

THE COMPLETE WRITER'S GLOSSARY:

An Index of Literary Terms



**EVERY TERM YOU NEED TO KNOW
WHEN WRITING YOUR BESTSELLER.**

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Dear Writer,

First of all, welcome!

If this is your first time writing a book, then you have much to learn! If this is your fourth time drafting a manuscript, then we hope you use this glossary as a reusable resource. Understanding the terms in the following pages can be the difference between publishing your next bestseller or leaving your thoughts to gather dust in the corner of your mind. These words & phrases will help you build the foundation you need to begin growing your skills as a writer. This glossary will transform you to become the next literary expert.

When Write & Day began author coaching, we found ourselves having to define the same handful of important terms over and over again for our clients. That's when we realized that creating a guide with a myriad of crucial words that every writer should know would be a great asset to any up and coming author.

What This Guide Contains:

- Must-know writing terms, organized A-Z.
- Detailed definitions with easy-to-understand examples.
- A variety of vocabulary including literary elements, publishing terms, and editing phrases.

We're so glad that you've picked up this ebook and we're confident that it will serve as a go-to reference throughout your writing journey. We believe everyone has a story to tell, if only they had the proper tools in which to help. One sentence at a time, you'll be on your way to a published masterpiece in no time! **Of course, if what you learn here sparks new questions, please send them our way:**

<https://www.writeandday.com/contact>

We're always excited to hear from our readers, and we can't wait to learn more about your writing journey! Let's get started!

Happy Writing!

xoxo,

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1. Act: A specific unit of a story structure (including examples) that comprises a particular period of the story's plot and construction. Acts are mostly self-contained and make way for specific purposes including rising action/setup, climax/confrontation, or denouement/resolution.

2. Active Voice: A type of sentence structure used where the subject of the sentence (a person or thing) performs the main action of the sentence. For example: (active) "I drank tea by the window," versus (passive) "Tea was drank by the window." In this example, the subject (I) performed the main action-drank the tea. See also: Passive Voice.

3. Antagonist: This is the contradictory force that works against the protagonist/main character throughout the story. Antagonists are most often described as the villains or evil characters whose characteristics or actions oppose those of the protagonist. In other instances, an antagonist can be represented by a group of people, the protagonists' mental or emotional weaknesses, forces of nature, animals, technology, etc.

4. Anti-Hero: Central characters whose qualities or personality traits are not commonly associated with those of a hero. They are often forced into the role of a hero, or may do so reluctantly. Examples include: being shy, ignoble, grumpy, fearful in the face of danger, or possessing a lack of courage.

5. Advanced Readers Copy (ARC): An advanced reading copy is a free copy of a book given to select people prior to publication for mass distribution. Also known as advanced review copy, advanced reader's edition, advanced copy, or a reader's edition. It is often given to booksellers, librarians, journalists, celebrities, influencers, book reviewers, etc.

6. Archetypes: Archetypes are typical character profiles, settings, or actions used in storytelling that are representative of larger patterns commonly found in human nature. Examples include the hero, the villain, good versus evil, or the character's fall from grace.

7. Autobiography: A biography account of one's own life as told in chronological order, typically starting from birth and ending at a later date. The story is told from the perspective of the person who lived it.

8. Backstory: Events or circumstances from the character's past that have a significant impact on their current mindset, worldview and/or journey.

9. Beta Reader: An important person or group of persons to utilize during the revision process. These are people who read through early versions of written work and provide feedback regarding story structure, characters, plot holes, and overall flow in order to help the writer improve their work.

10. Blurb: The short description or synopsis of the book. Often found on the back of book covers, in dust jackets, or on website descriptions, these are intended to provide potential readers with a description of the book so as to entice them to read it.

11. Book Series: A sequence of books that are set within the same story world and usually composed of the same characters. Each story is a complete story on its own within the larger sequence and are usually grouped in logical order. Examples include: Harry Potter, Nancy Drew, and The Lord of the Rings.

12. Byline: Additional line of information either before or after a written work that provides readers with the author's name and how to find more of their work.

13. Central Problem: A problem, issue, or belief that a character must confront in order to complete the story arc. The character faces the central problem at the climax of the story. Examples include: a character's mistrust of others/themselves or a character's superiority or inferiority complex.

