

# **The Donard Ghosts Guide to Writing**

[www.donardghosts.com](http://www.donardghosts.com)

**The Donard Ghosts Guide to Writing**

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.

All Rights Reserved © 2009 by Donard Ghosts

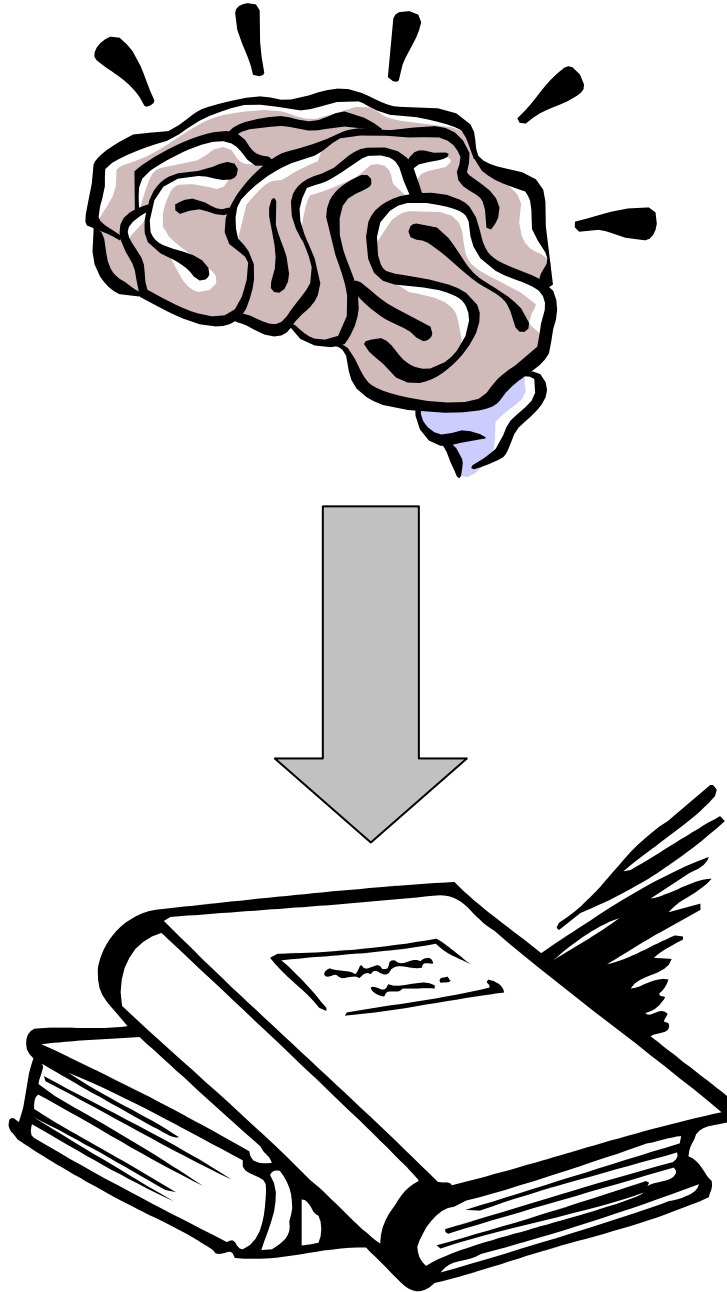
## **Table of Contents**

(**HINT:** Click on a section listed below to go directly to that section.)

Introduction: A Guide to this Guide .....	Page 4
Part One: The Story Idea .....	Page 10
Part Two: The Importance of linkage .....	Page 19
Part Three: Building your main character .....	Page 28
Part Four: Supporting characters .....	Page 40
Part Five: Great beginnings .....	Page 50
Part Six: The Middle .....	Page 57
Part Seven: In conclusion .....	Page 71
Part Eight: After the fact .....	Page 83
Part Nine: Dealing with writer's block .....	Page 86
Templates .....	Page 87

## **Introduction: A guide to this guide**

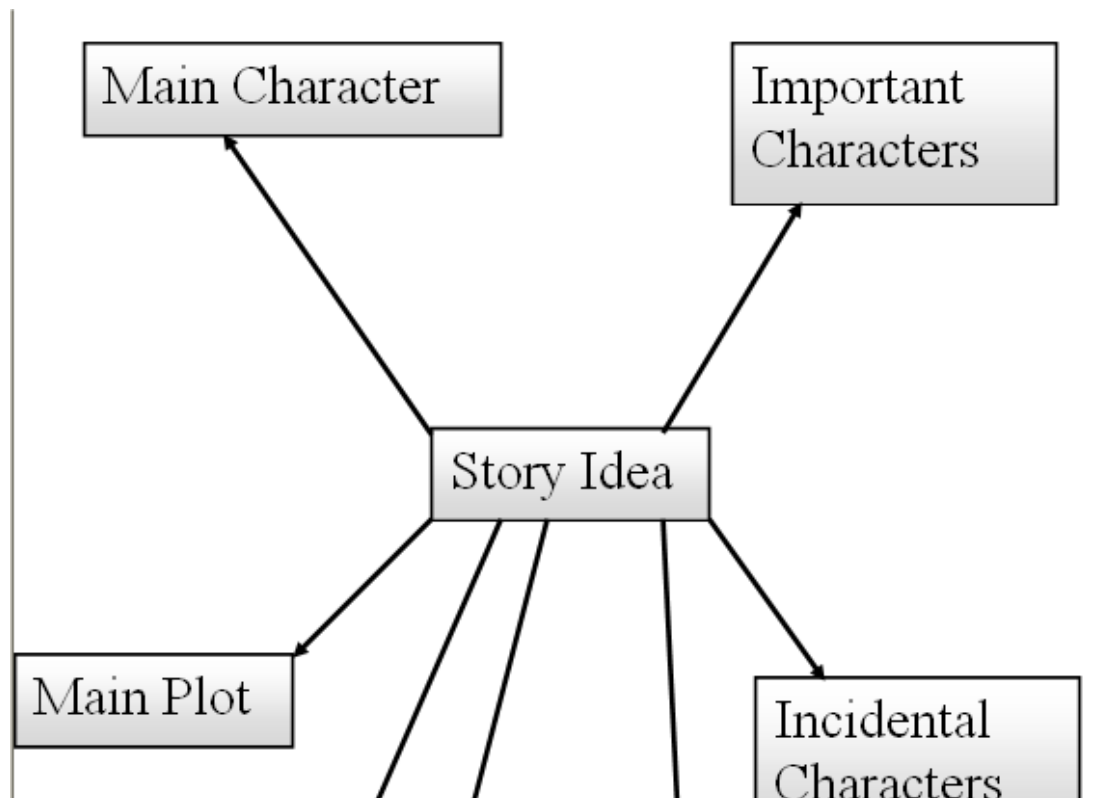
*From idea to finished work... It's a lot easier than you might think!*



As with all realistic how-to guides on writing, this guide is not intended to write your novel/short story for you. Rather, it is intended to provide an easy to follow, helpful and hopefully entertaining run through of the best way to approach the construction and execution of writing a good story. A lot of the advice in this publication is common sense but the way

it is presented is designed to make you think critically about how you organise your ideas and best present these to the world so that your vision makes sense. The approach is based on how the best stories are written and the common mistakes made in other stories.

The guide is designed to provide the best possible advice in as digestible form as is possible, and as well providing examples for each point outlined, there is the opportunity for the reader to try the suggested advice in each section.



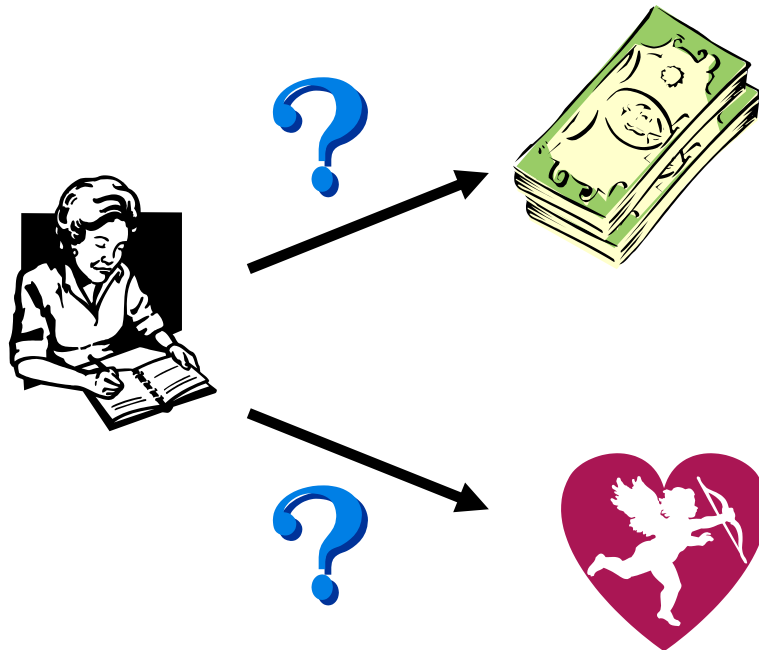
*A sample of one of the template pages*

We recommend that as you go through each of the sections you keep a file of the ideas you are developing which can later be organised and referred to when you eventually sit down to craft your story.



Many guides on writing concentrate wholly, or at least in part, on the motivation a writer has for sitting down to pen a story. This guide has little to say on this particular topic, as we are not concerned here with the why you write, rather, we are more focused on how you write.

The advice often forwarded states that writing for love of the story should be your main objective, and some even go as far as saying that writing for any other reason is doomed to failure. We do not take such a firm stance on the reasons as to why you should wish to write, and indeed believe that motivations such as writing for profit can be more compelling and beneficial to good story writing as the love of writing for its own sake.



In short, don't let your motivation for writing your story temper your enjoyment when you do sit down to write.

Do not feel guilty because you think there are thousands of poverty-ridden writers all over the world suffering for their craft while you are only truly motivated by writing a bestseller and retiring early to a life of luxury.



If you do not know what you want to write about then this guide will not be of much use to you at this stage. Inspiration and how to gain it can be found in other publications.

However, if you are only motivated by writing something which will sell well, then perhaps it would be a good idea to visit your local bookshop and find out which genres are attracting most attention at present. Bestsellers lists found in various newspapers may also prove useful.

With that said, it is also worth mentioning that new writers who do the impossible and write a bestseller, more often than not do not conform to what is in vogue and it is the very fact that they are that little bit different that gets them that all important publicity in the first place.

It is highly unlikely that a novel which is only a slight variation on a theme of other popular works is going to generate enough interest to break into a particular market successfully.

### **The Importance of time.**

The last point we would like to make before we begin is on time. Needless to say, different novels require different amounts of time to write.

Practical factors such as novel length and complexity, as well as the realistic amount of time a writer can spend on their story are all important.

If you intend to write something on the scale of Lord of the Rings you probably will need a little more time than a couple of free weekends to complete your project.

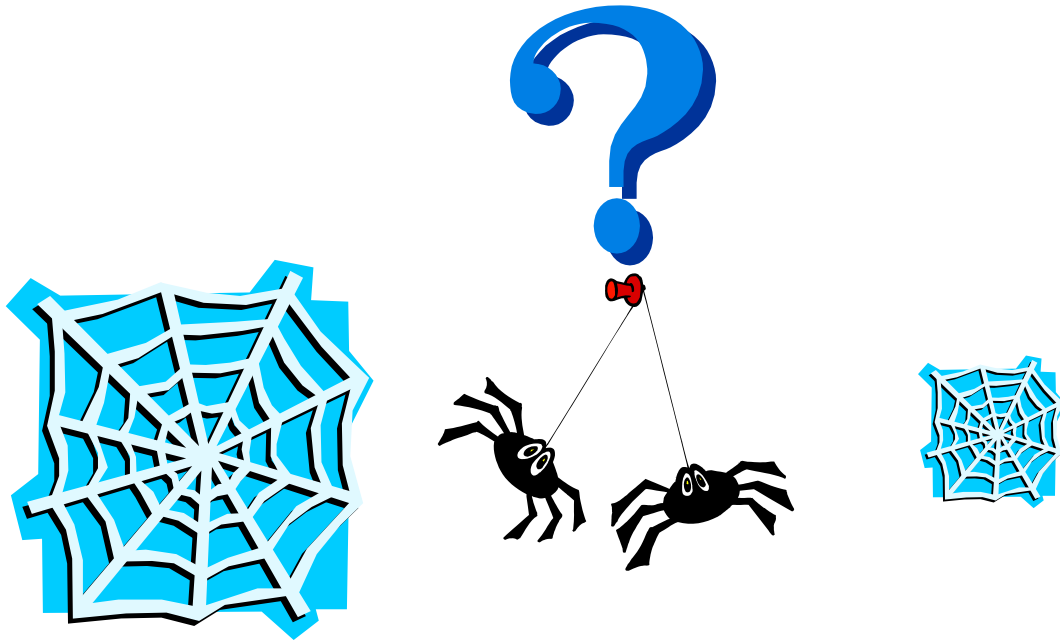


If a small children's book is what you are aiming for then those two free weekends might just do it. The important point is to be realistic about your time and what you want to achieve in this time. It would be nice if you could give up your job and spend a few years writing your epic novel. Unfortunately, this is often not practical.

Even if you have almost finished your story it would not be our advice for you to walk up to your boss and quit your job. Finishing the story is only the first step (and perhaps the easiest step). Only you can decide on the other influences, commitments and responsibilities in your life and how these will dictate the story you write.

**How this guide approaches constructing a story.**

If you consider your story to be like a spider's web, the more intricate it becomes the more beautiful becomes, but the more intricate web needs more time to construct and can be a lot more fragile (there are so many more ways in which things can go wrong).



Some of the material, templates for character development, for example, may be photocopied for future use as long as the material is for personal use and not distributed or resold (copies of the templates are provided at the back of this guide). Such pages will have the following symbol at the bottom of the page:



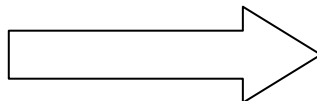
## Part One: The Story Idea

“Write about what you know.” You have heard it time and again, “Write about what you know.” Perhaps not the most helpful piece of advice ever given, especially as by definition it is not possible to write about something you don’t know. After all, you don’t know what you don’t know. It would perhaps be a little more insightful to modify this advice to say “Write about what you know best”, or at the very least “Know what you are writing about.”

