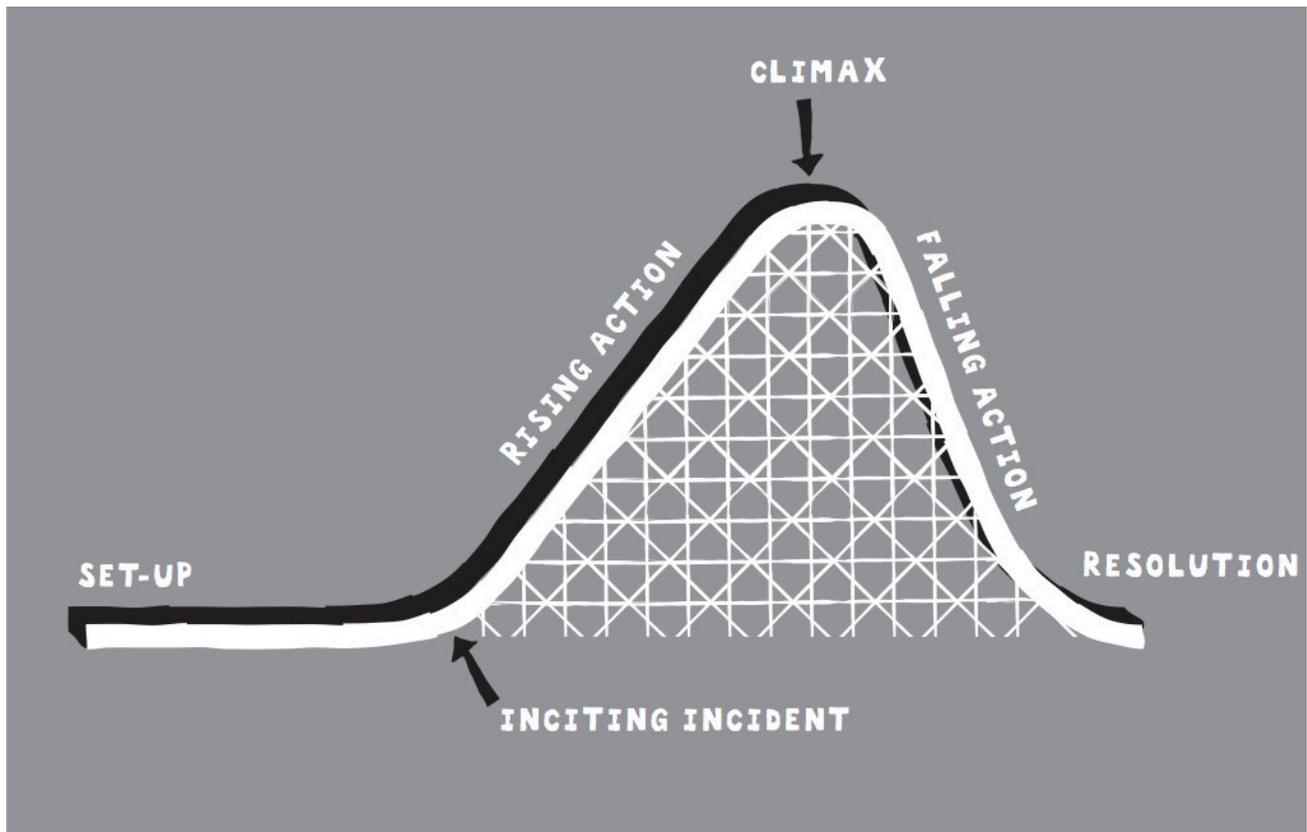
Write the first line or two of the novel of our volunteers' days according to each of the four beginning strategies.

How would each type of beginning impact the way the rest of the novel would have to be written? If you start the novel *in media res*, for example, you will have to decide whether to proceed chronologically to the climax next or to flash back to the start of the story before moving on to the climax.

Outlining Your Plot

Now that you've created some exciting conflict for your novel, you probably have an idea of what is going to happen in your book this November. You may know what kind of journey your protagonist will undertake, and you know what will stand in his or her way. Now it's time to take the next step and map out how everything is going to happen.