14. Character Arcs: This is a fundamental story element. It is the personal evolution that the character faces throughout the course of the story, and oftentimes coincides with the central problem that they are facing. Three major character arcs are: Growth, Change/Transformation, and Fall.

15. Character Flaw: An undesirable element of a character's personality that affects their ability to face and overcome their Central Problem within the story. Most relatable characters have a significant flaw, which is used to enhance the storyline. Examples of character flaws include: social awkwardness, anger problems, irrational fears, overly friendly, distrustful, alcohol/drug problems, etc.

16. Characterization: Elements that support the description and portrayal of a character in a story. These include and are not limited to: personality, appearance, attitude, backstory, abilities.

17. Chekhov's Gun: Chekhov's Gun refers to a dramatic concept developed in the 1800's by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov where each element of a story must contribute to the plot. His argument for the use of this concept is summarized when he says, "If in the first act you have hang a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there."

18. Chronological Narrative: A type of non-fiction story structure where a single story is told in chronological order.

19. Cliché: A commonly used expression or plot line that, with overuse, becomes redundant to readers, loses its novelty and loses impact. Common clichés include using stereotypes to describe characters, the love triangle, character blaming an abusive or absentee parent for their behavior, describing one's characteristics in the mirror, etc.

20. Collective Narrative: A non-fiction story structure where a series of narratives are used to form the story. Examples include a collection of stories by the author, a collection of essays on a single topic, or a variety of voices all contributing to the same story.

21. Coming of Age Story: A classic story genre that follows the protagonist's growth from childhood to adulthood. It often includes themes such as losing one's innocence, learning important lessons about oneself, and discovering one's place within their larger society. Examples include Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

22. Comp Titles: Short for "comparison titles" or sometimes "competitive titles." Comp titles represent a book used that is analogous to another book that is in a similar genre/age group. They're especially used to make a quick comparison to the other.

23. Conceptual Design: A non-fiction story structure where the book's organizational structure is shaped by both the topic and what the author has to say. This type of structure is most commonly found in self-help books and cookbooks, where the topic of the book guides the way the book is organized.

24. Conflict: A fundamental element of a story where thematic obstacles and problems are used to propel the story forward. Conflict can arise in the form of an internal problem within the character, or via an external problem, i.e. possibility of death, unsolved mystery, differences of opinion between multiple characters, etc.

25. Copyediting: The process of revising written work with a focus on its technical elements. This includes checking grammar, writing style, punctuation, and spelling. This is one of the final stages of edits before publication.

26. Cover Letter: A brief letter introducing your story that accompanies your submission to a prospective agent, editor, journal, magazine, etc.

27. Critique Partners: Similar to a Beta Reader, a critique partner is someone with whom you can share and critique each others' written work. They provide critical feedback throughout the writing process for improvement.

28. Deus Ex Machina: An artificial, godlike, or improbable device that is used to resolve the difficulties of the plot. They can be unexpectedly introduced to the story to solve a problem that seemed previously impossible to solve. An example is Cinderella's fairy godmother who comes and solves all of her problems by magically creating a dress, coach, and servants so that Cinderella can go to the ball.

29. Developmental Editing: Part of the early editing process, this editing process is used to focus on the "big picture" to resolve issues related to macro elements, including: story structure, themes, plot, character/character development, point of view, etc.

30. Duotrope: An online-based resource for writers and artists that connects them to viable markets for them to sell their work. This subscription-based service provides a searchable database where writers can find publishers or agents to sell their work.

31. Editor: A person who is in charge of analyzing the final content of a manuscript, book, newspaper, or magazine. The person typically reviews the ideas behind the story and determines the type of content that pleases readers. An editor offers suggestions to improve the quality of the overall content.

32. Editorial Assessment: Also known as a manuscript critique, an editorial assessment is a highly valuable first overview of your manuscript by a professional editor. The editor will read through the entire manuscript and provide meaningful, in-depth feedback concerning elements such as plot, characterization, structure, consistency and style.

33. Epigraph: An epigraph is typically a short quotation that is printed at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme.

