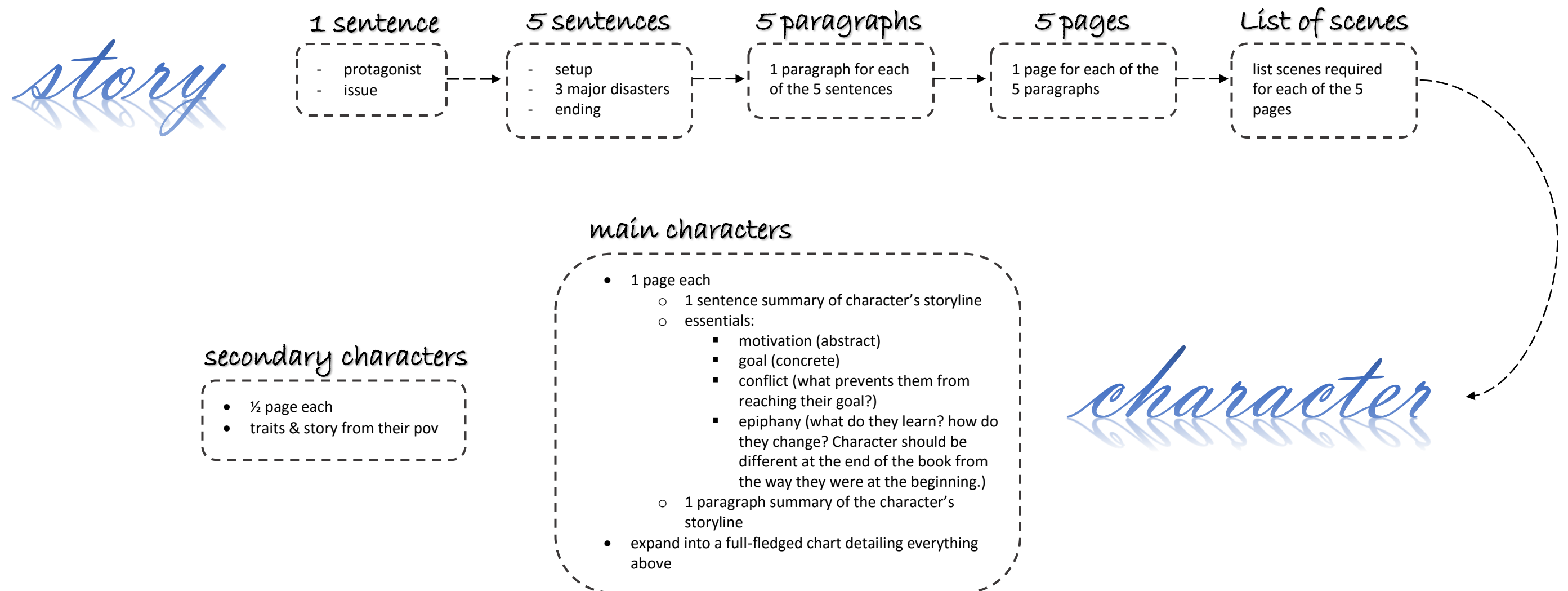


The Snowflake Method

By Randy Ingermanson



The Snowflake Method

By Randy Ingermanson

INTRO

There are thousands of different methods to write a novel and this is just one of them. It's here for you to take a look through, pick out whatever helps and ignore the rest.

A few of important points before we start:

Quick note from me:

Everything here is extracted from Ingermanson's article—the idea and sometimes even entire sentences. It's plagiarism to the extreme.☺ So all credit goes to him.

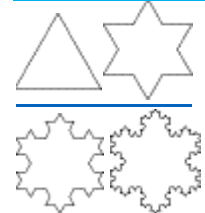
In the Snowflake Method, Ingermanson jumps repeatedly from **plot** to **character**. This is because he believes interchanging elements helps the creative process. That is, working on characters may provide insights into plot and vice versa. To help center you (and myself), I have labelled the element in focus for each step.

Notes regarding the method:

As you go through this process, you may find that you need to go back and revise your answer to earlier steps. This is expected and in fact, encouraged.

Or in explicit terms: nothing here has to be perfect. Purpose of each step is to *advance you to the next step*. Keep your momentum. You can always go back and fix things when you understand your story better.

How to create a snowflake:



That's exactly how you design a novel—start small and build up.

The 10-Step Design Process

WHY DESIGN?

Why outline, plot or plan? Because your memory is fallible, and your creativity has probably left a lot of holes in your story—holes you need to fill before you start writing your novel.

Step 1:

PLOT

DURATION:
1 hour

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Write a one-sentence summary of your novel.

EXAMPLE:
“A rogue physicist travels back in time to kill the apostle Paul.”
(The summary of Ingermanson's first novel, Transgression.)

TIPS on what makes a good sentence:

- Shorter is better. Try for fewer than 15 words.
- No character names! Better to say “a handicapped trapeze artist” than “Jane Doe”.