So, what if you want to write a high-tension thriller set in a nuclear power plant, centred on a main character who is a highly qualified nuclear technician. Fine perhaps if your job happens to be highly qualified nuclear technician, not so easy if you teach English and the sum total of your nuclear technician experience has been gleaned from the exploits of Homer Simpson.



Does this mean that only people who work within a certain field are the only ones who can write a story set within that occupation? Of course not. If this were the case then ninety-nine percent of all fiction would never have been written, and stories set far in the future in space, for example, would be unheard of.



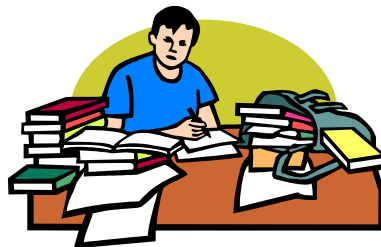
So, how do you apply the rule about writing about what you know when the something that you want to write about falls outside your own experience?



In the case of the thriller involving our nuclear technician friend, the *what you know* isn't the nuts and bolts of the operation of a nuclear power plant and what a nuclear technician does, the *what you know* is the nuclear technician.

Unless your story is going to be a step-by-step guide to the work that a nuclear technician does, then what he does is rather incidental to the story. Your story will focus on the personality, mannerisms etc. of the main character and the situations you decide to put him in. After all, this is your story, and the character will be based on your own experiences, either based wholly, or in part, on individuals you have met or even yourself.

So you see, it really is impossible to write about something that you don't know. If your story needs technical detail to add authenticity, this information can be researched and will become something *you know*, and can therefore write about. The most important aspect to writing any story is having an idea for a story and having the time and ability to turn this idea into a full-length story.



How we go about turning this idea into a full-length story is perhaps more important than writing the story, and it is this process that we are mainly going to focus on.

## **The Basics**

From the time we first picked-up a pen to write a piece of fiction at school we were told that every story has three main parts to it:

**Beginning**

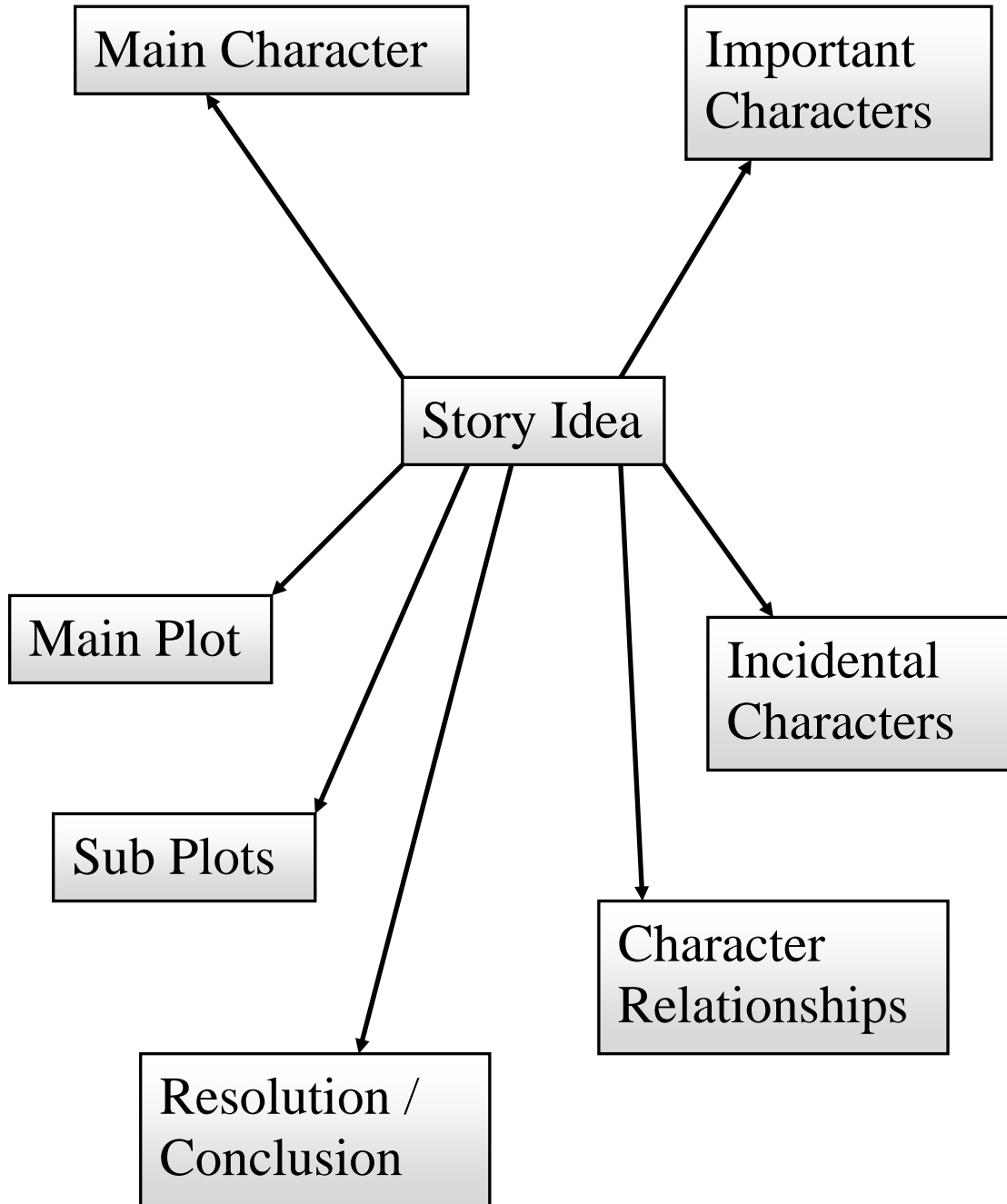
**Middle**

**End**

It should come as no surprise that this fundamental advice is still good. We will look at these three main parts to a story in a lot more detail a little later on.

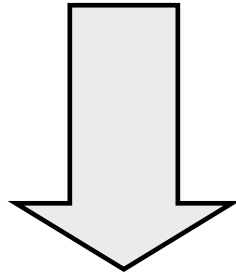
The concept of beginning, middle and end are more important when we actually sit down to write the story, but before that we should spend some time to plan the story. Again, this is a stepwise process and we will look at each of these steps in detail as we go along.

The diagram below gives us an overview of the main elements to a story that we will look at in turn as we go along.



For our hypothetical story what we really need is a plan. This is an overview to get you started and it might go something like this:

**Introduction:** Nuclear technician saves plant from meltdown. He then starts an investigation into the cause of the near-disaster. The plant explodes.



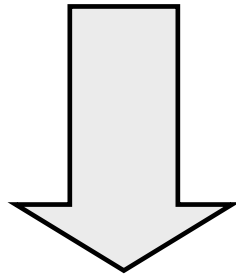
**Main character:**

*Name:* Rick

*Age:* 35

*Occupation:* Nuclear technician

*Personality:* Mild-mannered, inquisitive, thoughtful, heroic, loyal, highly intelligent



**Character 1:**

*Name:* Ann

*Age:* 28

*Relationship to main character:*  
Girlfriend

*Occupation:*  
Teacher

*Personality:*  
Loving etc.

**Character 2:**

*Name:* Daren

Goth

*Age:* 35

*Relationship to main character:*  
Boss

*Personality:*  
Boorish etc.

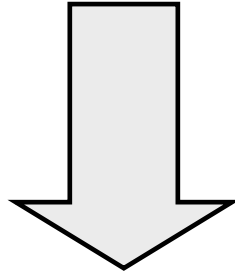
**Character 3:**

*Name:* etc.

*Age:* etc.

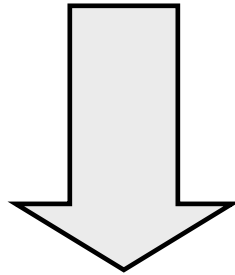
*Occupation:* etc.

*Personality:* etc.



**The Plot:**

After the near meltdown, Rick carries out an investigation against the orders of his supervisor. The more he investigates the more his superiors act against him. He uncovers corruption, etc. and this discovery leads to life and death chase across the country.

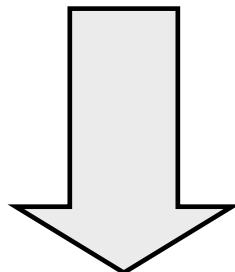


**Sub-plots:**

Ann discovers she is pregnant but Rick is not the father of the child.

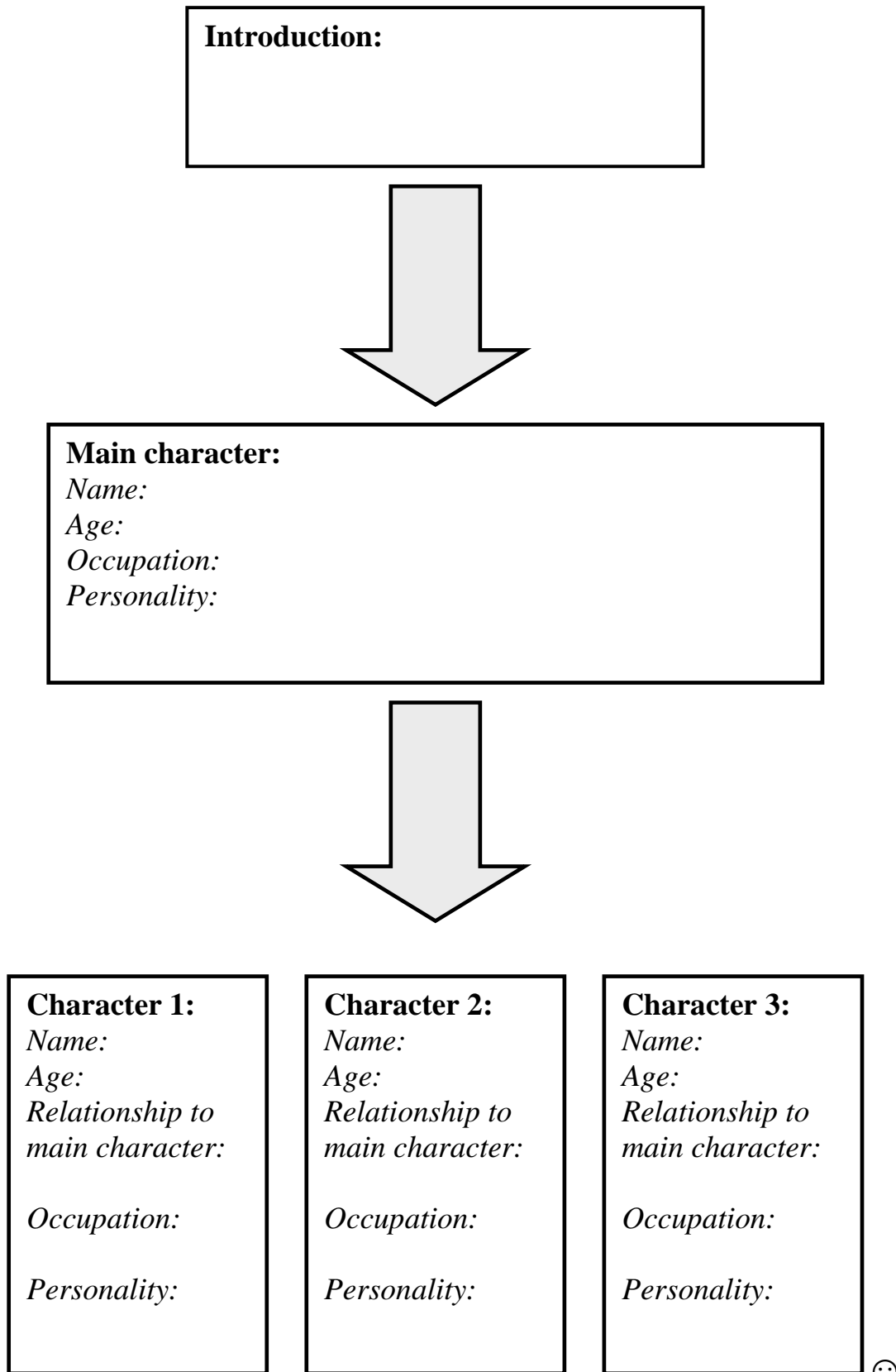
Rick's father becomes ill and Rick wants to see him in hospital.

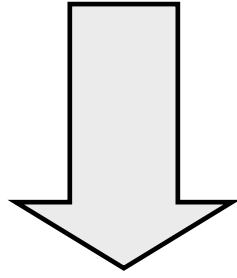
And so on...



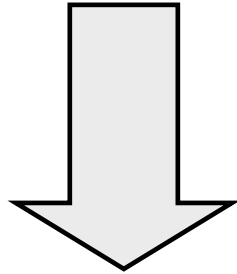
**Conclusion:** Rick wins fight to death with bad guys and he and Ann live happily ever after.

You can use the template below to outline your story.

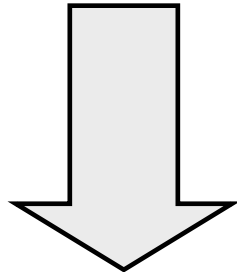




**The Plot:**



**Sub-plots:**



**Conclusion:**



## **Summary**

By the end of Part One you should have started to put together the main elements of your story, in outline.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Story idea
- Main plot
- Subplots
- Main character
- Important characters
- Incidental Characters
- Character Relationships
- Resolution / Conclusion

## **Part Two: The Importance of linkage**

The idea of linkage is a natural and fundamental concept in story writing and it is often overlooked, or poorly managed. Linkage occurs in two main areas within a story. One, how the characters are linked to one another, and two, how the plotlines (see later) are linked and ultimately come together.

Linking the characters is by far the easier of the two to understand as all the main characters naturally have some kind of link, or why else would they be a main character? In some instances a character may be introduced who ambles in the background and who's story is told by way of comparison, but in this case the character has a linkage to the main characters by virtue of their role in providing a contrast.

For example, a novel about the lives of rich Hollywood actors might contrast their lives with a character who is poor and whose circumstances highlight just how obscene and self-preoccupied the main characters are. For example, one of the actors might throw a tantrum in a restaurant because their expensive soup is a little cold, then in the next scene we cut to our unfortunate character who is picking his food out of a trash can.

Such contrasting scenes may occur throughout the story, and here it is important to provide some kind of conclusion to the unfortunate character's story as it is to the story involving the other main characters—the reader will be interested.