34. Epilogue: An epilogue always comes at the end of a story, denoting an ending scene. Epilogues are usually separate from the final chapter. When properly written, an epilogue will have a big impact on readers, providing closure in a way that a final chapter sometimes cannot, or does not, do.

35. Exposition: Anything which isn't a part of the story you're telling, but is nevertheless important to explain what's happening or put the events into context. It is a form of narration that explains past scenarios, back-stories, settings, or history. Example: George Lucas' Star Wars: "A long time ago in a galaxy far away, far away..."

36. Flash Fiction: 2,000 words or less, flash fiction is part poetry, part narrative, and sudden fiction. This deceptively complex genre can be incredibly rewarding as it forces writers to pay close attention to every bit of conversation, action, gesture, and every syllable of every word.

37. Flashback: An occurrence in which a character remembers an earlier event that happened before the current point of the story, interrupting the normal chronological order of events. Flashbacks are often used for comedic effect to challenge something in the present. Example: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "In my younger and more vulnerable years, my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since." "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

38. Foil Character: In fiction, a foil character is someone who contrasts with another character, usually the protagonist. This particular character highlights the qualities of the other character. A subplot can also work as a foil to the main plot. The foil subplot highlights some key aspects of the main plot by showing an opposing situation.

39. Foreshadowing: A literary device where the author gives clues about events that will happen later in the story. Foreshadowing is ultimately used to drive a reader's interest by providing a series of suspense and significant reveals at certain plots. Example: *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway: "The leaves fell early that year."

40. Front Matter: Front matter is the first section of a book and is usually the shortest part. It is also known as the prelims or preliminary matter. Front matter can sometimes be a single title page, or it can also include multiple title pages, foreword, a preface, and more.

41. Genre: Genre is termed as a classification of different categories related to storytelling. This lets your readers instantly know what to expect from your work. Genres typically fall into two main categories: fiction or nonfiction, in which there are several subgenres of each. Examples of nonfiction genres include memoirs, biographies, or essays. Fiction genres include fantasy, science fiction, mystery, thriller, and much more.

42. Google Drive: A file storage and synchronization service developed by Google, allowing users to store, synchronize and share files. Google Drive is a great way to keep all of your ideas and progress organized throughout your book writing journey.

43. Grammarly: A free writing app that makes content, documents, and other forms of writing clear, mistake-free, and effectively readable. Other than Microsoft spell check, it's a great way to ensure your writing is clear and error-free.

44. Head Hopping: Head-hopping defines what happens to the reader when a writer suddenly changes character point of view. The practice unexpectedly pulls the reader from one orientation and pushes him/her into another. Head-hopping usually takes place when a first-person narration suddenly flips to a third person.

45. Hero: Character who rises to greatness and power through overcoming the conflict of their story. The hero in a story bravely combats adversity through feats of ingenuity, courage, or strength and is usually the main character.

46. Hero's Journey: The Hero's Journey is a storytelling structure outlined by Joseph Campbell in his work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. After years of studying myths from various global cultures, Campbell outlined what he called the Monomyth, the idea that all human storytelling follows the same innate patterns regardless of time period, region, or culture. The Hero's Journey is the structure that grew out of this Monomyth, following a hero who goes on an adventure, learns a lesson, bags a victory with that newfound knowledge, and then returns home in a transformed state. Examples of works that The Hero's Journey include *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*.

47. High Concept: High concept means the premise alone of your book will get attention, before anyone sees even one word of your writing. High concepts are usually used in pitching stories to agents and contain a unique element, making it distinct from other ideas on the market.

48. In Medias Res: A Latin term that means "in the middle of things." A work that starts out in medias res kicks off somewhere in the middle of the plot. Example: *The Gambler* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

49. ISBN: An International Standard Book Number (ISBN) is a unique number identifier that is assigned to each edition of a book. The ISBN is not only confined to printed material, but is assigned to each version of publication of a book that exists. An e-book, paperback, hardcover and other edition types would each have a different ISBN.

50. Line Editing: It is the process of editing sentence by sentence or line by line to upgrade the prose. A line edit guarantees that your book's content is consistent while its language is creative and concise.