Step 2:

PLOT

DURATION:
1 hour

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Expand that sentence to a full paragraph describing:

1. the story setup
2. 3 major disasters (each disaster equals a quarter of the book)
 - i. Disaster #1: external circumstances
 - ii. Disaster #2: protagonist's attempts to “fix things”
 - iii. Disaster #3: protagonist's attempts to “fix things” (things just get worse and worse)
3. the ending (last quarter of the book)

NOTE:
Do not confuse this paragraph with the back-cover copy of your book. This paragraph summarizes the whole story. Your back-cover copy should summarize only about the first quarter of the story (i.e., only the first disaster that gets the story going).

Step 3:

CHARACTER

DURATION:
1 hour (per character)

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
For each of your major characters, write a one-page summary sheet that includes:

- Name
- A **one-sentence** summary of the character's storyline
- Motivation (what does he/she want abstractly?)
- Goal (what does he/she want concretely?)
- Conflict (what prevents him/her from reaching this goal?)
- Epiphany (what will he/she learn, how will he/she change?)
- A one-**paragraph** summary of the character's storyline (i.e., the story through your character's eyes.)

Step 4:

PLOT

By this stage, you should have a good idea of the large-scale structure of your novel, and you may have spent as much as a week on it. If the story is broken, you know it now, rather than after investing 500 hours in a rambling first draft.

Now just keep growing the story.

DURATION:
Several hours

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Expand each sentence of your summary paragraph into a full paragraph. All but the last paragraph should end in a disaster. The final paragraph should tell how the book ends.
At the end of the exercise, you have a pretty decent one-page skeleton of your novel.

NOTE:
It's okay if you can't get it all onto one single-spaced page. What matters is that you are growing the ideas that will go into your story. You are expanding the conflict.

Step 5:

CHARACTER

DURATION:
1-2 days

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Write up a:

- one-page description of each major character
- half-page description of the other important characters.

NOTE:
These “character synopses” should tell the story from the point of view of each character. As always, feel free to cycle back to the earlier steps and make revisions as you learn cool stuff about your characters.

Step 6:

PLOT

By now, you have a solid story and several story-threads, one for each character.

DURATION:
1 week

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Expand the one-page plot synopsis of the novel to a four-page synopsis (i.e., expand each paragraph from step 4 into a full page).

Now you are figuring out the high-level logic of the story and making strategic decisions. You will definitely want to cycle back and fix things in the earlier stages as you gain insight into the story and new ideas whack you in the face.

Step 7:

CHARACTER

DURATION:
1-4 weeks

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Expand your character descriptions into full-fledged character charts detailing everything there is to know about each character:

- the standard stuff: birthdate, description, history, motivation, goal, etc.
- most importantly: how will this character change by the end of the novel?

NOTES:

- Expansion of your work in step 3
- You can go back and revise steps 1-6 as your characters become “real” to you and begin making petulant demands on the story.
- **Take as much time as you need to do this**, because you're saving time downstream. It may take a full month of solid effort to finish this step.

Step 8:

PLOT

DURATION:
1 week

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
Take the four-page synopsis and make a list of all the scenes that you'll need to turn the story into a novel.

One line for each scene, with the following suggested column headings:

- POV character
- Scene description

After you're done listing all the scenes:

- Chapters

NOTES:
Can be as large as 100 lines (i.e., scenes) long. You can save different versions of the story. Incredibly valuable for analyzing a story.

Step 9:

OPTIONAL (Ingermanson no longer does this step)

DURATION:
1 week

ACTIVITY/ACTION:

- Take each line of the spreadsheet and expand it to a multi-paragraph description of the scene.
- Put in any cool lines of dialogue you think of, and sketch out the essential conflict of that scene. (If there's no conflict, you'll know it here and you should either add conflict or scrub the scene.)

NOTES:

- You can write 1-2 pages per chapter, starting each chapter on a new page.
- Result: approx. 50-page document.
- Used for editing. This is the draft before your first draft. (The draft even before your zero draft.)

Step 10

ACTIVITY/ACTION:
You can now sit down and start pounding out the first draft of your novel.

Midway through, fix the broken parts of your design documents. (Remember, they're fluid structures, they weren't meant to be perfect on the first go. They are a living set of documents that changes and grows as you develop your novel. If you've done your job right, at the end of the first draft you will laugh at what an amateurish piece of junk your original design documents were. And you'll be thrilled at how deep your story has become.)

NOTES:
You might think that all the creativity is chewed out of the story by this time. Well, no, not unless you overdid your analysis when you wrote your Snowflake. This is supposed to be the fun part, because there are many small-scale logic problems to work out here. How does Hero get out of that tree surrounded by alligators and rescue Heroine who's in the burning rowboat? This is the time to figure it out! But it's fun because you already know that the large-scale structure of the novel works. So you only have to solve a limited set of problems, and so you can write relatively fast.