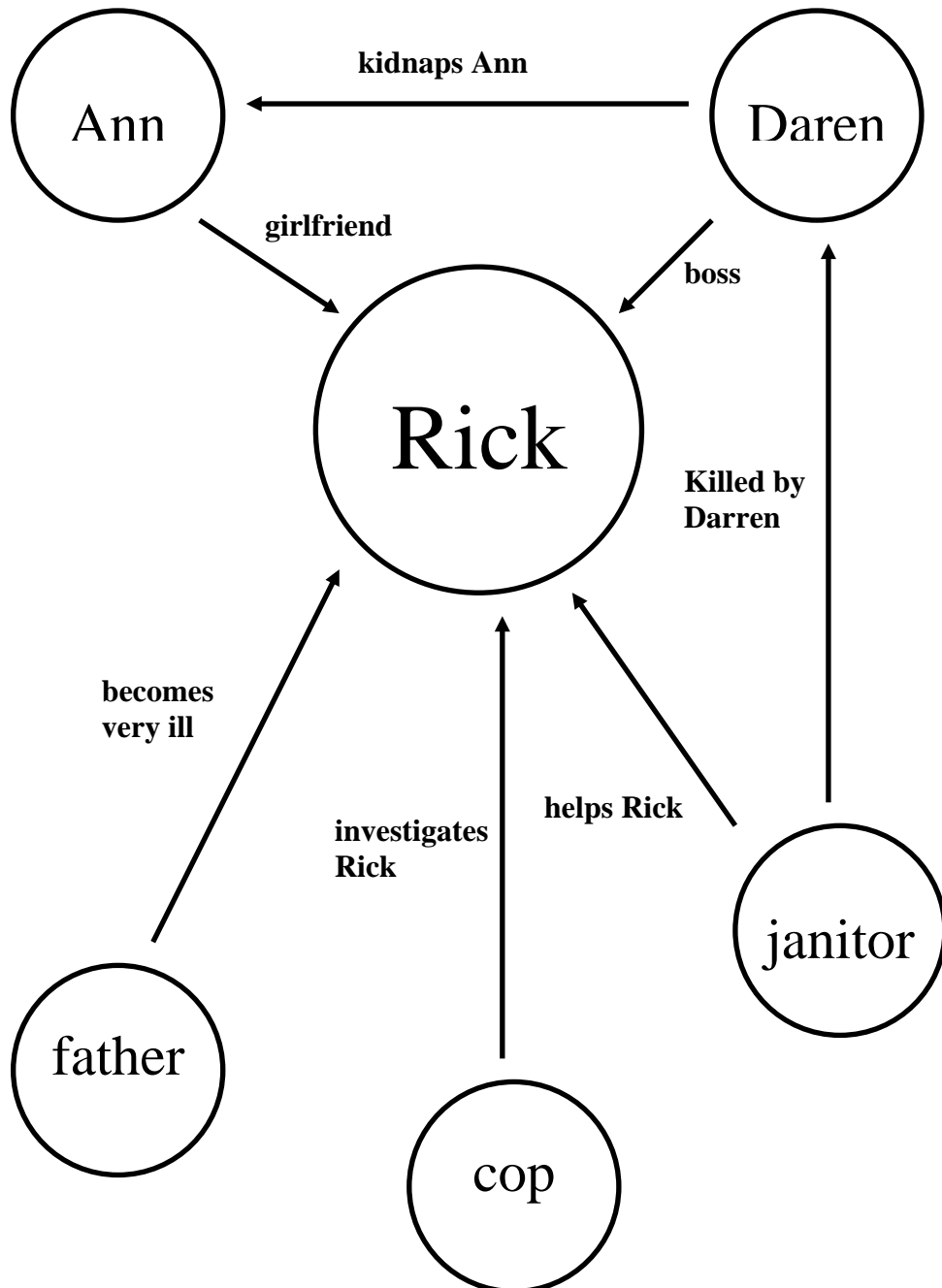
Other characters that appear in the story will not hold such a high-profile and will naturally drift in and out of the story without any conclusion to their stories being required.

For example, in our story about the Hollywood stars, the pool man may make an appearance on a number of occasions. Some information may be provided about him but we don't necessarily need to know everything about him, and what becomes of him in the end.

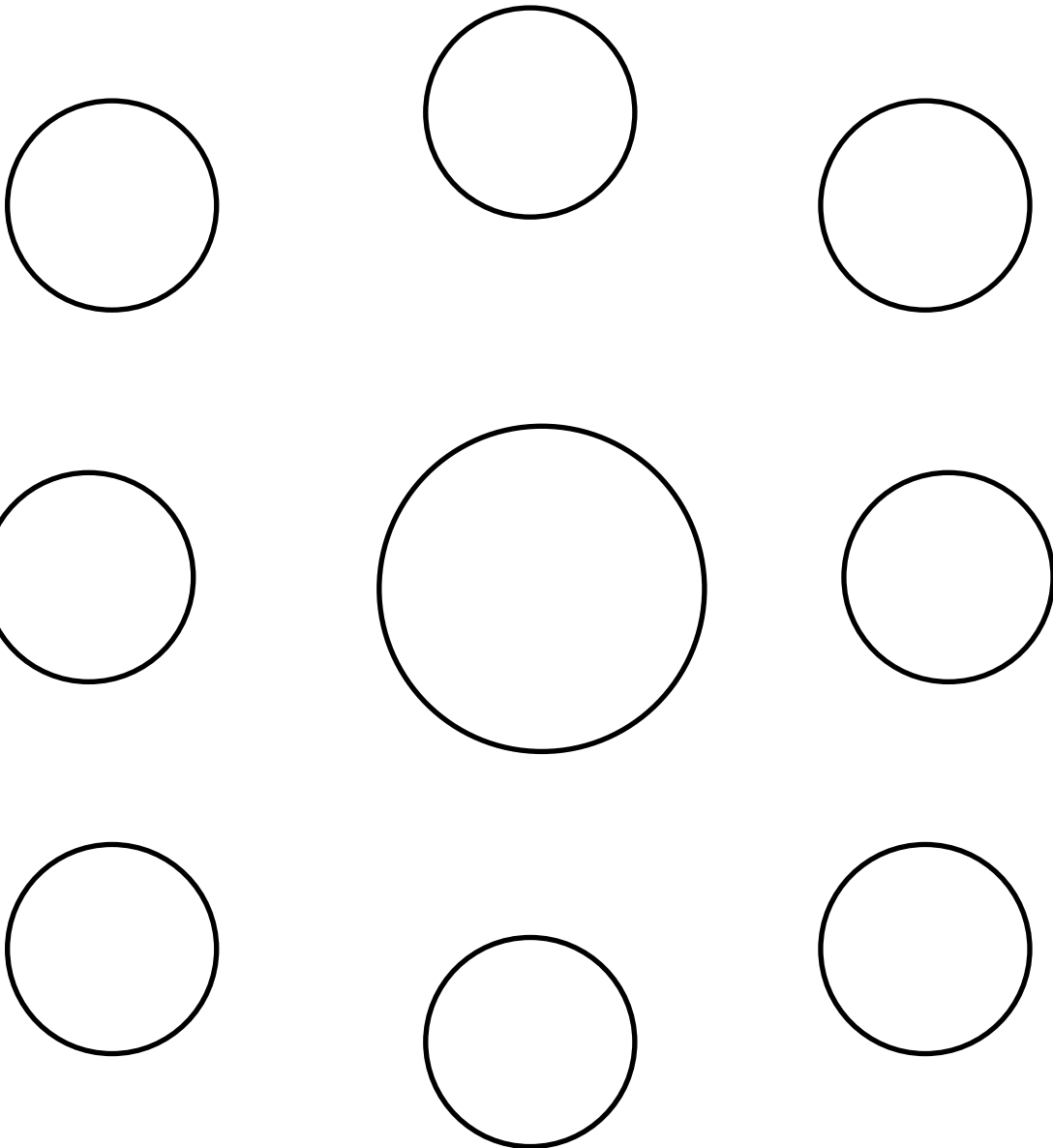
It is worth taking a little time before you begin writing to decide on the characters and how they will be linked to one another this makes

concluding their stories (if this is necessary) a lot easier when wrapping-up the story.

Jumping back to the characters from Part One:



Try it for your story (add more circles if necessary).



## **Linking the plotlines.**

Once you have decided on the main plot and subplots it is important that you devise a comprehensive strategy to link these in such a way that the reader doesn't get lost. If you plan how the plots are to be linked and stick to your plan, then at the end of your story you won't be left with important plot elements hanging in the air.

Disembodied or unresolved plotlines are very frustrating for the reader and give the impression that you as a writer either haven't really put enough effort into your story, or worse than that, you may give the impression that you don't care about the story. If you don't care, why should the reader?

A good plan for linking the plotlines within your story will also make it a lot easier to write the story more naturally, as you can modify, or manipulate plotlines so that they converge, or link organically, rather than having to force an unnatural link by way of a last minute afterthought. Such forced links will be picked-up easily by the reader.

In linking the plotlines the first thing you should do is make a list of all the plots under headings that describe the plotline in a short and meaningful way. Don't worry if at this stage you haven't completely thought through what each plotline will contain.

As long as you have a rough idea at this point, it will make planning the story a lot easier. You can make adjustments to your plotlines as you go along but it is important to remember that if you do make a change it is important to view how this change impacts on the other plotlines within your story.

As an obvious example of this, in one part of the story a character may die, but if he then appears very much alive in another, later plotline then you have failed to apply the rule on linkage, and your story just seems sloppy. It is unlikely that such an obvious mistake would be made, but smaller, more subtle mistakes can occur if you have not thought through all the links.

You may for example describe a relationship between two of the characters, for example, they met at a party when they were students at college, but in another plotline you describe a meeting between these two characters as if it is the first time they have met.

It is important to remember that just because you have linked all your plotlines at the beginning, it doesn't mean you can't add to them, or modify them, just be certain you keep track of these changes and the impact they will have on the rest of your story.

**Make a list.**

In the example of our story about the nuclear technician, our list of plotlines might go something like this:

1. Main Plot
2. Relationship between Rick and Ann, their story and how it is resolved
3. Relationship between Rick and Janitor, their investigation at the plant and the murder of the janitor
4. Relationship between Rick and his boss. Rick's investigation at the plant and how his boss reacts.
5. Rick's boss and his story. His involvement in the going's on at the plant, the murder of the janitor and his attempt to have Rick and Ann murdered

and so on...

For your story you may have dozens of subplots, and you may even introduce more subplots as your story progresses.

List as many as possible to begin with and add to the list as necessary.

Plotlines:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

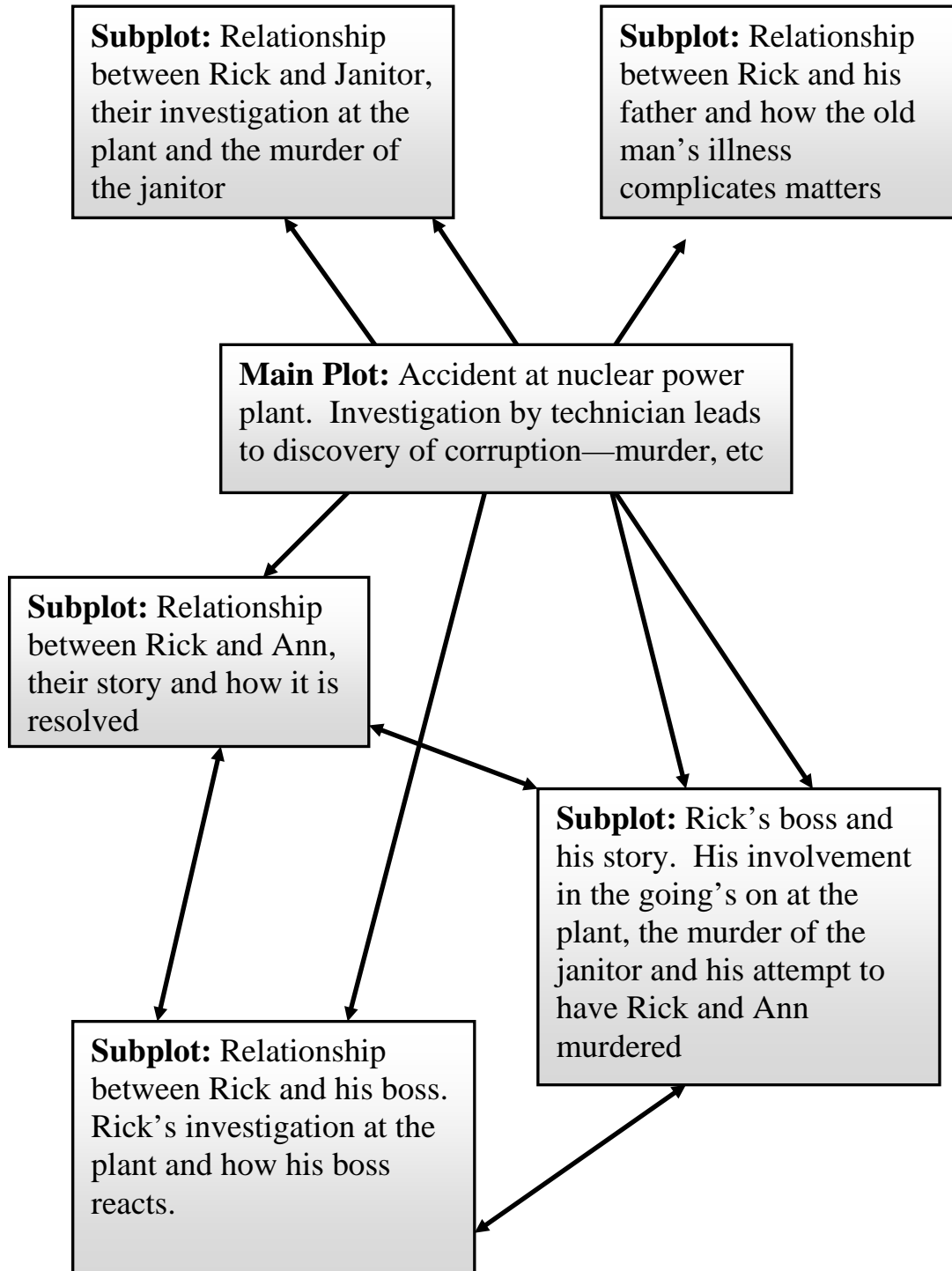
7.

8.

