The background is a vibrant blue with a fine, woven texture. In the center, a large, ornate gold and silver decorative frame contains a large, bold yellow number '7'. The frame is highly detailed with scrollwork and floral motifs. Four similar, smaller decorative elements are positioned in the corners of the cover, mirroring the central design.

7 Secrets of Successful Stories

Grant P. Hudson
author of
How Stories Really Work
and
Become a Professional Author

7 Secrets of Successful Stories

SECOND EDITION

including a **BONUS SECTION:**
Revitalising Your Work

by Grant P. Hudson

author of
How Stories Really Work: Exploring the Physics of Fiction
and
Become a Professional Author

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Published by Clarendon House Publications
ISBN# 978-0-244-12829-6

Grant P. Hudson is a published author and poet, has over 5,000 items of merchandise available featuring his artwork, has edited and published many books, taught many people, made many more laugh (education and laughter go well together) and has delved into business on many levels.

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How to Use This Book

There are better ways of writing fiction, and there are worse ways. Better ways would attract more readers, produce more reader satisfaction, create more emotional commitment, generate greater sales, and perhaps end up with a book becoming a classic of its kind.

You can review what the better ways are by looking at best seller lists, but also by studying literature through the ages to see which books have lasted and become loved. The trouble is that reading stories is largely about falling under the author's spell: the very best fiction is so good that it can be hard to step back and spot exactly why it is having an effect on you and other readers.

Worse ways of writing fiction would drive readers away or be flat and unattractive, fail to satisfy readers, frustrate reader satisfaction, not succeed commercially and would probably end up with the work being forgotten rapidly.

It's much harder to find examples of the worst kinds of story, as they don't usually get far enough to get published. But we can find some pretty awful stuff in any bookshop nevertheless - it's the kind of thing that sits on the shelves and doesn't sell very well, if at all. The authors of this kind of book have not succeeded in weaving much of a spell. But even they can tell us useful things about what makes writing successful by pointing out what *not* to do.

Luckily, there are thousands of stories which have stood the test of time and there are contemporary films and plays which are huge commercial, literary and cinematic successes. Analysing them, as has been done in books like *How Stories Really Work*, should be able to give us some kind of template or perhaps a series of templates against which to measure what works and what doesn't. Then, projecting that template onto another work - perhaps one which doesn't seem all that successful or which is flagging in some way - we should be able to see 'shadowy areas' just like the patches which show up on a medical X-Ray picture. Knowing where these weak spots are would be the beginning of fixing them, if the work were one of our own.

Like modern medicine, though, we can now adjust our scanners and see different layers of success beyond the simple X-Ray: we can look, in fact, into at least seven levels of what goes on beneath the surface of stories.

The seven levels are:

Ideas

Characters

Attractive Power

Emotional Commitment

Plot

Quality

Fulfilment

and they are all interlinked.

Let's take a look at each of these individually.

(And after you've finished reading about those, please read your special bonus section on revitalising a story.)

Ideas

Ideas underpin any piece of fiction. They make the difference between the book that doesn't get sold and the bestseller; they also make the difference between the bestseller that a couple of years later you find on the second-hand bookshelf, and the bestseller which is read again and again and made into box-office-shattering films.

Get the ideas behind a piece of fiction right, and the rest will come much easier.

But what ideas? Do you just dream up some clever ideas and then hope for the best? No, there are ways of approaching this which will get you to the core of the matter far more quickly.

1. Step back from fiction.

Put aside your writing for a moment and think about Life.

What is important to you? Why is it important?

What people, relationships, places, items and so on are precious to you?

Make a list.

2. What do you want to say about these things?

Work out what you would like to communicate to the world about these people and things that are precious to you.

Write a few paragraphs if you can.

If done properly, this could be one of the most important exercises you could do in relation to your own writing.

The motivation you have as a writer is intimately connected to the central ideas or themes you want to communicate in your work. If you consider, deep down, that your ideas are not important enough or powerful enough, it's likely that you won't make the time to push various obstacles out of the way and get writing actually happening.

Similarly, if you are too hazy about what you want to communicate and why, your writing will sag and drift towards tropes and clichés.

3. Now look for metaphors of the above.

Let's say the thing that is most precious to you is your home and family.

Let's assume that the thing that you want to tell the world about your home and family is how much you love them and want them to thrive.

What could be a metaphor for that?

A growing and budding tree?

An egg in a nest, hatching into a beautiful bird?

A ship setting sail from a harbour on a gorgeous summer's day?