Writing an entire novel from beginning to end may seem impossible, but once you have a plan, it is not as hard as you think. Trust us. Most stories have the same structure, and break down into the same six sections that make up a plot. See the diagram below.



This diagram may look familiar to you. It is most commonly in the shape of an inverted checkmark, but we think a plot rollercoaster sounds much more fun than a checkmark, so we're going with that.

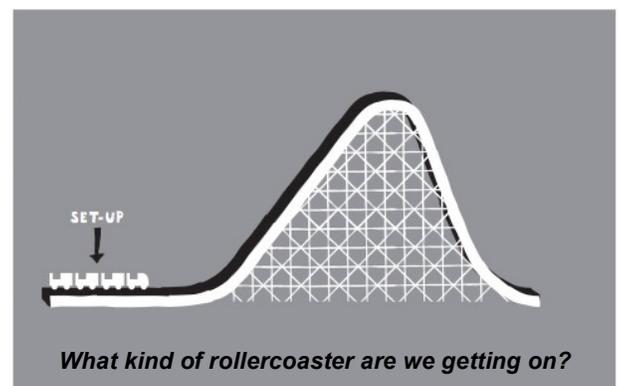
Even if this is stuff you already know from English class, carefully read all the sections below before you move on to map out your own plot.

The Set-Up

Though some novels begin with an “inciting incident”—which you will read about in just a second—many of them start by telling the reader a little bit about the characters, the setting, and the conflict before jumping into the action. Just like you'd want to know what kind of rollercoaster you're getting on before waiting in line, a reader wants to know what kind of novel he or she is about to read before committing time to it.

Here is an example of a story's set-up:

Boris is in his bedroom playing guitar and eating frosted strawberry Pop-Tarts. His hot-pink Mohawk bobs up and down as he plays and jumps from side to side. He knocks over his Coke by mistake, adding to the litter on the floor in his messy room. His walls are covered with rock posters, and his floor is covered with guitar magazines and how-to books, pedals, and various cords and connectors.



Outlining Your Plot

His mom, Wilma, walks into his room with a plate of Pop-Tarts. She dodges him as he swings his guitar behind his back, and continues to play.

“Showoff,” Wilma says playfully.

“Mom, I’m so over it!” Boris shouts over his amp.

Wilma turns his amp off. “Over what?” she says. “What does that even mean?”

“I am bored with everything.” Boris pushes some dirty clothes off his bed and sits down.

“I don’t understand you at all, little man,” Wilma says, handing Boris the plate of pastries. “You have every guitar and guitar gadget in the world. What else do you need?”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me ‘little man’?”

“I’m way too old to be sitting in my bedroom like a loser.” Boris shoves a Pop-Tart in his mouth and talks with his mouth full. “I want to be in a band. I want to travel the world . . .”

“I’ve been telling you, you should check out that new reality TV show, *So You Think You Can Rock?! I hear auditions are coming to Detroit next weekend, and the grand prize is a \$2,000,000 contract with Capitol Records.*”

“Yeah right!” Boris says. “I’d pass out cold in front of an audience that big. And that judge, Billy Van Carnage, is a total jerk. I get nervous even thinking about him.”



Okay, that was a good set up. We have been introduced to the protagonist and story’s main conflicts: Boris wants to join a rock band and travel the world, but he has crippling stage fright (internal conflict). Plus, it has been hinted that Mr. Van Carnage is also going to pose a problem for Boris (external conflict).

The Inciting Incident

The inciting incident launches your protagonist into the adventure whether he or she is ready or not. It can be a pretty scary moment for your main character. Once it happens, there’s no turning back.

Here is the inciting incident that happens in this story:

Boris is looking at a bright pink Stratocaster when he sees Abigail at the counter. Afraid of saying something stupid to her, he ducks behind a drum set, but it’s too late. He’s been spotted.

Abigail walks over and picks up the guitar Boris was just looking at. “Look— it matches your hair perfectly. You have to get it.”

“Yeah. Sounds like a plan.” Boris’ face is slowly turning a shade of pink that matches his hair.

Abigail doesn’t seem to notice. “So guess what?” she asks.

“Um...nothing,” Boris stammers. “I mean, I’m great!...I mean, what?”

Abigail laughs. “My band is trying out for *So You Think You Can Rock?* this weekend.”

