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Take Off Your Pants!: Outline Your Books For Faster, Better Writing: Revised Edition



Synopsis

When it comes to writing books, are you a “plotter” or a “pantser”? Is one method really better than the other? In this instructional ebook, author Libbie Hawker explains the benefits and technique of planning a story before you begin to write. She’ll show you how to develop a foolproof character arc and plot, how to pace any book for a can’t-put-down reading experience, and how to ensure that your stories are complete and satisfying without wasting time or words. Hawker’s outlining technique works no matter what genre you write, and no matter the age of your audience. If you want to improve your writing speed, increase your backlist, and ensure a quality book before you even write the first word, this is the how-to book for you. Take off your pants! It’s time to start outlining. This Revised Edition includes answers to the most popular questions regarding Libbie Hawker’s outlining method.

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Customer Reviews

There are a lot of things to love about Libbie Hawker's outlining process, and tons of insights to garner from this book! I first heard of the book on the Self-Publishing Podcast, where Libbie charmed me with her confidence and good-natured attitude. Then it showed up in the Also-Boughts of a book I wrote. I'm already a plotter, but currently working on bulking up my own outlining process and reading TONS of outlining/scriptwriting books, so I had to pick it up. I was not disappointed! Here are some of the insights I gained from this book:

- How to put character arc first - My go-to bible for outlining is *Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks, but he admittedly focuses a lot on plot points. I was trying to figure out how to overlay character arc onto his 4-box story architecture and coming up short. Characterization has always been a struggle for me, so this isn't a huge surprise. Libbie's section on character arc helped connect a lot of the dots for me, and was well worth 10x the price of the book alone. Oddly enough, I have the book she mentions multiple times - *The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby - and was skim-reading it just before I read this book! BUT I did not pick out the character arc information I needed from that (maybe an argument against skim-reading?). Libbie's focus on character arc was exactly what I needed to make things "click." She explained her version of it simply and concisely. I now want to go back to John Truby's explanation and see if I understand it.
- Antagonists and Allies - I had really never heard of an Ally before and this is a key insight that Libbie's book talks about in detail. The way she explains allies is *really* easy to understand. I immediately figured out several of my protagonist's allies in this outline I'm working on. Once you know your allies, a lot of scenes just before the resolution fall into place. Cool stuff!
- The Character Flaw - Libbie's character arc revolves around one simple idea - that the character has a deep flaw that determines both the internal and external conflict for the entire book. She provides examples from *Lolita* and *Charlotte's Web* to drive this point home - and again, a lot of pieces clicked into place for me. In other books, the character flaw is talked about in vague or wishy-washy terms. It's "inner demons" or "internal conflict," which has historically shed very little insight on characterization for me. No more! I'm confident that my characterization will improve leaps and bounds just by understanding the character flaw and how it plays out in the character arc.
- Theme as a filter - Most storytelling books relegate theme to the bottom of the heap, focusing primarily on plot or characterization. Libbie gives theme a prominent place and suggests using it as a filter for what makes it into your book. I again found this extremely helpful in the same way I found the character arc section helpful - I'm trying to map concepts of theme, character, and so on onto the 4-box story architecture. Libbie didn't go into a ton of detail about theme, but no