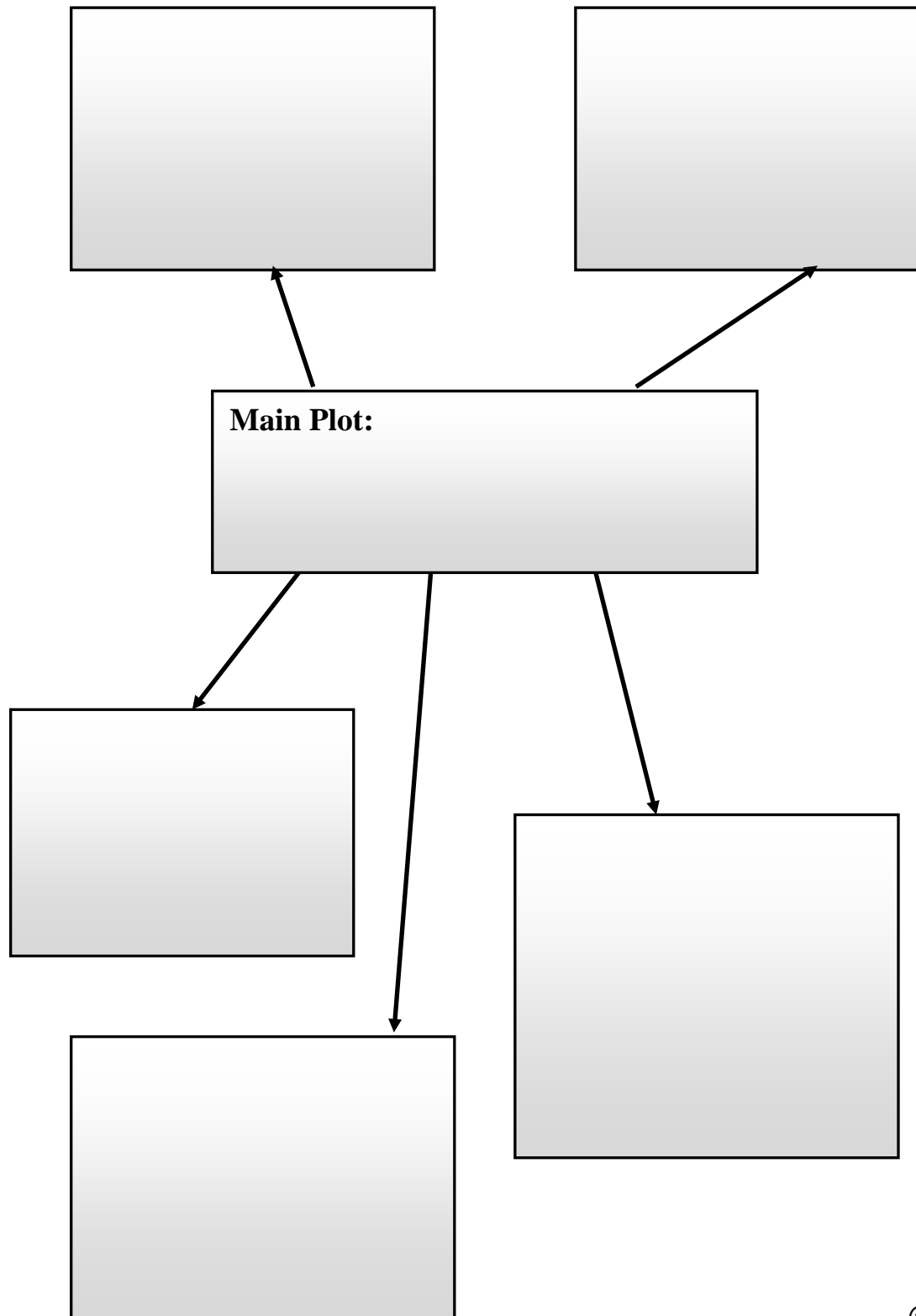
9.

10.

The diagram below gives us an overview of the main plotline to our hypothetical story.



Now try it for your story. Add more boxes if necessary. Link with double headed arrows those plotlines that are linked.



## **Summary**

By the end of Part Two you should have started to outline the characters and plotlines of your story and have worked how they are linked to one another.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Main character linked to important characters linked to incidental characters
- Main plot linked to Subplots

Don't forget to modify your links if you modify any of the elements of your story!

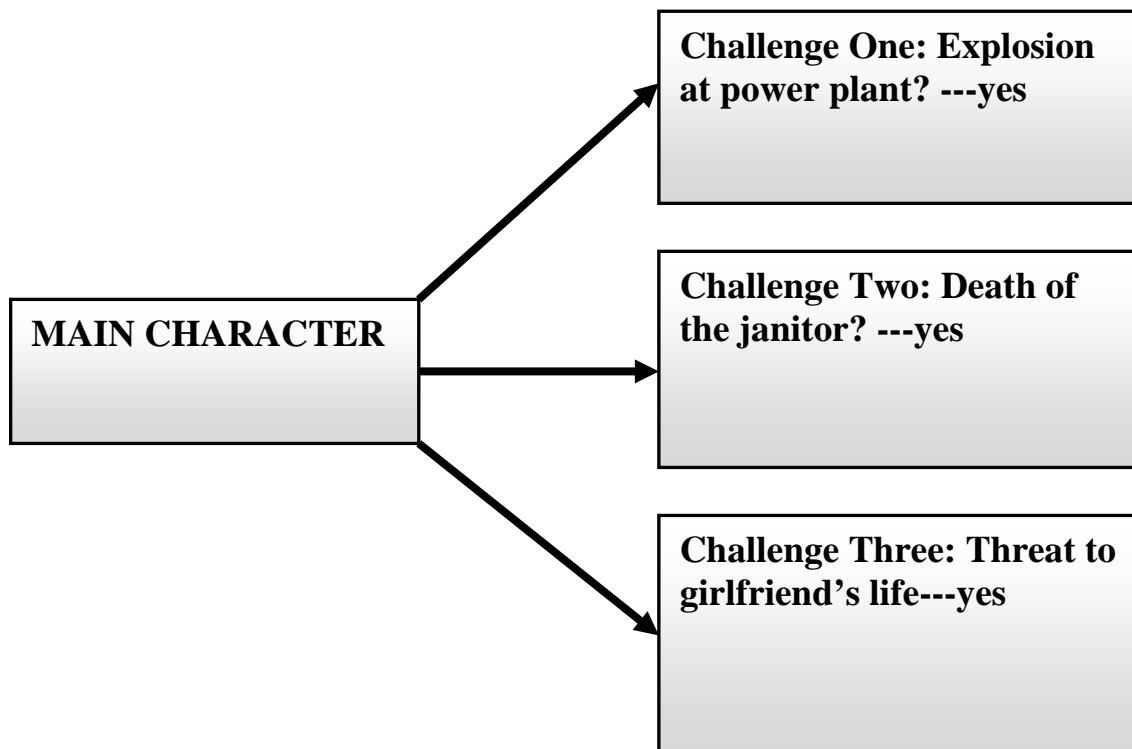
## **Part Three: Building your main character**

The main character in your story is as every bit as important as your main plot, and when you create your main character it is important to keep your main plot in mind at all times. If the plot and lead character do not interact well then your story will be ridiculous.

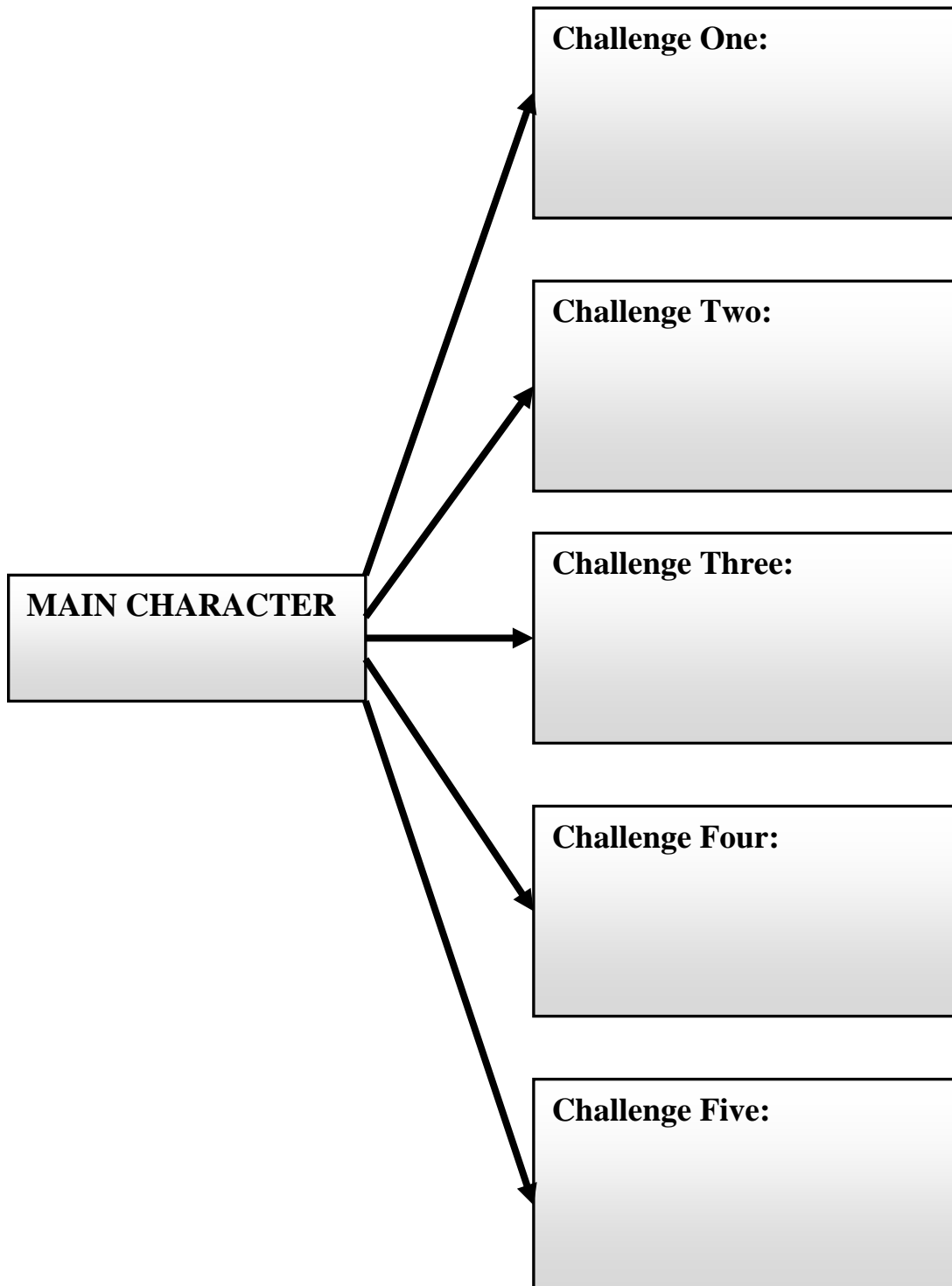
For example, you may spend a lot of time and effort building a very believable main character with many well thought out layers who is instantaneously interesting, but who happens to be ninety-years-old.

However, if your story is an action adventure that has a lot of physical demands of your lead, then the ninety-year-old is obviously a poor choice. He would also be out of place if the story required him to be an undercover cop investigating crime in nightclubs.

Your main character will be faced with a challenge or challenges during the course of the story and it is important that your lead can meet these challenges convincingly.



Now try it for your story. (If you have not thought through all the challenges your character will face, you can come back and fill them in when they occur to you).



If your character is not up to a particular challenge you need to do one of two things. You either need to modify your character so that he can meet the challenge, or modify the challenge so that it can be met by the main character. When you make some modifications it is important to ask yourself which is more important—maintaining your main character as you originally imagined them, or keeping the challenge as it was, and how changing the challenge will impact on the story as a whole?



Once you have sketched an outline of your main character and the challenges they face you will have a clearer idea of what your character is going to be like up-close (or to be more correct, what your character needs to be like up-close so that they can meet the challenges they face.)

### **Adding depth to your main character.**



When adding depth to your main character, try to build up as much information as you can about them before you drop them into the story. This can include minor details such as eye or hair colour, to more important information such as their immediate background circumstances and information regarding their upbringing and the kind of person they are in the eyes of others.

With this information jotted down, deciding how the lead will deal with the challenges you present to them will be much easier and it will also help keep your character's actions and emotions consistent. It might be helpful to view this as a very detailed C.V..

For our nuclear technician friend, a character file might look something like this:

**Name:** Rick

**Age:** 35

**Physical features:**

- Height: 6ft 2"
- Eye colour: Green
- Hair colour: black
- Weight: 180lb's
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - Small scar just above his left eye.
  - Very pale skin
  - Very deep voice

**Occupation and main duties:**

Nuclear technician.  
A relatively junior member of staff who monitors the reactor core at a nuclear power plant.  
Mainly works the nightshift.

**Personality:**

Mild-mannered, inquisitive, thoughtful, heroic, loyal, highly intelligent. Does not have an over-inflated opinion of himself as highlighted by his very close relationship with the janitor (he would rather take his coffee breaks in the company of this man, than in the company of his peers).

**Background:**

- Only child
- Mother is dead
- Father is very ill
- Born in NY state
- Went to collage in LA
- Best refined died in car accident when Rick was 17.