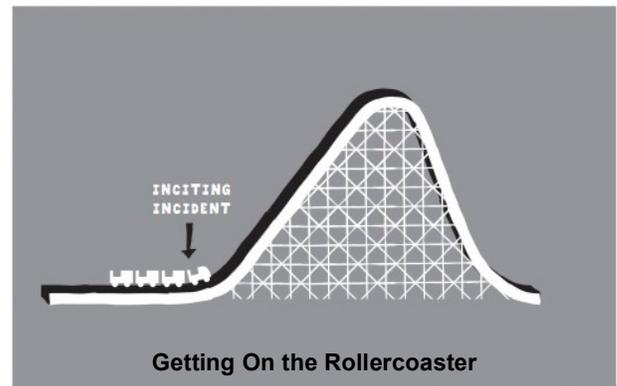
“Wow, you’re so cool,” Boris says. “I mean, that’s so cool. What is your band called?”

“Crude Medicine,” Abigail says, looking a little nervous herself. “I’m glad I ran into you. I’ve heard you’re a pretty awesome lead guitarist and our guy is M.I.A. We’re starting to freak out.”

She pauses and looks around, then looks back at Boris. “If he doesn’t show, would you fill in for the tryout?”

“Um, wow, um, wow. . .” A bead of sweat runs down Boris’ forehead.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes!’” Abigail hugs Boris, catching him totally off guard. “I’ll be at your place at 8 AM sharp Saturday morning. Make sure you know the guitar solo in this song by then.” Abigail hands Boris a burned CD and runs out the door.



If an inciting incident never happened, Boris would more than likely continue to eat breakfast pastries and play guitar alone in his bedroom. This might sound like a pretty fun life to live, but it is not a very fun life to read about.

Outlining Your Plot

Rising Action

This will be the longest section of your novel. You will develop your characters, deepen their relationships with one another, and lay out everything that happens to them before the climax. Think of the rising action as the biggest hill on the rollercoaster—the higher you go, the more suspenseful it gets. The rising action is made up of many events, each of them building to the most exciting part of your story: the climax.

Here is a summary of some of the rising action in this story:

1. Abigail pulls up outside in her beat-up Volkswagen Jetta and Boris—trying not to look back to his room where his guitars, amps, and pedals are looking sad and deserted—says goodbye to his mom. Abigail honks until Boris finally hugs his mom, grabs his vintage Fender Jaguar and runs out the door.
 2. As soon as they get to the auditions, Boris starts to get nervous. He can barely talk to people, but Abigail and the other two band members, Zach (the drummer) and Megan (the bassist), do all the talking. Though Boris is nervous about getting on stage, he finds himself becoming more and more comfortable around Abigail. She is unlike any other girl he has ever met. And she seems to like him.
 3. When it's time for Crude Medicine to get up in front of the judges to play, Boris can hardly see straight. Boris knows the song like the back of his hand, so all he has to worry about is not throwing up or passing out. Boris makes it all the way through the song just fine, and Abigail sings lead and nails it. All the judges are blown away, except one. "Girl lead singers are cliché," Billy Van Carnage says, and then points at Boris. "And I'm pretty sure that this guy will lose his lunch on stage opening night, and that would not be pretty."
- But the rest of the judges outvote him. Crude Medicine is on its way to stardom.
4. Crude Medicine makes it all the way to the final episode and each performance gets easier for Boris. Boris figures they are going to win, and spends less time worrying about impressing the judges and more time daydreaming about all the ways to spend his part of the prize money—a six-month tropical vacation with Abigail, a new house for his mom, or maybe a large donation to a local music school for urban kids. Losing, at this point, is not an option.



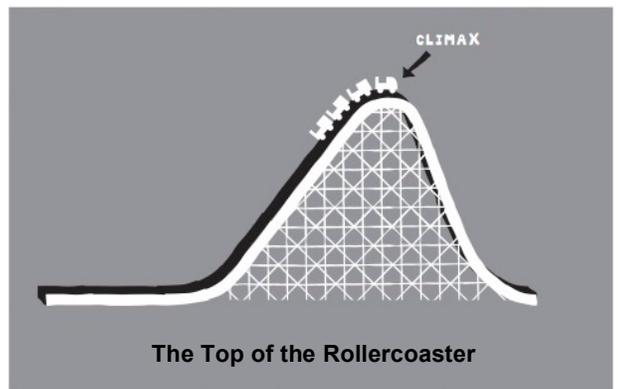
The Climax

This is the “gasp” moment. This is the moment at the very top of the rollercoaster, right before your high-speed drop. This moment doesn't last long, and neither does the climax in your novel. It can be as short as one paragraph—just enough to make your readers hold their breath in suspense and ask, “What's going to happen next?!”