There are probably an infinite number of metaphors. The above are obvious ones - some might be more subtle.

Another example: let's say that the thing you value most in all the world is your political freedom. And that what you want to say about that is that it is crucial that people exercise their political freedoms while they still have them.

Metaphors?

A lion escaping from a cage and returning to the wilderness?

A fire raging through a town destroying everything?

A couple of boys fighting to be 'King of the Castle'?

Again, there would be many more images that could help to tell the story of the battle for political freedoms through an image, a picture, a metaphor.

You may already have works of fiction, finished and unfinished, which you might now view as shells, ready to be occupied by the powerful ideas that you have evoked. Ray Bradbury said, 'Look for metaphors' - see if the stories you have been trying to tell are metaphors in some way for the ideas that you want to communicate, or whether you could now incorporate some metaphors to make your stories stronger.

If not, tell stories that are more metaphorical.

You'll be amazed at the difference, both to the quality of your writing and to your personal motivation in getting writing done.

4. Get some momentum going.

If you find writing easy, you are probably inspired by ideas, whether or not you have consciously worked them out; if you find it difficult,

then the other forces in operation in Life - family pressures, health, money and all the rest of them - are stronger than your drive to write. What can you do?

Dig deeper.

To overcome this kind of inertia, you need to tap into deeper, more profound levels of thought and imagination than you are currently. Does that mean that your current writing is worthless? No, far from it: but as a writer you may be perpetually on the edge of a creative volcano. You just have to tap into it.

Ideas drive your writing forward. When writing is moving forward, your lifestyle will slowly follow. You will stop looking for time to write and you will start to make the time to write.

There's a difference.

5. Set some realistic quantitative targets.

If you can knock out a high-quality draft chapter followed by another and another, it indicates that you've contacted some kind of creative river within yourself.

You know roughly what you want to say and have worked out roughly how you want to say it. And things get clearer as you go. Take advantage of that and set yourself some targets - numbers of words, chapters written, sections completed, that kind of thing. This doesn't mean that you have to rigidly meet all these targets or run your life like a machine, but it's a measurement of something more fundamental occurring in your writing life: what you have to say inside is gradually becoming a tangible work of fiction for others to read outside.

6. Hone your philosophy.

Throughout the history of literature, one thing stands out when you examine successful authors: all of them had some kind of vision about Life. These things may have changed and evolved over time for them; they may occasionally be hard to summarise or even express in terms apart from their fiction itself; but, at the time of writing, a stable vision underlaid the piece of work.

Think of Shakespeare's Tragedies; think of Donne's poems; think of Forster's novels. Think of George Lucas's *Star Wars*.

Think of any piece of successful fiction that you like. They all have themes, and by themes is meant that they all rest upon a foundation of powerfully held ideas.

The ideas may not be the personal beliefs of the author - it's hard to conclude that Shakespeare himself viewed Life tragically, or what exactly went on in Donne's love life, though thousands of words of speculation have been written about both - but for the time that the work was being created, ideas formed the basis of it. The mechanics of how this works and what exactly happens, machine-like, in any work of fiction, poetry, novel, short story, play or film, is discussed in much greater detail in the books *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author*.

Working out what you think can be an ongoing process which is never 'finished' in any realistic sense - but an author's philosophy is the foundation of successful story-writing, even when that philosophy is in flux.

7. Spot the seams of gold in your work.

Considering the above, it's entirely feasible that you might feel a little apathetic at first. Where do you start creating a set of foundational ideas for a piece of fiction that in any way approaches the grandeur of, for example, Hardy's melancholic view of Life, or Tolkien's or Graham Greene's Catholicism?

The truth is that you will already have these ideas in some form. It's quite possible - even likely - that your existing fiction already reveals some of the underlying basis upon which it can develop to be better and more powerful.

Like an untrained miner, you've probably walked right past seams of coal or gold in your material without realising what they were. Take some time to look at your own writings through slightly different eyes: search for the coal or the gold.

You will find it, or traces of it.

Chances are that you are already drawing on the fuel of powerfully-held ideas to drive your fiction. You may not have realised why you admire a particular turn of phrase in a piece of your writing; you may not have stopped to think why a specific chapter resonates with emotional power. Understanding what is working in your

writing can lead you to discover even more of it - and then you can get every part of your work to shine.

8. Recognise two kinds of stress connected with your writing.

A sense of overload or stress connected to writing is an indicator that perhaps you haven't yet tapped into the motherlode of ideas that you need.