**Private life:**

- Girlfriend of 2 years is Ann
- Shares a small house with his girlfriend
- Goes jogging every mourning after work
- Sleeps most of the day
- Spends holidays with his elderly father
- Lost faith in religion when his mother died young from cancer
- Greatest fear is losing Ann, either to illness or to another man

**Strengths:**

- Thoughtful
- Not easily discouraged
- Intelligence
- Resourcefulness
- Loyal
- Sensitive to others
- Not easy to intimidate
- Would die for those closest to him

**Weaknesses:**

- Too inquisitive
- Blinding sense of morality
- Love for his girlfriend and dad and fear for their well-being
- Too thoughtful
- Would die for those closest to him

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- Likable
- Fear for his plight
- Brave
- Understand how he feels and reacts in certain situations

**Additional information:**

- None at this time

Use the following template for your main character:

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Physical features:**

- Height:
- Eye colour:
- Hair colour:
- Weight:
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - 
  - 
  -

**Occupation and main duties:**

**Personality:**

**Background:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Private life:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Strengths:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Weaknesses:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- 
- 
- 
- 

**Additional information:**

- 



Remember, if at any time you decide to change the main character in any way you must revisit your challenges and view the impact this change will have. Similarly, if the challenges change or new ones are added, revisit the main character to make sure they will meet these new challenges.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

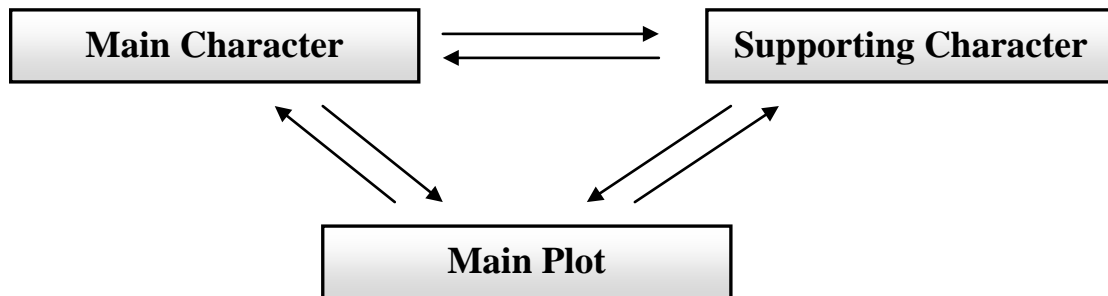
- Main character and their challenges defined
- Detailed file on the main character

## **Part Four: Supporting characters**

The other characters in the story, although not as important as the main character, are none-the-less vital. We may not need to know as much about them as we do about the main character but we do need to know enough about them to know what their purpose is.

How these characters impact on the main character and the main plot is something that needs more than just a passing thought or you may end up with a very solid main character and plot which is seriously undermined but a weak supporting cast. For important characters the reader needs to know a little about them, their motivations and personalities, for example, and this will help the reader better understand why your main character chooses to confide in them, or why the main character is so afraid of them.

Going back to pervious sections, you need to clearly define how the main and supporting characters interact with one another and the main plot, and more importantly, what is it about these characters that makes these interactions the way they are?



As with the main character and how he deals with the challenges he faces, it is important to give your supporting characters the right make-up to set the challenges for the main character or help him overcome the challenges.

One of the easiest and most rewarding characters to develop is the villain. By their very nature villains are normally larger than life individuals who get up to the most diabolical activities. So unlike the hero where we may want to develop some flaws to make them appear a little more real,

villains can adopt almost any personality or background and still come across as being believable.



If the main character is a natural coward from the start, and he then turns around and does something incredibly brave, it may be hard for the reader to accept such a sudden and dramatic change.

However, with a villain, they may come from the most beneficial background and have had all the best opportunities in life, but what is important is how they act at a particular moment in the story. This is what defines their character more than any other factor. For our hypothetical story.

**Name:** Daren

**Age:** 57

**Physical features:**

- Height: 5ft 10"
- Eye colour: blue
- Hair colour: brown
- Weight: 200lb's
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - Slight limp
  - Facial tick
  -

**Relationship to main character:**

Rick's boss, and the man who in the end tries to kill Rick and Ann.

**Occupation and main duties:**

Owner of the power plant where Rick works. Spends a lot of time in his office meeting with some very shady characters.

**Personality:**

- Loud
- Boorish
- Easily angered

**Background:**

- Self-made man
- Poor background
- Orphan
- Never married
- No children
- 

**Private life:**

- Little is known about his private life
- He has many girlfriends
- He plays golf
- Drivers sports cars
- Collects fine arts
- Donates a lot of money to charity
- 
- 

**Strengths:**

- Fears nothing
- Has no morals
- He has no connections in this world other than to his money, and so has nothing to loose—his rivals find it hard to threaten him
-

**Weaknesses:**

- Is power crazy
- Has to get his own way all the time
- Will act quickly without properly thinking things through
- 
- 
- 

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- Dislike
- Want to see him fail
- Ultimately, want to see him dead
- 

**Additional information:**

- None at this time

The same process should be applied for all the main characters—the love interest, for instance, although how much information we need to know about them will depend on how important they are.

Use the following template for your other characters

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Physical features:**

- Height:
- Eye colour:
- Hair colour:
- Weight:
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - 
  -

**Relationship to main character:**

**Occupation and main duties:**

**Personality:**

- 
- 
- 

**Background:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Private life:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Strengths:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Weaknesses:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Additional information:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



Remember, if at any time you decide to change the characters in any way you must revisit the challenges they cause, or help resolve, and view the impact this change will have. Similarly, if the challenges change or new ones are added, revisit the characters to make sure they will meet these new challenges.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Main Characters profiled and how they are going to cause or help resolve problems
- Identified the relationships between the characters and how they interact with the plot

## **Part Five: Great beginnings**



**BANG!** If you are a new writer without a reputation and a following you will need to grab the attention of the reader early on, especially if that reader is an editor.

It is very unlikely that people will spend the time and effort to let you indulge your creativity. If you take too long to get to the heart of the matter they will quickly turn somewhere else. This is unfortunate but it is one of the key factors you should bear in mind when you set out to write any story. Once you become established and have built up a loyal base of fans, then feel free to take your readers on a little pleasure ride before you settle down to the main event.

Until that time you should devote more time and effort to the first dozen or so paragraphs of your story than to any other part of the work. You need a beginning that will reach out and grab the reader instantly, and once you have done that you can settle back a little and head down one or two side roads (only one or two, mind!)

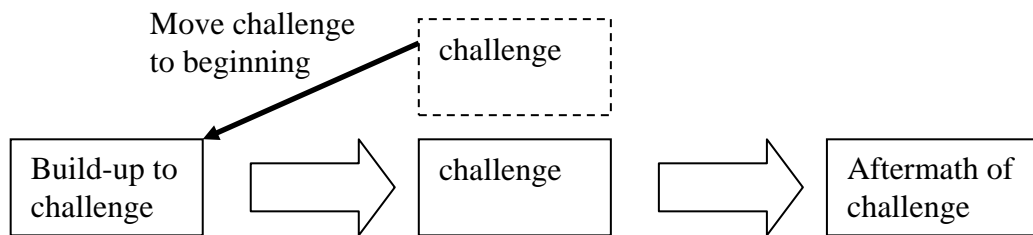
Grabbing the attention of the reader is an important aspect to the story but do remember to keep it relevant. A large explosion at the White House may incite the curiosity of the reader enough to keep them reading, but if it has nothing whatsoever to do with the rest of your story then the reader will quickly turn against you.

The opening paragraph is best approached by quickly establishing one of the main challenges that your central character is going to face. In some stories it is natural for a major challenge to be set out at the beginning of the story. Sometimes though it is not possible to quickly introduce a major challenge as this would not fit in with the natural flow of the story. For example, in the case of our hypothetical story we may want to build up to the disaster, filling in the detail of the main character and his life before we get to the explosion at the nuclear power plant. We want to set

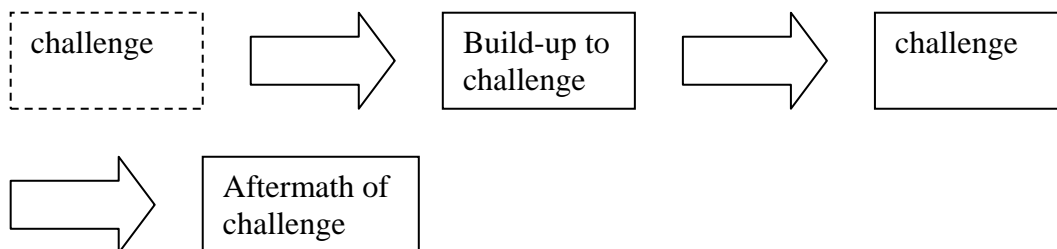
the scene and in this process things can drag out a bit before we get to the challenge of the explosion.

This need not be a major problem. We could, for example, sideline the build-up to the explosion and get right to it, or even describe the aftermath of the explosion in the opening few paragraphs. Immediately after this introduction we can jump back to a time before the explosion and begin our build-up then. It is one of the great powers of story telling that time does not need to be linear.

By displacing one of your challenges you can grab the attention early and the fact that the reader has some insight into what is going to take place can make the rest of the early part of your story much more engaging. There will be more tension, a greater sense of anticipation that has been used to great effect by all the best storytellers at one time or another.



When you rearrange your story in this way it is important not to simply take the challenge out of the middle of your story, place it at the start, and never go back to it. You still need to build up to the challenge, even though it has been mentioned at the start, but the second time you get to it you will have endowed the challenge with much more meaning.



It is vital that you pick the right challenge to set the tone of your story as some challenges will be better suited to this purpose than others. Return to the challenges you constructed for your main character in Part Three and then ask yourself a few simple questions. Through this process it will soon become apparent which challenge is best suited to starting your story with a bang.

Once you have listed the challenges apply three simple questions to each of the challenges to find out which one is the best candidate to base your introduction around. The three simple questions are:

- 1. Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?*
- 2. Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?*
- 3. Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?*

If the answer is yes to all three questions then that particular challenge is probably the one that you should use in your introduction. In fact, any of your challenges for which the answer to the three questions is yes could be used as your opening. It will then be up to you to decide which of the challenges are most interesting and will excite the reader best.

To help you do this it may be worthwhile to consider how some of the best stories you have read began. Try then to put the challenge you encountered in the beginning of these stories into the context of the rest of the story and ask yourself why it worked so well. It is important not to copy the beginning to another story too perfectly as this will give the reader a sense that what they are reading is nothing new. It is also important to keep the challenge you present in the context of the rest of your story. Do not manufacture a challenge just to make an impact. If the challenge has nothing to do with the rest of your story you will confuse and frustrate the reader.

On the following page are listed the challenges for our hypothetical story and how the one we use at the beginning is selected.

From our example:

**Challenge One: Explosion  
at power plant?**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?—yes  
Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?—yes  
Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?—yes

**Challenge Two: Death of  
the janitor? ---yes**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?—yes  
Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?—no  
Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?—possibly

**Challenge Three: Threat to  
girlfriend's life---yes**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?—yes  
Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?—no  
Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?—possibly

Challenge One is the obvious choice.

Use the template on the following page to decide which of your challenges you may wish to use as an introduction.

**Challenge One:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Two:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Three:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Four:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?



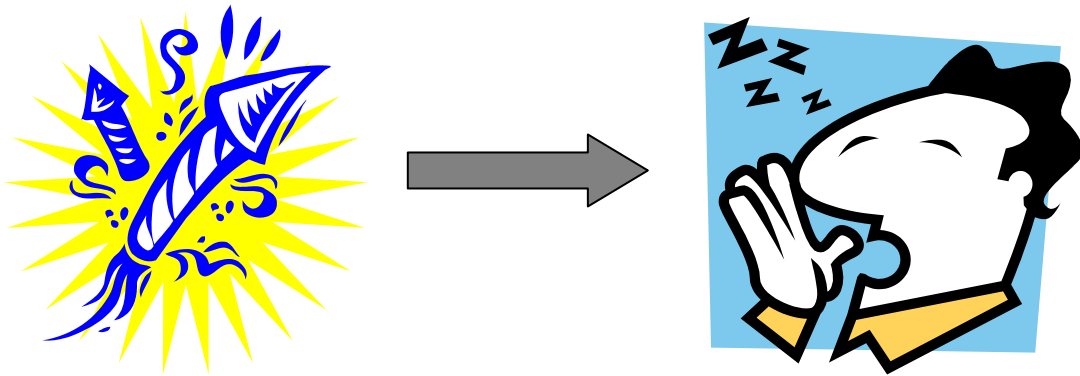
If you can't decide on one clear challenge that you believe stands out above the others as an introduction it may be necessary to write introductions using all such challenges to see which works best. It may be a good idea to ask a few people to read your introductions and ask which they believe works best.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Challenges listed and the three key questions asked of each to decide which is to used as an introduction
- If no clear challenge emerges, write introductions using all appropriate challenges and decide which one works best

## Part Six: The Middle

Now that the stage has been set, all the main players have been introduced and the crisis and drama that is the meat of your story has been laid out for the reader, it can be hard to keep this momentum going. The beginning has to be something special, it has to seize the reader and compel them to read on. The main problem now comes in the form of living up to the expectations which have been grounded in the opening of your book. The initial spectacular fireworks display you set off has now faded and died and what follows must incite as much fascination for the reader if they are ever going to be motivated to reach the end of your work.



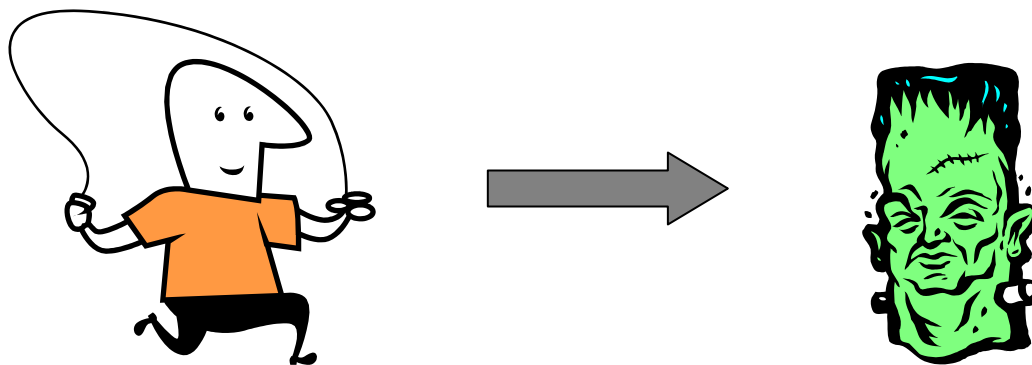
Although this may appear at first as a daunting task it need not necessarily be case. Also, it is important not to panic at this stage and try to move some of the impact from the begging in an effort to make the middle more interesting.

Another common mistake at this point is to try to stretch things out in an effort to make your story that little bit longer, as if you owe the reader more than you actually do, and as such you feel the story must be longer even if this length adds nothing to story and actually results in frustrating the reader. Don't start rambling at this stage or things are not going to end well for you or the reader.

In the plan for your story you will have enough material on which to draw interest from to keep the story rolling along. However, resist the

temptation to return to your character profiles to find things to write about. For example, you may have included in the profile of your main character some detail about their childhood. You may feel that dropping this information into the story in the middle may help stretch things out a little. Just because you included this information in the profile does not necessarily mean that it must be included in your story. The profile is to help you visualise your characters and how they will perform when faced with the challenges, it is not designed to provide a mid-story biography for the benefit of the reader. If something from the character's profile is relevant to a particular incident in the middle of the story then by all means refer to it, otherwise, leave it out.