51. Literary Agent: A literary agent is an agent who represents writers and their written works to publishers and helps in the sale and deal negotiation tactics. Literary agents usually represent novelists, screenwriters, and non-fiction writers.

52. Low Concept: The part of a story that focuses on the world and characters surrounding the plot, instead of the plot itself.

53. MacGuffin: In fiction, this term denotes an object, device, or event that is important to the plot and the motivation of the characters, but is insignificant, unimportant, or irrelevant when standing alone. Example: The statuette of a falcon in the 1929 detective novel, *The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett.

54. Macro Elements: Detailed elements that are put together to bring out a deeper meaning and impact from the story.

55. Main Character: A main character is the one who grabs all the attention in a story. Their goals, desires, fears and worst case scenarios drive towards the core events that are weaved to make a good story.

56. Magical Realism: Style of fiction writing that adds magical elements in a real world setting. Example: *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende.

57. Media Kit: A document that contains all the information about your business, product or event. Media kits are typically used at events and for launches as a package of information for journalists, thereby helping authors share their story.

58. Memoir: A collection of memories that an individual writes about moments or events, both public and private. Such incidents might have taken place in the subject's/person's life. The declaration made in the work is understood to be factual. Examples include Ulysses Grant's *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*.

59. Motif: In a narrative, a motif is any recurring element that has symbolic significance in a story. Through its replication, a motif can help produce other narrative or literary aspects such as theme or mood. William Shakespeare frequently uses motifs in his plays to express and reinforce theme. I.e. "light and dark" in *Romeo and Juliet*. Throughout the play, Romeo refers to Juliet as a powerful light source.

60. Narrator: Narrator is a person who tells a story. In a work of fiction, the narrator decides the story's point of view. If the narrator is a full participant in the story's theme and action, the narrative is said to be told through the first person perspective. A story told by a narrator who is not a character in the story is said to be in the third-person narrative.

61. Novel: It is a book-length fictitious prose narrative that typically represents character and action with some degree of realism. Examples include *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green.

62. Novella: A text of written, fictional, narrative prose normally longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, usually between 17,500 and 40,000 words. Examples include *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville, and *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann.

63. Outline: An outline is a document that comprises important planning information about your book's structure, plot, characters, scenes, and more. It is typically a skeleton of your manuscript.

64. Pacing: A stylistic device that shows how fast a story unfolds. When readers feel the frustration in the length of a story, writers use different techniques to control the pace of the story. In a nutshell, pacing is moving a story forward with a certain speed.

65. Pantser: Someone who doesn't plan and just writes off the top of their head. No outline, no theme, just writing. Pretty rebellious if you ask us.

66. Passive Voice: The subject is acted upon and receive the action expressed by the verb. It is used when we want to emphasize the action and the object of a sentence rather than subject. This means that the subject is either less important than the action or that we don't know who or what the subject is. Example: Egypt is known for its ancient civilization and some of the world's most famous monuments.

67. Pitching: When a writer describes a potential story to an editor, it is called pitching. A pitch can also be delivered verbally.

68. Plot: A literary term used to describe the events that make up a story, or the main part of a story. When the events in a story relate to each other in a pattern or a sequence, it is known as a plot.

69. Plot Point: A significant event within a plot that spins the action around in another direction. There are five plot points in a story: Inciting Incident, Break (or turn) into Act 2, Midpoint, Break (or turn) into Act 3, and Climax.

70. Plotter: The opposite of a Pantser, Plotters plan their story before they write through outlining, researching important elements, and developing characters early on. This planning helps them maintain their flow and work through any problems before they start to write.