There are two basic kinds of stress associated with fiction writing:

i) when you have written something and simply can't figure out why it's not working as you would wish

and

ii) when you have figured it all out and are bursting to write more, but have to abide by the rules of normal human society and eat and sleep in order to keep on functioning as a human being.

The first kind of stress is quite introverting and normally resolves when underlying ideas are tapped into; the second will always be with us - it's part of being a writer!

9. Plan out a career as a writer.

If you think that your philosophy is now at a point where it's feasible for you to make a living or at least some money from your writing eventually, move on to the next section in the confidence that some basics are established; if, however, you want to 'pack it in' and give up either right now or in the near future, you need to refer to the earlier questions in this section and do something differently.

Spend some time working out the central ideas or themes you want to communicate in your work.

What's important to you?

What gives your life meaning?

Work out how to go deeper; reach more profound levels of thought and imagination than you are currently. If possible, work out what your consistent vision about Life is.

It will be time well spent.

Characters

Sorting out your core ideas and finding fictive ways of expressing them are just the beginning.

One of the primary tools used by master authors for the expression of their ideas - whether they think of it that way or not - are the things we call 'characters'.

There can hardly be a work of fiction without at least one 'character'. But there is a great deal of false and misleading information out there about what a character is and how to devise a successful one.

The construction of characters turns out to be much simpler - and stranger - than you might think.

What is a 'convincing character'? Your first thought might be 'Someone who appears realistic to a reader'.

That leads automatically to trying to construct something that resembles a real person, down to age, height, eye colour, preference in clothes and so on, like many guide books tell authors to do.

That could lead you astray.

'Realism' when it comes to character is not a case of building a convincing life-story around someone who you have invented, at least not in terms of facts and figures.

By all means compose a detailed biography of a character; alternatively, simply create him or her 'on the fly'. Whichever you choose to do, if the construction you've ended up doesn't possess certain very distinct attributes, your story will be less effective than it might have been.

Instead of thinking of a character as a person reduced to a few notes on a page, think of him or her as a vessel.

In other words, don't try to create a 'person'.

Try to create an *empty receptacle* of a particular kind.

What does that mean?

It's simpler than it might sound.

There are seven basic types of these 'receptacles' in fiction.

As you go through these, you may see that it is possible to blend some of them together to get more rounded or complex characters, but there are a limited number of basic archetypes. Each of them is a kind of metaphor or personification of the core ideas at the heart of a story, and the movement or change that occurs within each one and within them together as part of the tale you are telling reflects the message or meaning of what you are trying to say.

The best way to explain this is to go through each type and give you some examples.

Let's say you have a fairly standard 'message' in your story along the lines of 'Pride is wrong and leads to disaster'. This is a common theme or message, and is no less valid or powerful for being prevalent in stories all over the world.

How do you craft a set of seven receptacles to convey that message?

1. The Antagonist

This is the vessel which will represent the darkest point or aspect of your message. He or she will be overcome by pride and blind to the fact, representing the negative outcome or reverse of what you are trying to say. Standard villains are of this kind - *Star Wars*' Emperor Palpatine, fantasy Dark Lords, Moriarty and black-hearted knaves and so on.

They abound in fiction. You can probably think of dozens of them. You may not have noticed how similar they all are, nor how little they change in the course of a tale.

If they are overcome in the end, defeated by the protagonist as they are in 85% of stories, then that triumph reflects the author's message that 'Pride is wrong and leads to disaster'.

If they manage to defeat the protagonist, then we have a different kind of story, and a whole different genre - a Tragedy or an Irony (for more on the Four Basic Genres, please see *How Stories Really Work*). The author's message in this case would be something like 'Pride is wrong and leads to disaster, but there's nothing we can do about it - that's just the way of the world'. Horror stories fit here, for instance.

Most villains don't change in the course of a story. If they do, they begin to look like the next vessel, the Shadow Protagonist.

2. The Shadow Protagonist

This is the character who is dark, perhaps conventionally 'evil' but is tortured by that knowledge and vacillates constantly, eternally tormented by the awareness that he or she is knowingly doing wrong but cannot escape.

Tragic heroes fit here - think Macbeth, in particular. But also Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*, or Darth Vader (though he is unrealistically redeemed in the films). Orlick in Dickens' *Great Expectations* is another - like the protagonist, yet unlike.

This is the painful end of the character spectrum: the figure who would have been the protagonist had he or she made different choices, and who is now caught in an orbit around darkness, unable to break free.