bother. There are other books that explain it in detail. This one idea was easily worth the price of admission alone and again, connected several dots for me. Plotting multi-protagonist books - Libbie's ideas about plotting for multiple protagonists reaffirmed a lot of what I already sensed but hadn't quite been able to put into practice. She provides easy-to-understand examples from her own work and confirmed that every character needs its own arc plotted. She also confirmed that sometimes your protagonists will be each other's antagonists and that this is a good thing, helpful in unifying the book rather than telling stories in parallel. All in all, a fantastic discussion on multiple protagonists that most story craft books either completely skip over or only briefly mention. Overall, Libbie has a ton of great insight and lots of NEW ideas about outlining that make this book insanely valuable. That's why I gave it 5 stars. BUT, I would caution that the book belongs on the shelf and isn't a one-stop shop on craft. I say that because, while I think Libbie agrees that writers should read other books on the subject, she makes it really easy to understand and think, "yeah, I got a handle on all of this." She's like one of those fantastic professors in college who makes you feel so smart and makes the material so fun that you decide not to study too hard for the final. Then, you get a 77% and you're like, "What? I thought I understood this!" While Libbie's method is easy-to-understand, I still recommend attempting to map it onto the traditional three-act structure as homework. I did this last night (I used the 4-box structure provided in Story Engineering) and it was not nearly as easy or straightforward as I thought it would be. However, the exercise is a big reason for the connected dots I keep mentioning. There were so many freaking a-ha moments. I was basically in heaven when it all fell into place. In doing that, I also realized I had new questions that I need to explore on my own. For example:- Can an ally be a thing or idea, rather than a person? An antagonist can often be an antagonistic force instead of a person. The person is usually a symbol of the force. I believe the answer to the question is probable "yes." - Should the antagonist be introduced as late as Libbie suggests? Other architectures seem to introduce or at least mention the antagonist earlier. Libbie does point out that the antagonist can be a character who essentially becomes antagonistic at that specific point in the outline. However, I'm still a bit unsure of what would work for me, and need to keep digging for that connective tissue to my personal style. The second thing I recommend as homework is to dig into scene structure a bit more. Libbie has a section on pacing, and while easy to understand, I sense that many writers will benefit from the more formal study of scenes and sequels to see where these simpler explanations come from. I think Randy Ingermanson (the Snowflake Method) has several articles on this topic if you want to get your feet wet. So, I guess this is all my long-winded way of saying that I believe this book is fantastic for both beginners who find

most story craft books a bit daunting and confusing (as I did when I first started and still do at times), AND writers with several books under their belts who are focusing on something specific to improve (like theme, or character arc, or pacing). BUT don't skip the fundamentals completely. Do the optional reading Libbie suggests to understand the theory behind many of her insightful conclusions. Some of the books I'm enjoying right now are Story Engineering, The Anatomy of a Story (Libbie's suggested book), and Story by Robert McKee. This text greatly enriches my understanding of these other meatier and more complex story craft books – but I wouldn't consider it a replacement. And based on Libbie's candor within the book, I don't think she intended it to be.

As an author, I am proud to admit that for the most part, I am a fly by the seat of pants type of writer. I have friends who painstakingly plot out every last smile and frown. Sure, they might be faster writers, but I think this swallows creativity. But whatever works, that's what's important. Libbie Hawker's book is about plotting/outlining. But it's done in such a non-obtrusive kind of way that even the staunch pantsters will be able to take away something from this method. I did a quick skim/read through and went back and wrote down all the steps. I wrote to the author and suggested she should put together a workbook or worksheets in PDF form for download and readers of the book might find them useful. I like how she gives examples in the book, but having never read any of the examples, (no, not even Charlotte's Web-don't judge), I found it a little harder to wrap my head around what she's getting at by example. I think even the most hardcore panster will be able to take something helpful from this book and highly recommend it!

A friend of mine who read this book the same day I did said, "It's so rare to come upon a book that changes your writing process at this point. I wasn't expecting this." I'm quoting her because she said it better first. :) This book changed not only my process but my understanding of a number of aspects of storytelling. I could almost hear the clicks in my head as things that I had kind-of-sort-of-maybe grasped before dropped solidly into place. Typically my outlines, though complete (in that they cover all the way from the beginning to the end), are a good five manuscript drafts away from being a solid-enough story to send to my editor, because my outlines have, up till now, been about what happens in the story ("this, then that, but then, so they"). When I've planned out a story, I've typically put a character in a situation, then worked it all out from there. Take Off Your Pants approaches it from an entirely different direction, and that approach just...literally unlocked "story" for me. I now have three storyline outlines for a current project that are SOLID, and

if I do happen to get stuck during the writing of it, I now know how to solve the problem and get the story going again. ~In the first draft.~I don't know that my first drafts will go any faster than they usually do (something Libbie promises in the book), but I can definitely see a time-and-effort savings in subsequent drafts, which I now expect I'll be editing mainly for prose rather than structure and character. This book may have been the best investment I've made for my writing career. ~f~c~ â ¯â ¯ â ¯at \$2.99 it was a complete steal.

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