Here is an example of a climax:

The members of Crude Medicine take the stage in their new bright orange jumpsuits and white sunglasses. The audience cheers. Boris and Abigail wave to the crowd, and then Zach counts them in with a few clicks of his drumsticks. As soon as Boris hits the first note on his guitar they know that something is terribly wrong. His guitar sounds like 100 sick cats crying, and the bass doesn't sound much better.

Abigail begins to sing, but her voice sounds horrible. Even the microphone is out of tune. The band members all look around with expressions of total disbelief. An empty Coke can is thrown at Abigail, and the audience starts booing until the show cuts to commercial break.



Outlining Your Plot

The Falling Action

The falling action is what happens next. It is the fast-paced, action-packed part of your novel. You're finally speeding down the tracks of the rollercoaster with your hands in the air! Does the antagonist get defeated? Do the protagonist's dreams finally come true? If so, how?

Here is an example of falling action:

Crude Medicine, humiliated, exits stage right. None of them speak, but they all shoot suspicious glances at one another while the judges make their final decision.

"It's just so strange," Gill says. "They were doing so well."

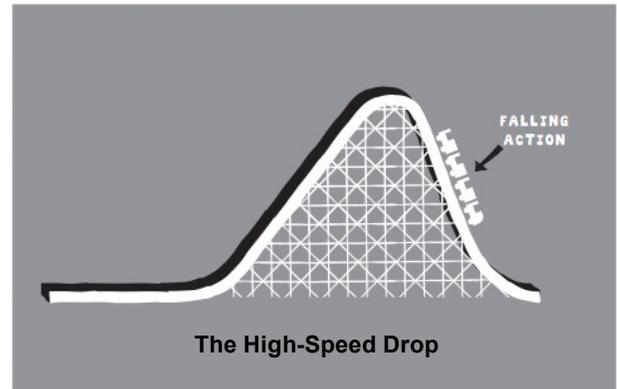
"I told you chicks can't rock," Billy says, but before he can say another word the stage manager runs out to the judges' table with a tape. Kendra pops it in the instant replay player and, lo and behold, it shows Billy messing with the band's equipment before the show.

"I never . . ." Billy begins, but it is too late. Two beefy security guards carry him away.

Gill gets up on stage and the show goes live again.

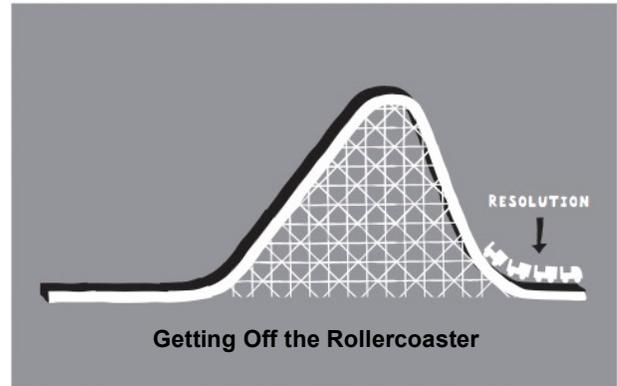
"Sorry about that everyone, looks like Billy Van Carnage messed with Crude Medicine's equipment before they went on, so I would like to invite them back up for an encore."

The band plays, and there is no doubt in anyone's mind that they are the winners of *So You Think You Can Rock!*? 2008.



The Resolution

This is how things work out in the very end, after your protagonist gets (or doesn't get) what he or she wants. It has been said by creative writing sages that your characters—especially your protagonist—must change over the course of the book. This change happens little by little as your character battles his or her fears, defeats villains, and builds friendships and relationships with a cast of amazing characters. All of these adventures will end up changing the way your main character sees the world and his or her place in it. Try to use the final scenes to highlight those changes.