In our example story, the villain may remind the hero of someone from the hero's past. These feelings of familiarity may justify a slight detour into the past and in the process we get to know a little more of the hero's life story. However, do not be artificial about this process—do not redefine the villain just so that you can make some mention of the hero's past, or if you do change the villain to accommodate a piece of information you feel the reader may like to know, don't forget to translate these changes to the rest of your story or you may end up describing the villain in such conflicting terms that they appear to be two entirely different characters. Such inconsistencies will be very damaging and will greatly reduce the value of your finished work.



Having consider at some length some of the things to be avoided in the middle part of the story we will now turn our attention to what should be included in this section of your story.

The middle part of the story provides the crucial bridge between the beginning and end of the story and in order for the reader to cross this

bridge safely it is important to give some thought as to how you want them to make the journey.

Using the type of structure outlined in our example story this bridge is a lot easier to construct. We have introduced a catastrophic event at the very beginning (the accident at the power plant) and have then moved back in time to the lead-up to this event. The middle of the story in this case is mainly concerned with the build-up to the disaster.



We can return to the profile of the hero and extract those traits and experiences that the reader needs to know so that when we eventually get to the challenge the reader knows something of how they will react to it and believe that this is something they can eventually overcome.

The middle of the story is also the point where some of the incidental characters make an appearance. These are normally encountered as the story progresses and again it is vital that the reader only gets to know enough about them as is important to the story, even if you have spent a lot of time constructing a hefty character profile for these characters.

The middle is also where most of the minor plotlines are introduced, and for the most part it is also where these plotlines are resolved, clearing away the clutter so that the focus of the reader is completely on the resolution to the main challenge when you finally get down to writing the ending.

Essentially, the middle of the story is like a small story in itself and as such it is important that the principals used when formulating the story as a whole are applied here, albeit in a shorter form. Turn back to all the minor challenges and minor characters before you start to write the middle of the story and decide which you want to include.

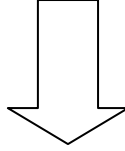
Ask yourself what these challenges and characters are going to contribute to the overall story and how they will fit in with and consolidate the main story as it continues to make progress through the middle section.

It may be necessary to make minor modifications to the challenges and characters at this point so that their existence makes more sense when viewed in a whole story context, but do remember to keep the changes consistent and only make them if it furthers the story's cause.

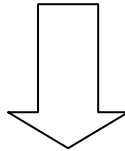
It will prove helpful to analyse each minor character and other challenge by asking a few common sense questions. The questions found on the following pages are examples of some of the types of questions you may wish to think about when considering any character (the example does however focus on one of the minor characters):

**Minor character.**

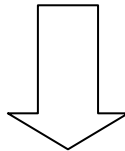
**Character:** The Janitor



**What is the relationships to the main character?** Works with him in the power plant. Is on first name terms and would be considered a friend.



**How does the character fit in with the main plot?** Provides the hero with important information that points the hero in the direction of the villain. Is murdered by the villain.

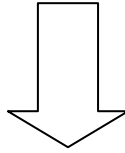


**Involvement in sub-plots?** Yes. Is murdered by the villain. He also knows the villain and provides the reader with some important information into the villain's personality and motivations.

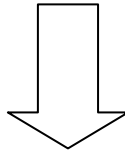
He is murdered by the villain and this happens just after he talks to the hero about what he suspects the villain is up to. This helps direct the hero's focus towards the villain as the hero finds this coincidence very suspicious.

**Would the story fail without this character?**

Yes. Without this character and the insight he imparts to the hero some of the conclusions reached by the hero would not be logical.

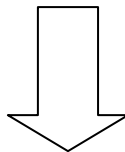


**How much of their background does the reader need to know?** He is a janitor. He is insightful and suspicious. He is good friends with the hero and their relationship is such that he feels he can bring his suspicions about the villain to the hero.



**Would more background information on this character help the plot develop?**

No.

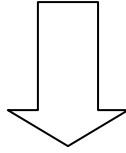


**Could this character be used to fuller effect in the story?**

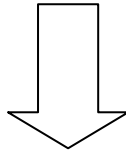
A description of his murder may be helpful as it would provide the opportunity to learn more about the villain's motives as he tries to find out what the janitor knows.

Try it for your characters using the templates on the next few pages.

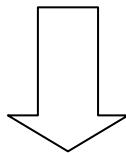
**Character:**



**What is the relationships to the main character?**



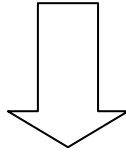
**How does the character fit in with the main plot?**



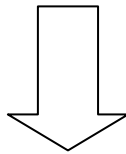
**Involvement in sub-plots?**



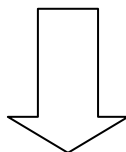
**Would the story fail without this character?**



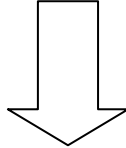
**How much of their background does the reader need to know?**



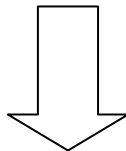
**Would more background information on this character help the plot develop?**



**Could this character be used to fuller effect in the story?**



**Additional question 1:**



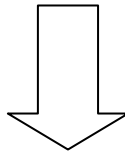
**Additional question 2:**



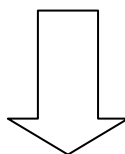
As far as the other challenges and encounters you are considering including in your story are concerned, it is important that you again ask yourself a few simple, yet logical questions to ensure they are not simply included to act as filling. If the challenge or situation does nothing to further the story or reinforce certain important points in the plot or explanation of the motivations for the characters, then leave it out. This can be frustrating as you have gone to all the trouble of thinking these things up in the first place, but in the end your readers will thank you for not subjecting them to pages of unnecessary information.

For example:

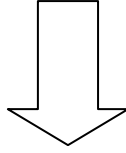
**Situation:** Fight in coffee shop.



**Outline of situation:** A former worker from the power plant gets into a fight with a security team from the power plant. The hero steps in and saves him from a beating. This man outlines why he has been sacked—he questioned some of the corners being cut with regard to safety in order to save the plant money.

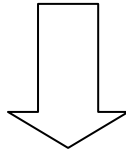


**How does the situation fit in with the main plot?**  
Provides the hero with some insight into just how ruthless the villain is. Provides the main character with an important friend—helps with his investigation later in the story.



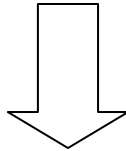
**What would the impact be on the main story if this situation were removed?**

The situation could be removed—the hero has additional sources to underline just how ruthless the villain is. The hero could carry out his investigation without this situation and the minor character introduced here.



**Would the story fail without this situation?**

No.



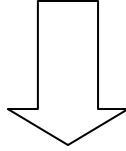
**Should this situation be included in the story? (Give reasons).**

No. The situation takes too long to establish and conclude and provides the hero and reader with no useful additional help or information.

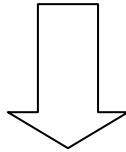
Now try it for the situations in your story.

For example:

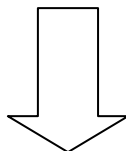
**Situation:**



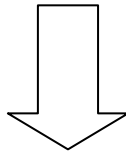
**Outline of situation:**



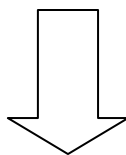
**How does the situation fit in with the main plot?**



**What would the impact be on the main story if this situation were removed?**



**Would the story fail without this situation?**



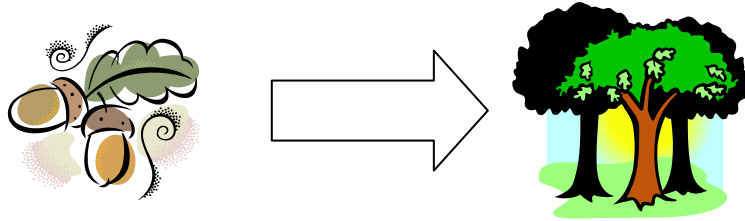
**Should this situation be included in the story? (Give reasons).**

The middle part of a story can be problematic and if not given proper consideration it can move in some very odd and very frustrating directions. Do not give in to the temptation to fill the middle with as much information as you can think of. Keep it relevant.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Consider each character, their relevance, and decide should you keep them in, and if so, how much does the reader need to know about them.
- Do we need a particular situation? If we do, why is it so important to the overall story?

## Part Seven: In conclusion



From idea to finished work, your creative journey is almost at an end. You have created your story, developed plotlines and characters, taken the reader on a journey they will hopefully not forget in a hurry. Now all you need to do is bring the story to an end. It is suggested by many experts on the art of story telling that this is the most difficult part of the entire process. If you have been following the advice outlined in this guide then ending your story should not be a painful process.

There are a few simple rules which are peculiar to the ending of a story, while others apply as aptly to any part of the story as to the ending. For instance, we began the journey by suggesting that you start your story with a bang. It will probably not come as a surprise that ending the story with a bang is every bit as important.



There is however a subtle, yet very important difference with the bang at the end. At the beginning you are trying to create some suspense, some mystery, some reason why the reader should read on. At the end the bang you create will answer the questions and resolve the mystery you were so careful to induce at the start of the story.

The explosive ending should put the hero face to face with one last challenge, usually the one challenge the reader believes he will not overcome.

This challenge will put in jeopardy all the progress that the hero has made throughout the story. Having faced down the challenge and triumphed the story can naturally conclude and the reader will be satisfied and you will have done what you set out to do in the first place.

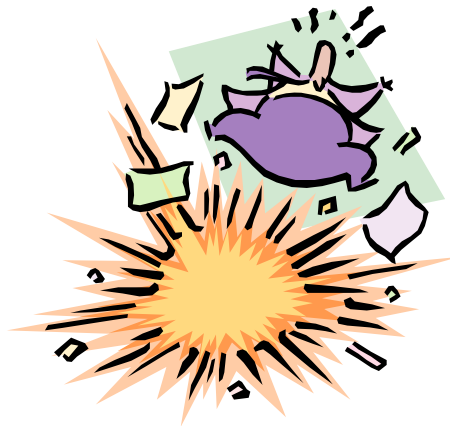


To help you craft a perfect ending you might wish to consider the following questions.

1. Is the final challenge sufficiently grave enough to give the reader a sense that all progress made throughout the story may be lost?
2. Has the hero made enough progress throughout the story to overcome the challenge in a believable way?
3. Has the hero's story been resolved?
4. Have all the plotlines been linked and concluded in a believable way?
5. Have the important characters had their stories resolved in a believable way?

In an effort to answer all these questions in a satisfactory manner it is vital that you don't employ silly tactics which annoy the reader. It was all a dream or some unbelievable Scooby Doo type revelation may tie up all loose ends, but such extreme plot devices make it appear as if the story was never properly thought through.

Out of the blue plot twists at the very end of the story, or new characters that tie everything up with a nice neat bow do in general disappoint the reader and if this is the first story you have written that they have read it could very well be the last!

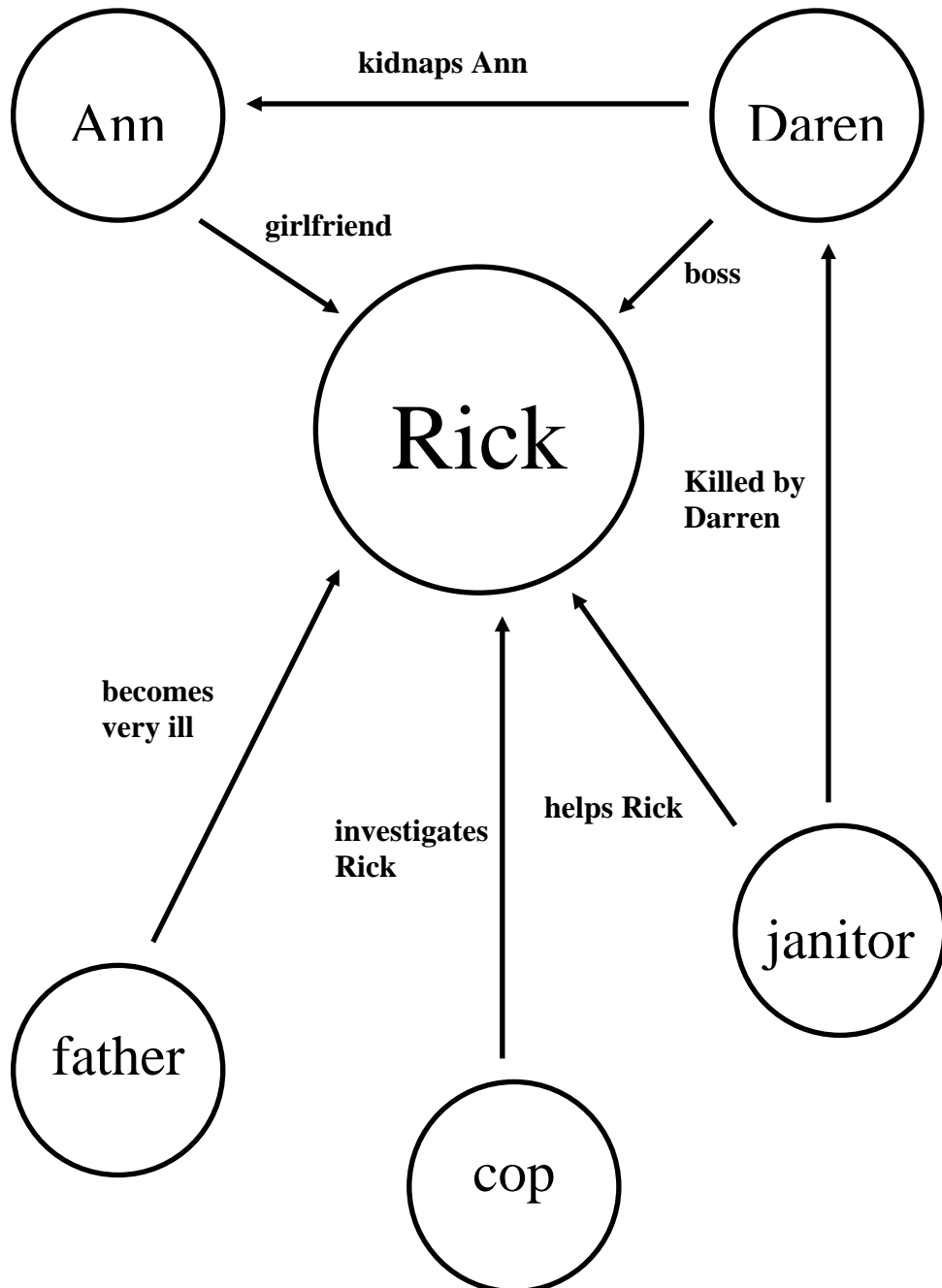


In your initial plan you will have linked all the plots and the lives of the characters in the story and now is your time to really shine by making these converge in such a way that the reader goes away thinking, "That was really clever!" Don't lose your nerve at this stage; you will be able to bring the story to an end without turning to drastic measures.

