

# Writing in the Rainforest

## Lesson One

### Plan Your Story – Story Mapping

*The only way to do this wrong is to not do it at all!*

#### 1. Write the moments

A moment is defined as *a comparatively brief period of time*, and we need to focus on the moments when we write our stories. When the topic is too broad, your writing becomes general, nonspecific, and loses its power. Instead, choose small moments to tell a larger story.

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#### 2. Create a story map

A story map is similar to a roadmap. It pinpoints where you intend to begin your story and traces your plan's path to your destination. Know that it is *only* a plan. Detours happen, and sometimes, we end up at a dead end. This map is just a guide.

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#### 3. Story question/purpose

This is a great way to focus your story because every story answers one or more questions. It's not always easy to figure out the question(s) your story answers, but it is worth the effort.

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#### 4. Summarize your story

If your story is narrowly focused, you should be able to write a one or two-sentence summary of what it is about.

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## 5. Title your story

Always give your story a working title. It makes the piece an entity of its own, makes it credible, legitimizes it. It's called a *working title* because as you write, you might find a better title. A title's primary purpose is to attract attention, get the reader to move from the title to the first line. It should also reflect the content and tone of the story.

### Guidelines

- keep it short, usually no more than five words
- use strong nouns and verbs
- unless you're *really* good at it, try not to be too clever, using puns, take-offs on other story titles, plays on words
- be specific – general titles are often boring

### Three ways to come up with a title:

- **word(s) from the story** – recognition when a reader sees the title within the text
  - **event/activity** – highlight some important event or activity within the story
  - **image from the story** – something concrete that represents the story, an image someone can see, hear, smell, touch, or taste
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## 6. Where to end

Stories, even character sketches, have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it's good to know where you *might* end up once the story is told. I say *might* because a story is a dynamic thing. You may find that it ends in a different way than you expected. Have a plan, but go where the story takes you. A good ending brings resolution, provides a satisfactory end to the story and a sense of closure.

### Two possible types of endings:

- **circle ending** - ending takes the reader back to the beginning
  - **last action taken** - ends with a concluding action or step
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## 7. Where to begin

It's logical to think you should begin at the beginning and tell the story chronologically. Maybe that is the best approach, but don't automatically assume that's where you *should* begin. A good rule is to start the story at its most interesting point.

### Two possible ways to open a story:

- ***in medias res*** – *in the middle* - start in the middle of the story, throw your reader into the center of the action
- **snapshot image** - captures a moment, like a photograph

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## 8. Cast of Characters

The people in our stories are our characters, and in writing memoir, you are a major character. Characters are the vehicles through which our stories are told, so you want to make these people more than just names on a page.

### Ways to characterize people:

- physical/appearance, actions and gestures, ways of speaking, profession/interests/hobbies, disposition, life goals/beliefs/desires
- don't include everything – look for what is unique

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## 9. Setting

Every story happens somewhere. Setting is the container that holds events you're writing about. Life doesn't happen in a black box.

### Three things setting usually includes:

- **physical environment** (country, state, town, house, store, restaurant)
- **time** (year, month, day, season, morning, afternoon, evening)
- **objects** (trees, lakes, tables, lamps, paintings, other people)

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