An example of a resolution:

Crude Medicine is playing an arena full of rabid fans. "Hello Detroit!" Boris yells. "It's good to be home!"

He walks over to Abigail, and they high five, then kiss, and the crowd screams.

"Let's rock!" Abigail says.

The band plays, the crowd sings, and Boris looks just as comfortable on stage now as he did less than one year ago rocking out alone in his bedroom.



Outlining Your Plot

Now it's your turn to create your plot. Believe us, if you fill out this worksheet, noveling will be ten times easier in November. You don't have to describe everything that will happen in your novel here. This is just to help you get an idea about what'll happen in the beginning, middle, and end of your book.

1. Describe Your Set-Up

In one to two paragraphs, describe a scene that introduces your characters, your setting, and the main conflicts in your story. You may want to review your Conflict Worksheet before you do this.

2. Describe Your Inciting Incident

In one paragraph, describe the event that causes your protagonist to begin his or her adventure.

3. Describe Some of Your Rising Action:

Write a list of five events that build up to the climax of your novel. Don't forget to include all of your supporting characters!

4. Describe Your Climax:

In one paragraph, describe what will happen in the climax of your novel.

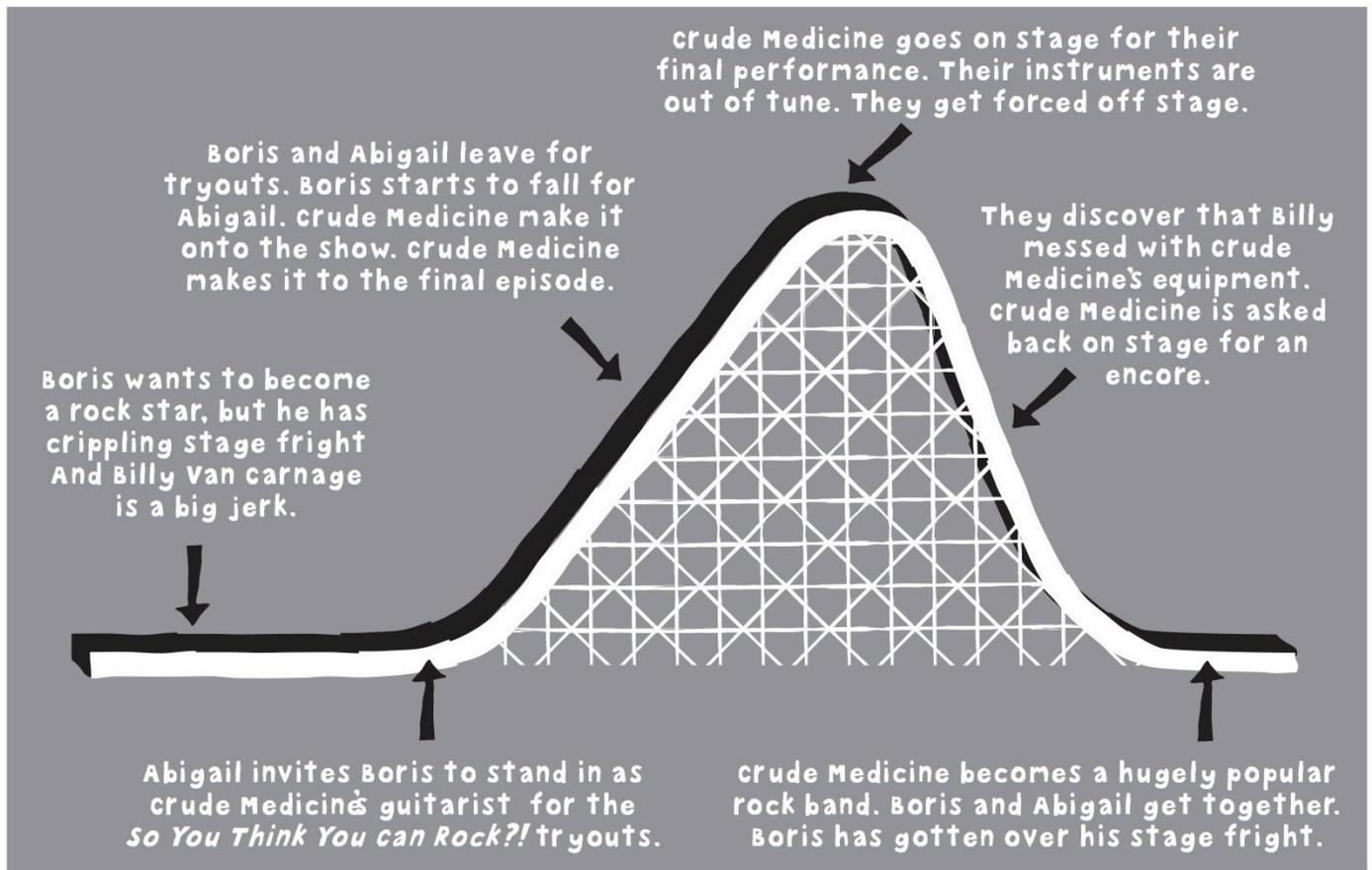
5. Describe Your Falling Action:

In one to two paragraphs, describe what happens after the climax. Does your protagonist get what he or she wants? Does the antagonist get defeated? How?

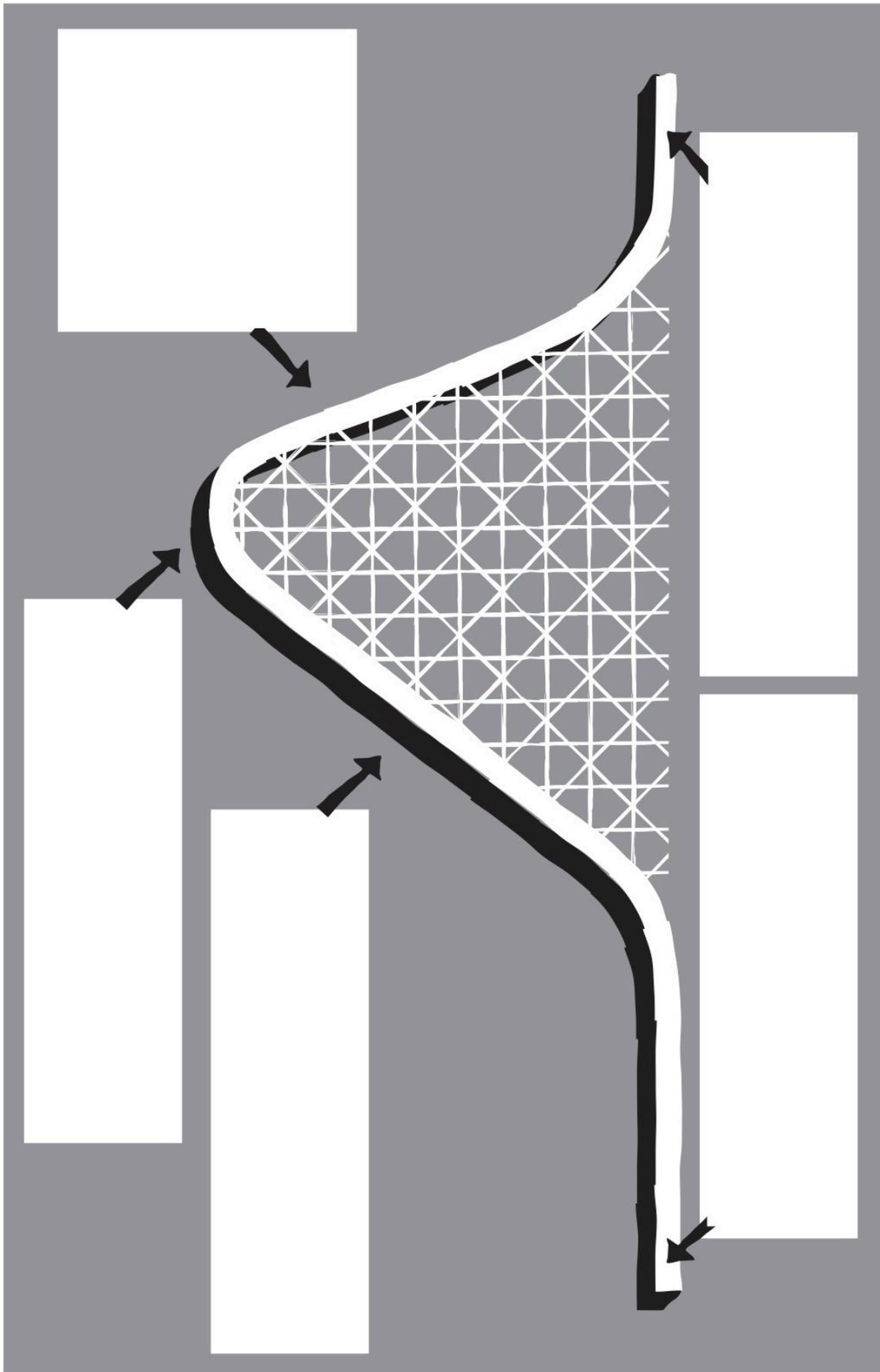
6. Describe Your Resolution:

In one to two paragraphs, describe how everything works out in the very end. Is it a happy ending? Sad? Remember to show how your characters changed because of their journey.

After you've finished your plot outline, you can take it one step further and fill out the blank "Plot Rollercoaster" on the next page. To get an idea of how to use the blank rollercoaster, check out the example we've created below.



Your Plot Rollercoaster



Back to the Beginning

Here you are, ready to start your novel! We know what you're thinking. You're thinking "Okay, I've got my paper, my pencil, my lucky pencil sharpener, 15 packs of gum, a month's supply of energy drinks, and my noveling iPod playlist to get me pumped and ready to go. So now what?"

If you are feeling a little nervous, and the blank page and you are having a staring contest, don't worry! It's perfectly natural. Many novelists will tell you that figuring out the first few lines of a novel is the hardest part. Lucky for you, you're about a million steps ahead of most novelists—you've already got your characters, your plot, your setting, and you know how to write some seriously awesome dialogue! Not bad for a month's work.

Like we said earlier, there are several ways to start your novel. You can begin with the inciting incident or work backwards from the resolution to the beginning. Novels are filled with flashbacks, flash-forwards, and unexpected plot twists. So feel free to begin anywhere you like!

You can:

- Start at the beginning.
- Start at your inciting incident.
- Start *in medias res* (in the middle of things).
- Start at the end.

Back to the Beginning

Start at the Beginning

As you learned in the "Outlining Your Plot" worksheet, the beginning or set-up of your novel needs to introduce your characters and your conflict. Starting a novel at the very beginning is a great way to ease your readers in. So many stories and fairy tales begin this way (Once upon a time...), that readers feel right at home in your story almost immediately.

There once lived a young girl named Judy who spent almost every moment of every day dreaming about owning her very own horse. And to her surprise, on the morning of her fourteenth birthday, a genie popped out of her box of cornflakes. His name was Bob, and he smelled slightly of onions. But that was okay—she was finally going to get the horse she'd always wanted.

Try starting your novel at the beginning. Take out your plot worksheet and review your set-up. Make sure you include your protagonist in your beginning, and you may also want to introduce your main conflict, and a supporting character.

Back to the Beginning

Start with the Inciting Incident

The inciting incident, as you know, is the moment that changes your protagonist's life and launches them into his/her adventure. Starting with this moment sucks your readers into your story, and leaves them wondering what will happen next.

Two days after Judy's fourteenth birthday, she woke up to find that she had turned into a horse. This was not what she wished for. She should've known not to trust a genie with a name like Bob.

Now try and begin with the inciting incident. Go back and review your inciting incident and then write a beginning to your novel that starts with this event.

Back to the Beginning

Start In medias res

In medias res (pronounced en med-ee-ya rez) is Latin for "in the middle of things." It literally means starting your story right smack in the middle of the action, and then filling in the holes—explaining who the characters are and what got them into the mess they're in. A lot of suspense, mystery, and action novels begin *in medias res*. It's a great way to draw readers in and to make sure they stick around for all the details.

Judy stood standing face to face with the four-headed dragon from the planet Gandoria—its eyes spinning with rage and spit pooling at the corners of its hungry mouths. She couldn't help but wonder how she got here, and more importantly, where Bob was.