Just remember the important points mentioned earlier regarding linking the characters. Look at the big picture first and how the lives of the characters are intertwined, then consider each character in turn to make certain their story has been resolved and their relationship to the main character has been concluded.

Consider the characters first. For our hypothetical story the linkage looked like this:

Jumping back to the characters from Part One:



Consider how Rick's relationship to each of these characters stands by the end of the story and if necessary bring some kind of resolution to each relationship.

Main character and:

**Daren:** Following many attempts throughout the story by Daren to kill Rick, Daren finally kidnaps Ann in an effort to draw Rick out of hiding so that he can kill him. The two confront each other in the final battle. Daren has armed thugs to aid him in this fight, Rick is unarmed and alone. Rick disarms one of the tugs and uses his gun to kill the other thugs. Daren wounds Rick but both men loose their weapons. They fight hand to hand on the roof of a warehouse—Daren falls to his death.

**Ann:** Ann has been with Rick for most if the story. Given the growing intensity of the adversities which they have to face it has become clear that she is very much in love with Rick. She has been kidnapped by Daren and locked in an empty warehouse where Daren intends to kill her once he has used her as bait to draw Rick out into the open. She can hear the gunshots and raised voices from the final battle. She is rescued by Rick after he kills Daren.

**Janitor:** After helping Rick in the early part of the story he is murdered by Daren. His story has been concluded.

**Cop:** Initially he investigates Rick in connection with the murder of the Janitor but gradually he realises Rick didn't do it. He turns up at the end, after the final battle and just after Rick has rescued Ann. This is in line with him arriving just too late throughout the story.

**Father:** After helping Rick in the early part of the story he and Rick part company. His story has been concluded.

You can use the templates on the following pages to help you resolve the relationships between your main character and other characters.

**Character:**

**Character:**

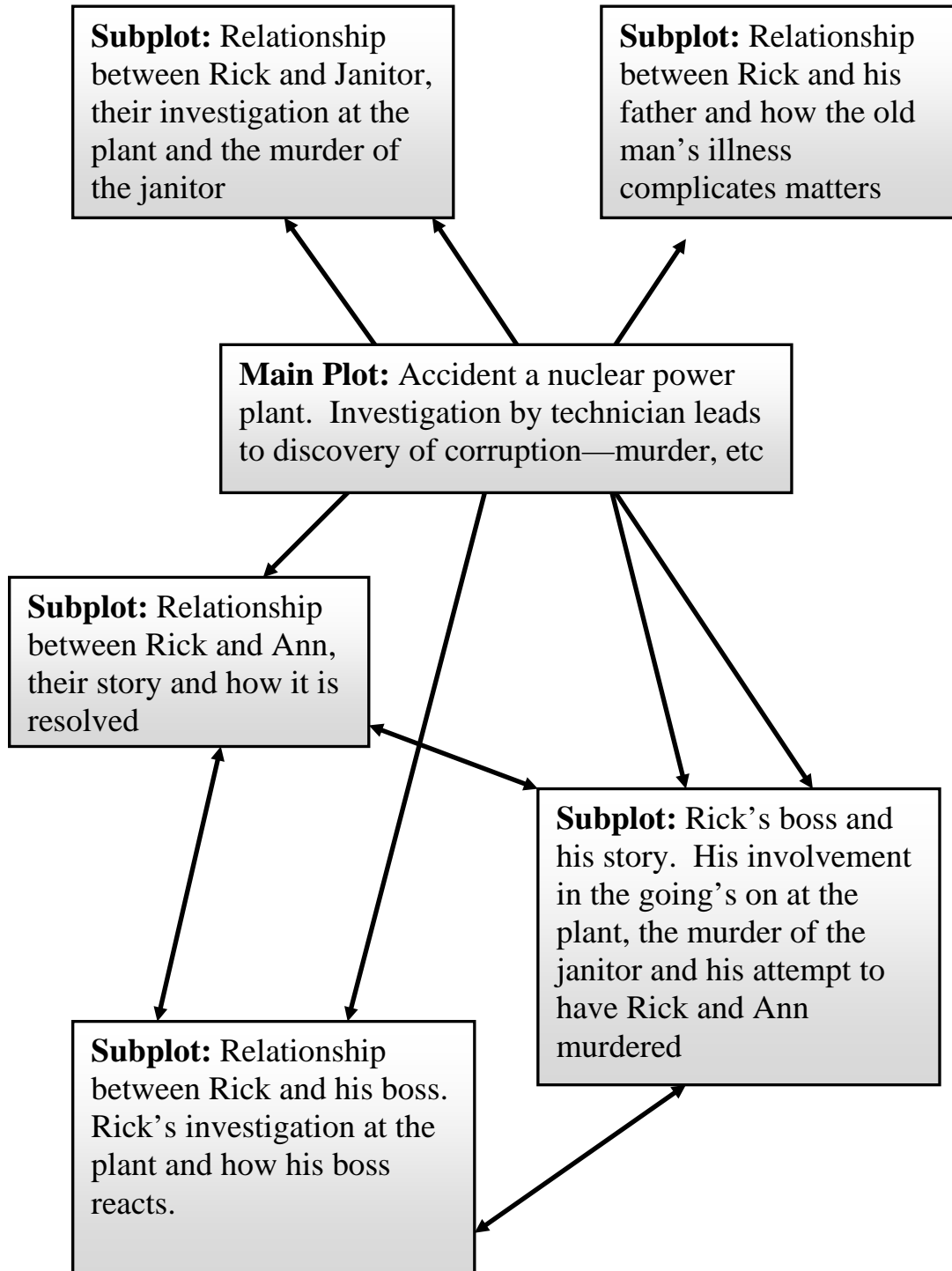
**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

Having tied up all the main relationships you can now turn your attention to the plotlines.



**Main Plot:** Rick has learned everything there is to know about Daren's involvement in the explosion in the factory by the end of the story.

**Sub-Plot:** The investigation carried out by Rick and the Janitor brings Rick into conflict with Daren and results in the Janitor's death.

**Sub-Plot:** Rick meets with his father where he learns of his father's terminal illness. The issue can not be resolved at the end of the story.

**Sub-Plot:** Rick and Ann spend much of the story in each other's company. Ann is kidnapped near the end and is rescued by Rick after he kills Daren.

**Sub-Plot:** Daren is responsible for the accident at the power plant. He kills the Janitor, kidnaps Ann and is eventually killed by Rick when the pair fight to the death at the end of the story.

**Sub-Plot:**

Use the template on the following page to help bring your plots to a conclusion.

**Main Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

Remember it is important to bring all the plotlines and character stories to a conclusion in the end (if this hasn't happened elsewhere in the story). Do not use unbelievable plot twists or introduce some new character who answers all the unanswered questions.

Check the following boxes once you have completed each:

- Main Characters stories concluded
- Plotlines all tied-up and fully resolved

## **Part Eight: After the fact**

With your story in the bag you are almost ready to send it out to the world. Right? Not quite. Having followed the advice in this guide you should put in place all the main elements of a good story. There are however fine details that need to be considered.

As mentioned earlier, this guide is not intended to provide you with everything needed to make your story fantastic, the main focus is to get your story down on page in a way that makes sense to the reader.

There a number of other factors that need to be considered before you can sit back with the satisfaction of knowing that your story is as good as it can be. Such factors include:

1. Grammar and spelling
2. Scene setting
3. Presentation

We will not consider these at length here but there are a number of points worth mentioning that will greatly enhance your final work without much further development.

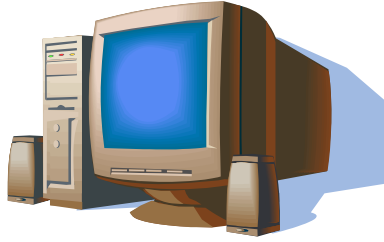
### **Grammar and Spelling**

If one thing is certain to set an editor against a story is lack of care on the part of the writer. If the story is full of spelling mistakes and glaring grammatical errors it gives the reader the impression that the writer simply doesn't care about their own work.

A few easy steps will help avoid this pitfall:

1. Turn on the spell-check on your word processor. This may appear like a very obvious piece of advice but it is amazing how many

manuscripts are written and turned in as finished without this simple operation being performed.



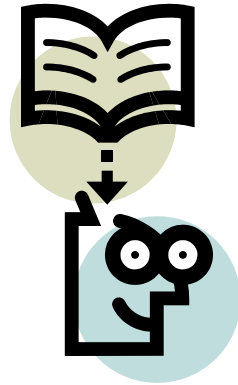
2. Give it some time. Set the story aside for a few weeks or months and then come back to it. When you have just written a story full of mistakes and you read it immediately after it has been written the chances are you will gloss over these mistakes in much the same way you did as when you were writing the story.



If you leave it for a while and then come back to the story with fresh eyes you will be amazed how many of those mistakes you will pick up on.



3. Ask a few friends to have a look at the story. It can be very difficult to edit your own work even if it has been left for a while before you come back to it. With your own work you know what you have written or more importantly, what you think you have written. Your brain can move past mistakes without them registering. Someone else can pick-up mistakes much more easily.



4. Read your story aloud. This is particularly helpful when considering dialogue. If it doesn't sound right as you read it then the chances are there is something wrong with it.

## **Part Nine: Dealing with writer's block**

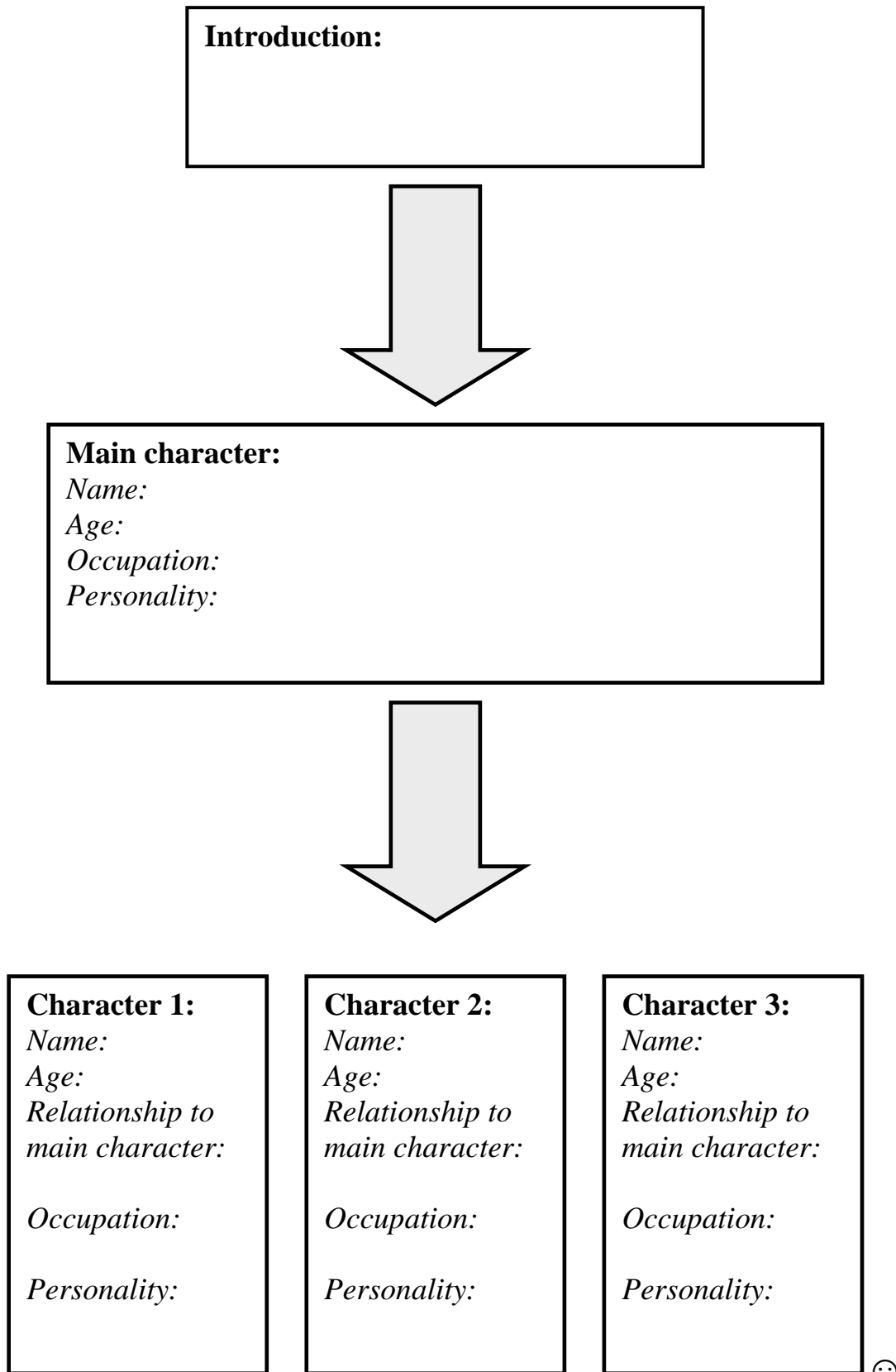
Writing a story is not a single trip with a beginning and end and a natural progression from one to the other. Writing a story is more like planning a battle.

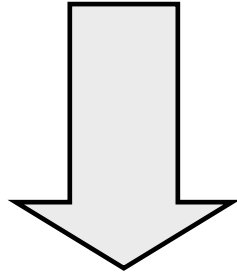
If you find that you are stuck on one part of the story there is no law against you moving to another part. There is nothing written in stone that stops you from writing the end before the beginning. If you are having difficulty with the development of a particular character then turn your attention to a scene you are planning to write.

Ultimately, if you can think of nothing more to write on any aspect to the story (this is highly unlikely) then set the story to one side and come back to it at some time in the future. Also, you will not be committing adultery if you start another story while you mull over your original story. The best thing about writing is the lack of constraints. Above all, relax and enjoy the journey.

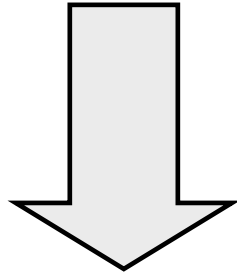
**Templates:** The following templates may be photocopied and used to help construct your story.

