

**From Here to There: An Alternative to Outlining**  
From Pikes Peak Writers Conference 2010 Workshop  
Presenter: Carol Berg  
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There are many ways to plot a story: detailed synopses, scene by scene outlines, chapter by chapter outlines, using note cards on a wall, preparing exhaustive character biographies. Many writers have a need to know the whole story before they first set pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. Others are overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to figure out a mountain of details before they can begin writing. No two writers are alike, and every writer develops his or her favorite method for plotting. In this workshop, acclaimed fantasy author Carol Berg shared what works for her.

Carol believes that tight and well-plotted novels can be written without knowing every detail, every character or every scene in the entire story before the writing starts. She prefers to live the events of the story with her characters, experiencing events as they happen and seeing the world through their eyes. This helps her develop characters that live and breathe on the page, and settings that become integral parts of the story. Action progresses logically from the events of the story and the interaction of the characters with their settings.

That doesn't mean that Carol doesn't do any planning at all before she starts to create a story; she simply prefers "not to have planned out too much." She advises that there is a minimum of information to know before you start writing your story, or else you'll "wander all over the place and have no idea where you're going, and it's going to be frustrating." Carol identifies a minimum of four need-to-know elements before she starts writing: character, point of view, a "here," and a "there."

1. A character. "You have to have somebody to start out with on page one. It may not be your principal character, but it probably should be a character that we're going to care about." A character is a being, human or otherwise, complete with a goal, a motivation and a conflict. Characters don't have to be good, or even likeable, but the reader needs to identify with them. Carol notes that if your main character doesn't appear on page one, then he or she had better show up somewhere in the first few pages!
2. Point of view. This doesn't mean the first-person or third-person way of telling the story, but rather the perspective from which the story is told. The reader will see the story's world and events through someone's eyes—often the main character, or perhaps a secondary character. Point of view characters can change throughout a story. Who will your point of view character(s) be?
3. "Here" is the time and place the story happens. It is also an event, often described as "the moment when everything changes." Time, place, and the event that is happening when the story opens all should appear on page one.
4. "There" is the overall story arc, which Carol defines as, "a series of actions or scenes of rising tension that eventually arrive at a climax." Novels are actually made of multiple arcs that

provide twists, revelations, changes of story direction, and mid-point resolutions. Determining the all-encompassing arc that goes from the beginning to the story's end will give you direction. And knowing your story's direction will keep you from straying too far from the story you want to tell.

Once you have identified these four elements for your own story, start writing. Let the story generate questions, and ask yourself how each scene would play differently if you change the situation leading up to it. Be prepared to throw out what doesn't work. See where the story takes you.

There may be more you want to know about your story before you start writing it, but at least you now have a direction. You will be able to feel when you start to wander away from the story. Carol likens this writing process to driving in fog. "Your story is out there in the fog, and you can only see the road just in front of you, and a maybe little bit to either side, but you know that you're heading for Kansas. And as you drive, the fog starts to thin out a little bit, and you start seeing road signs...and the farther you go, the more things appear from the fog."

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