The Snowflake Method

By Randy Ingermanson

STEP	DURATION	STORY ELEMENT	ACTIVITY	NOTES
1	1 hr	PLOT	Write a one-sentence summary of your novel.	EXAMPLE: “A rogue physicist travels back in time to kill the apostle Paul.” (The summary of Ingermanson’s first novel, Transgression.) TIPS on what makes a good sentence: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shorter is better. Try for fewer than 15 words.• No character names! Better to say “a handicapped trapeze artist” than “Jane Doe”.
2	1 hr	PLOT	Expand that sentence to a full paragraph describing: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. the story setup2. 3 major disasters (each disaster equals a quarter of the book)<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Disaster #1: external circumstancesii. Disaster #2: protagonist’s attempts to “fix things”iii. Disaster #3: protagonist’s attempts to “fix things” (things just get worse and worse)3. the ending (last quarter of the book)	Do not confuse this paragraph with the back-cover copy of your book. This paragraph summarizes the whole story. Your back-cover copy should summarize only about the first quarter of the story (i.e., only the first disaster that gets the story going).
3	1 hr	CHARACTER	For each of your major characters, write a one-page summary sheet that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name• A one-sentence summary of the character’s storyline• Motivation (what does he/she want abstractly?)• Goal (what does he/she want concretely?)• Conflict (what prevents him/her from reaching this goal?)• Epiphany (what will he/she learn, how will he/she change?)• A one-paragraph summary of the character’s storyline (i.e., the story through your character’s eyes.)	
4	Several hrs	PLOT	Expand each sentence of your summary paragraph into a full paragraph. All but the last paragraph should end in a disaster. The final paragraph should tell how the book ends. At the end of the exercise, you have a pretty decent one-page skeleton of your novel.	RECAP: <i>By this stage, you should have a good idea of the large-scale structure of your novel, and you may have spent as much as a week on it. If the story is broken, you know it now, rather than after investing 500 hours in a rambling first draft.</i> <i>Now just keep growing the story.</i> NOTE: It’s okay if you can’t get it all onto one single-spaced page. What matters is that you are growing the ideas that will go into your story. You are expanding the conflict.
5	1-2 days	CHARACTER	Write up a: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• one-page description of each major character• half-page description of the other important characters.	These “character synopses” should tell the story from the point of view of each character. As always, feel free to cycle back to the earlier steps and make revisions as you learn cool stuff about your characters.
6	1 week	PLOT	Expand the one-page plot synopsis of the novel to a four-page synopsis (i.e., expand each paragraph from step 4 into a full page).	RECAP: <i>By now, you have a solid story and several story-threads, one for each character.</i> NOTE: Now you are figuring out the high-level logic of the story and making strategic decisions. You will definitely want to cycle back and fix things in the earlier stages as you gain insight into the story and new ideas whack you in the face.
7	1-4 weeks	CHARACTER	Expand your character descriptions into full-fledged character charts detailing everything there is to know about each character: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>the standard stuff</u>: birthdate, description, history, motivation, goal, etc.• <u>most importantly</u>: how will this character change by the end of the novel?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expansion of your work in step 3• You can go back and revise steps 1-6 as your characters become “real” to you and begin making petulant demands on the story.• Take as much time as you need to do this, because you’re saving time downstream. It may take a full month of solid effort to finish this step.
8	1 week	PLOT	Take the four-page synopsis and make a list of all the scenes that you’ll need to turn the story into a novel. One line for each scene, with the following suggested column headings: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• POV character• Scene description <i>After you’re done listing all the scenes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chapters	Can be as large as 100 lines (i.e., scenes) long. You can save different versions of the story. Incredibly valuable for analyzing a story.
9	1 week		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take each line of the spreadsheet and expand it to a multi-paragraph description of the scene.• Put in any cool lines of dialogue you think of, and sketch out the essential conflict of that scene. (If there’s no conflict, you’ll know it here and you should either add conflict or scrub the scene.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This stage is optional• You can write 1-2 pages per chapter, starting each chapter on a new page.• Result: approx. 50-page document.• Used for editing. This is the draft before your first draft. (The draft even before your zero draft.)
10			You can now sit down and start pounding out the first draft of your novel. Midway through, fix the broken parts of your design documents. (Remember, they’re fluid structures, they weren’t meant to be perfect on the first go. They are a living set of documents that changes and grows as you develop your novel. If you’ve done your job right, at the end of the first draft you will laugh at what an amateurish piece of junk your original design documents were. And you’ll be thrilled at how deep your story has become.)	You might think that all the creativity is chewed out of the story by this time. Well, no, not unless you overdid your analysis when you wrote your Snowflake. This is supposed to be the fun part, because there are many small-scale logic problems to work out here. How does Hero get out of that tree surrounded by alligators and rescue Heroine who’s in the burning rowboat? This is the time to figure it out! But it’s fun because you already know that the large-scale structure of the novel works. So you only have to solve a limited set of problems, and so you can write relatively fast.