Start *in medias res*. Check out your rising action, falling action, and climax to see if there are any moments you might want to start with.

Back to the Beginning

Start at the End

This one is a bit tricky, but well worth a try! You basically tell the ending to your readers, but leave just enough mystery to keep them reading. Then, you can either work backwards to reveal just how that ending came about or jump to any other point of your novel and continue.

When it was all over and Judy was finally the queen of that forsaken land, she looked back and knew that it had all been worth it. She had learned to love Bob even if he did smell like onions, and knew that she would never want to be anything else but the horse she had become.

Start at the end. Try to include clues to the story's main conflict so readers get some idea of what the rest of the novel will be about and intrigue them to learn more.

Now you have a bunch of beginnings to start with. Recopy your favorite in your noveling notebook or onto your computer, and write, write, write!

How to Keep Writing During November!

Noveling Burnout usually happens around Week Two or Week Three, but can sometimes come as early as Day Two or Day Three. After the initial excitement of writing a novel wears off, the sudden realization that writing a novel isn't as easy as expected creeps up like a lion on a sleeping zebra. At one point in November, each and every novelist will show symptoms of Noveling Burnout, but the trick is not to let it overtake you. Here are some tips to help keep both spirits and word-counts high!

Be Dramatic.

The more dramatic you are right from the get-go about National Novel Writing Month, the longer that sense of noveling excitement will linger.

- throw a Kick-Off Party to get your spirits going early!
- create a visual chart to keep track of your progress
- buy some inspirational gear and gadgets at store.nanowrimo.org
- sign up for NaNoWriMo online and join our virtual classroom at ywp.nanowrimo.org/node/1631264
- if competition motivates you, challenge a friend to a competition at ywp.nanowrimo.org/invite

Take Advantage of NaNoWriMo's Online Resources.

Regular **pep talks** from well-known YA authors at ywp.nanowrimo.org/pep-talks will inspire even the most burned-out novelists.

Utilize our **Virtual Classroom** at ywp.nanowrimo.org/node/1631264 which is set up to communicate and easily forge noveling connections.

Start exciting discussions in our own dedicated online **Forum** at ywp.nanowrimo.org/node/1631264/classroom/forum

*Parents can ask to be added to the virtual classroom as an Educator and then use **NaNoMail** to send messages to the whole group.*

Take advantage of the full **Writer Community** at ywp.nanowrimo.org/writer-community by browsing the site with a parent to discover how big the NaNoWriMo YWP writing world really is, and in turn, how cool it is to be a part of it.

The **Dare Machine** is a block that appears on the homepage of NaNoWriMo YWP website and features different writing prompts called *Dares*. The machine will "dare" you to add new characters, plot twists, and more to their novels. Dares are a super-fun way to get novel out of a rut and back into action. ywp.nanowrimo.org

Bring in the Muse.

When spirits are really low, it's time to treat yourself like the author that you are.

- Reward yourself with small prizes (like pencils or stickers) when you reach a certain word-count goal.
- Trying writing some where else — go to the park, the library, or just a different room in the house.
- Try changing your writing position — sit on the floor, move to the couch, or stand up!
- Take a walk around the block to give your aching eyes and hands and mind a rest.

Reward yourself in any way you can to make sure that you know just how proud you should be of your hard work!

Check out the sponsor offers for NaNoWriMo YWP winners and NaNoWriMo participants

- CreateSpace** is offering NaNoWriMo YWP winners five free paperback copies of their finished book.
ywp.nanowrimo.org/sponsors
- BookBaby** is offering all NaNoWriMo participants a free copy of *The End. Now what?!*
nanowrimo.org/sponsor-offers
- Bibliocrunch** is offering all NaNoWriMo participants a free copy of *A Self-Publishing Guide for NaNoWriMo Writers: You're Done! Now What?*
nanowrimo.org/sponsor-offers
- Kobo** is offering all NaNoWriMo participants a free copy of Bryan Cohen's *1,000 Creative Writing Prompts, Volume 2*.
nanowrimo.org/sponsor-offers
- NaNoWriMo YWP winners who reach a word count goal of 50,000 words or more are eligible for all the sponsor offers for NaNoWriMo winners at nanowrimo.org/sponsor-offers