- 71. Plot Holes:** In fiction writing, a plot hole is a moment, scene, or gap that goes against the stream of logic and story outline.
- 72. Point of View (POV):** It is the narrator's position in the description of events. There are three categories of POV: First Person, Second Person, and Third Person POV.
- 73. Premise:** The core foundation and idea that supports and balances your entire plot.
- 74. Prewriting:** The first stage of your writing journey. This includes outlining, storyboarding, and character creation.
- 75. Prologue:** An introduction to your story; a chapter before the starting chapter.
- 76. Proofreading:** The final step of the editing process after drafting, editing, and revising. In this phase, the editor looks for misspelled words, grammar mistakes and punctuation.
- 77. Protagonist:** The leading character. In fiction, the protagonist is usually the hero/heroine of the story.
- 78. Publishing House:** A company that takes on the role of publishing, distributing, and marketing a book after purchasing a manuscript from a literary agent or author.
- 79. Purple Prose:** The overuse of flowery, descriptive, and distracting words scattered throughout written passages. If it sounds too convoluted and runs away from the storyline, then you're reading purple prose.
- 80. Query Letter:** A letter written to pitch your manuscript to agents or publishing houses to publish your manuscript with them.
- 81. Red Herring:** A kind of fallacy that is an irrelevant topic introduced in an argument to divert the attention of listeners or readers from the original issue. In literature, this fallacy is widely used in detective or suspense novels to mislead readers or characters, or to induce them to make false conclusions. Example: When your mom gets your phone bill and you went over the limit, you begin talking to her about how hard your math class is and how well you did on a test today.
- 82. Resonance:** The act of influencing readers by evoking emotion with your writing. When you get your readers to feel deeply from within, they become more interested in your content and are more loyal to your brand.
- 83. Scene:** A scene is a part of your novel where a character or characters engage in action or dialogue.
- 84. Scene Structure:** A story with a beginning, middle, and an end.

85. Scrivener: It is a word-processing program and outliner designed for authors. Scrivener provides a management system for structuring documents, notes and metadata. Think of it as the holy grail for your manuscript outline.

86. Self-Publishing: When the author publishes their manuscript without the outside help of an agent or publishing house. Example: E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*

87. Sequel: A continuation of a previous written work. Usually picks off where the first book ended.

88. Setting: In fiction and nonfiction, the setting is where the story takes place.

89. Standard Manuscript Format: Formatting style for short stories, novels, poems and other literary works. Should a writer want to send their manuscript to an agent, they must follow the guidelines for this format.

90. Story Bible: A story bible holds all of your ideas, outlines, character sheets, etc. for your story. This can either be a journal, a binder, or anything else that you could use to hold all of this information.

91. Storyboard: Images, thoughts, or ideas that pertain to your story. Usually used for designing movies, this is still used by many writers to prep their first draft. Storyboarding also helps with getting a view of how the story will come to flow.

92. Sub-genre: A subcategory within a particular genre.

93. Subplot: The side journey within the main story. For example, in Harry Potter, the reader learns more about Ron's life, including his family, even though it's not a main plot point in the story.

94. Subtext: Less obvious message or unspoken item in a literary work.

95. Symbol: Literary device that is usually concealed in the beginning but later on revealed to be of importance.

96. Synopsis: Brief summary of a literary piece.

97. Tagline: Usually one line, a phrase or slogan.

98. The Three-Act Structure: A model used in narrative fiction. The three main parts include the Setup, the Confrontation, and the Resolution.

99. Theme: The main underlying message in any literary work. The theme also supports the main idea.

100. Traditional Publishing: When a publisher offers the author a contract and, in turn, prints, publishes, and sells your book through booksellers and other retailers. The publisher essentially buys the rights to publish your book and pays you royalties from the sales derived.

101. Trello: It is a free web-based list-making application that helps to organize and plan projects.

102. Tropes: A literary trope is the use of figurative language, via word, phrase or an image, for artistic effect such as using a figure of speech. Example: I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.

103. Vanity Press: Also known as a vanity publisher or subsidy publisher, a vanity press is a publishing house in which authors pay to have their books published.

104. WIP (Work-in-Progress): A phrase that suggests the current project in which you're writing. This work is unfinished and unedited, as contrary to your finished stories and manuscripts.

105. Word Building: The formation, construction, or composition of words. For example, "The person who employs me has a fast car." You can make this sentence simpler, by replacing "the person who employs me" with "my employer". After: "My employer has a fast car."

106. Wound: A character wound is an important part of your writing repertoire. It provides the foundation for the most moving moments a story can contain—the character arc.

107. WPM (Words per Minute): It is the measure of words processed in a minute, often used as a measurement of the speed of typing, reading or Morse code sending and receiving.