You can use the template below to outline your story.

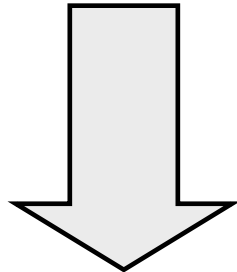




**The Plot:**



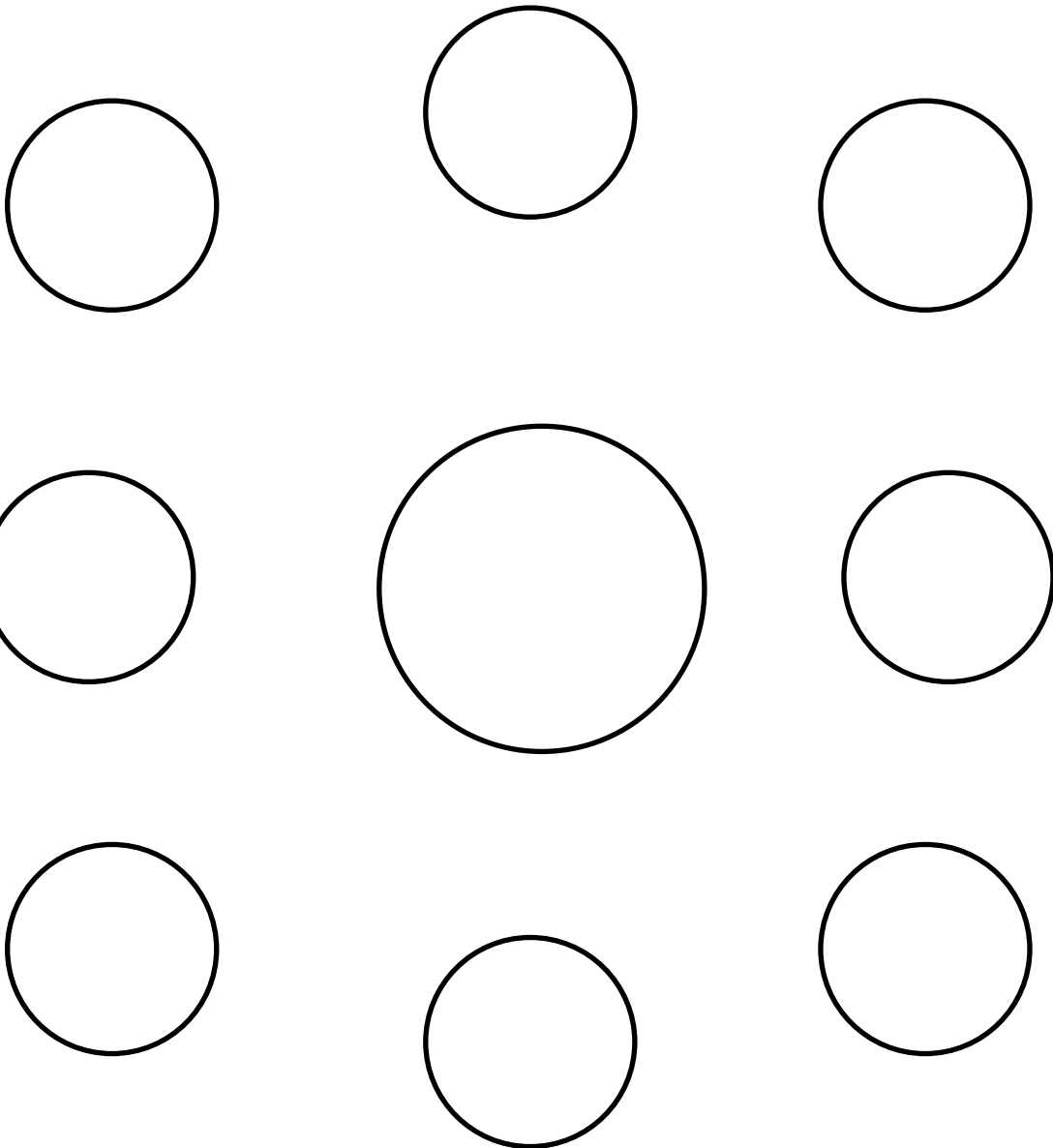
**Sub-plots:**



**Conclusion:**



Try it for your story (add more circles if necessary).



List as many as possible to begin with and add to the list as necessary.

Plotlines:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

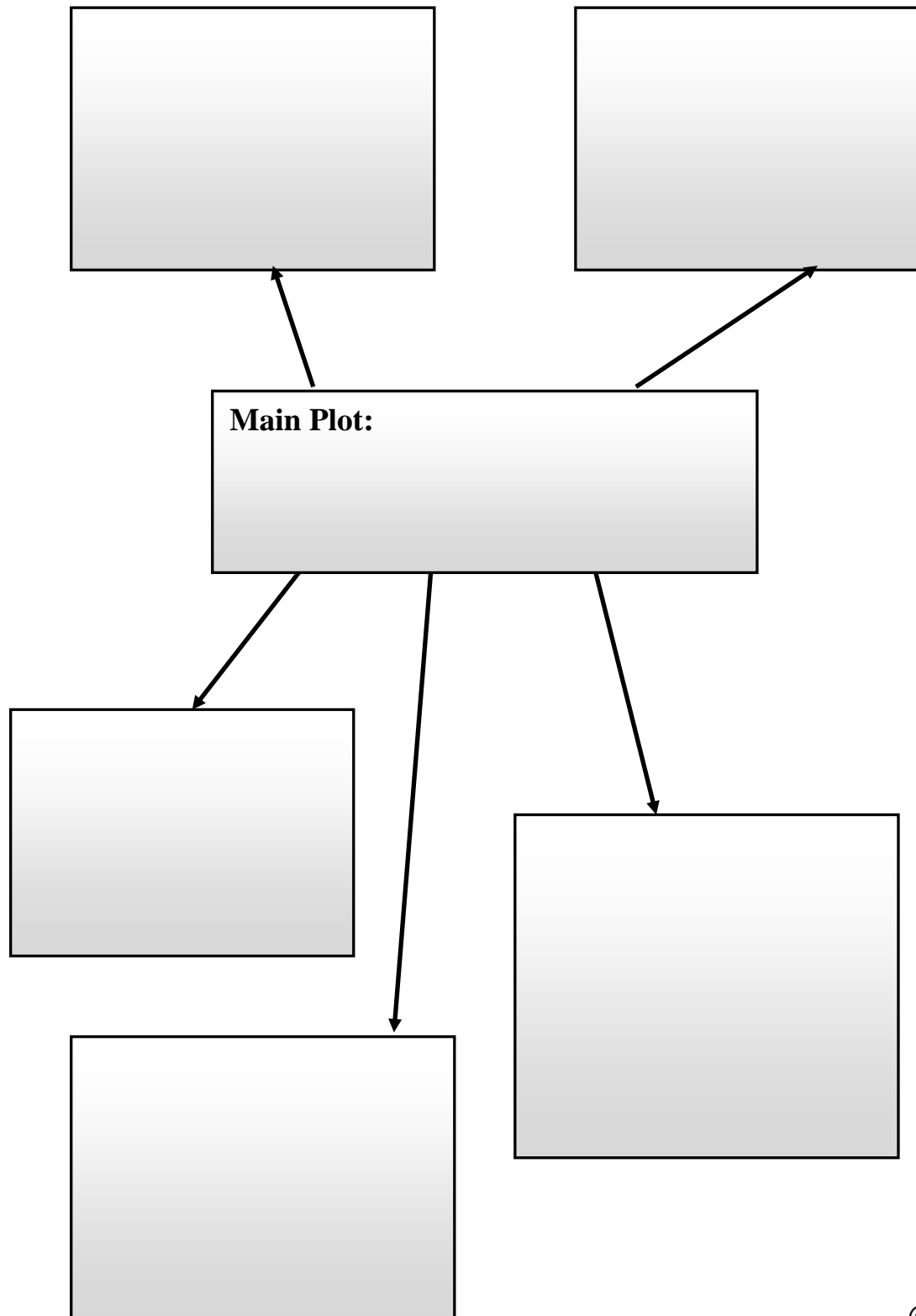
7.

8.

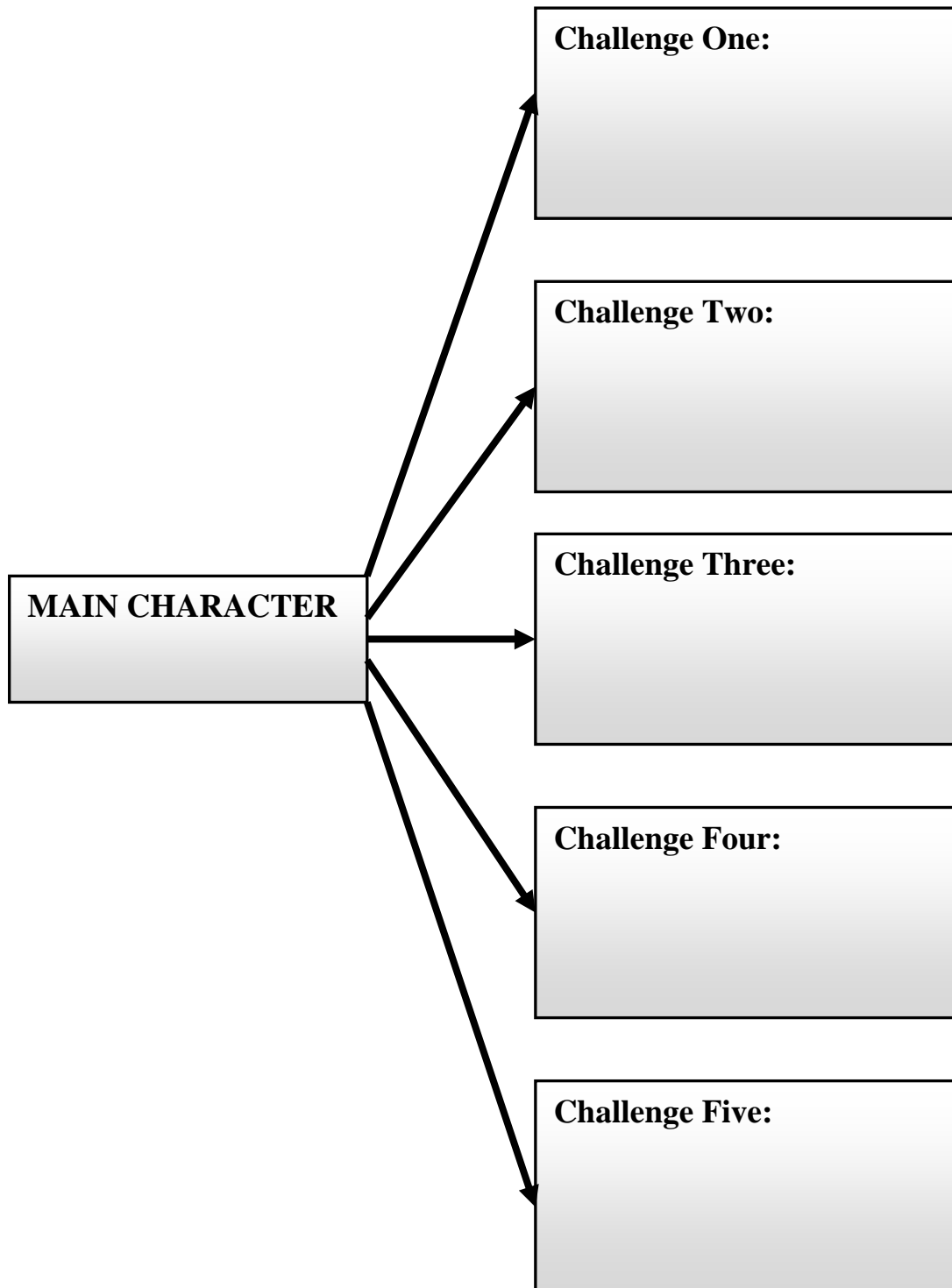
9.

10.

Now try it for your story. Add more boxes if necessary. Link with double headed arrows those plotlines that are linked.



Now try it for your story. (If you have not thought through all the challenges your character will face, you can come back and fill them in when they occur to you).



Use the following template for your main character:

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Physical features:**

- Height:
- Eye colour:
- Hair colour:
- Weight:
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - 
  - 
  -

**Occupation and main duties:**

**Personality:**

**Background:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Private life:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Strengths:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Weaknesses:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- 
- 
- 
- 

**Additional information:**

- 



Use the following template for your other characters

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Physical features:**

- Height:
- Eye colour:
- Hair colour:
- Weight:
- Any other noticeable physical features:
  - 
  -

**Relationship to main character:**

**Occupation and main duties:**

**Personality:**

- 
- 
- 

**Background:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**Private life:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Strengths:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Weaknesses:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
-

**How the reader should feel towards this person:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

**Additional information:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



Use the template on the following page to decide which of your challenges you may wish to use as an introduction.

**Challenge One:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Two:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Three:**

Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?

**Challenge Four:**

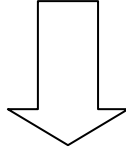
Is this one of the main challenges our main character has to face?

Is this challenge central to the main plot of the story?

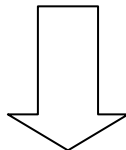
Will this challenge grab the attention of the reader and make them want to find out more?



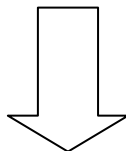
**Would the story fail without this character?**



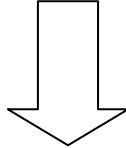
**How much of their background does the reader need to know?**



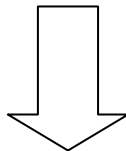
**Would more background information on this character help the plot develop?**



**Could this character be used to fuller effect in the story?**



**Additional question 1:**

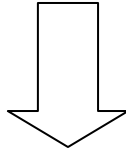


**Additional question 2:**

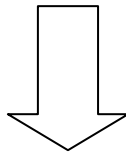


For example:

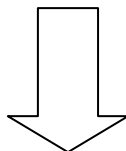
**Situation:**



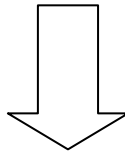
**Outline of situation:**



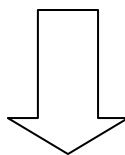
**How does the situation fit in with the main plot?**



**What would the impact be on the main story if this situation were removed?**



**Would the story fail without this situation?**



**Should this situation be included in the story? (Give reasons).**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Character:**

**Main Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**

**Sub-Plot:**