Master authors use characters like this to indicate a moral to their tales: 'You could end up like this if you're not careful.' They are usually similar to the Protagonist so as to increase the sense of risk to that character.

These vessels show slight motion both ways: they edge towards the 'light' end of the spectrum, or slip down into total darkness. But they can't escape.

3. The Submerged Companion

No sexism here, this is just observation from countless stories: the next 'vessel' is not always but often a female who hovers close to the emptiness offered by the Antagonist, but hasn't yet slipped into that trap.

Opportunities arise for this character to emerge completely from darkness and be 'redeemed'. Often, though, the character falls the other way and perishes.

Examples are too numerous to mention: Eowyn in *The Lord of the Rings*, Estella in *Great Expectations*, Lady Macbeth, Ophelia and just about any heroine in a romance story, where classically the female is 'rescued' through marriage to another character archetype who comes up in a moment.

As we move along this spectrum you may observe that the 'character arc' widens a little. Here, the submerged companion has a little more room to manoeuvre, climbing up into enlightenment or drifting down into doom in the course of the tale.

Submerged Companions are often the central characters of particular types of fiction - romances, for example. And authors often use this type of vessel to convey their basic message - 'Be like this,' they say, 'and there are no guarantees, but there is the possibility of triumph.'

As far as the message of 'Pride is wrong and leads to disaster' is concerned, a rising submerged companion overcomes temptation (Elizabeth Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice* comes to mind) and ends up married, normally - while a sinking one succumbs and is lost, like Lady Macbeth.

They usually suffer when falling too, because they have more to awareness of what they have to lose.

4. The Protagonist

This of course is where the central thrust of most stories lies: the hero or heroine. Why didn't we start with him or her? Because you might be able to see a progression here: just as the Antagonist, the Shadow Protagonist and the Female Companion potentially represent negative parts of the author's core communication, so here, at the centre of the seven vessels, is the one which is most in the balance: through this character we usually see the whole story tip towards the positive. The protagonist is normally the one who overcomes his or her own negatives and triumphs over the Antagonist.

Protagonists have built-in flaws; they also often have a built-in connection to the Antagonist or negative end of the message. This can be psychic (as in Harry Potter's link to Voldemort or Frodo's link to Sauron) or familial (as in Luke Skywalker's link to Darth Vader).

Why?

To show that they are personally in peril, gripped by darkness, and are capable of sliding the wrong way at any moment - at least, at

any moment until close to the end, when they usually overcome any remaining doubts or weaknesses and are victorious.

Luke Skywalker, King Arthur, Harry Potter and just about any protagonist you care to name has these attributes and has the increased capacity to swing wildly in the story between extremes of 'good' and 'evil' as they are represented within the tale in question. That's because the protagonist is the primary vessel, the vehicle in whom the author wants us to invest the bulk of our attention - authors want us to 'be' the protagonist as much as possible.

The journey of the protagonist through the events of the story is thus the journey of the reader through a complex metaphor until the conclusion leaves the reader with the message, wrapped in all the beautiful complexity of emotion, image, and wonder which fiction brings.

At least that's what happens in *successful* fiction. Less marvellous stories move the reader through a journey too, but perhaps with less overall impact and a less profound or effective message.

You can probably begin to appreciate that a 'character' in the normally understood mode is one of these vehicles or vessels by which the author conveys whatever the author wants to communicate. Any character needs to be 'realistic' only to the degree necessary to hook the required quotient of attention needed to produce a successful piece of fiction overall.

In other words, a story's hero or heroine needs to resemble a 'real person' only sketchily: what they mainly have to do is attract more reader attention than any other of these archetypes.

5. The Emerging Companion

Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings*, Hans Solo in *Star Wars*, Sirius Black in Harry Potter, Lancelot in the tales of Arthur, older brothers, street-wise fighters, worldly protectors - these types abound too. Their attributes are that they have some kind of darkness in their past - perhaps their recent past - which, in the course of the tale, they throw off, emerging into the 'light' to become leaders or even kings. Run down the list of them which you've probably already formed in your mind and see for yourself.

This is the part of the author's message which says 'See? I told you that Pride was dangerous - but here's what happens when it is overcome'. Or whatever the equivalent is for a particular author's message.

This is the positive part of what an author has to say asserting itself through the thing called the 'character' of the Emerging Companion.

Sometimes Protagonists become these figures in the course of a story. The movement in most stories is definitely in this direction.

6. The Comic Companion

The majority of stories also have this figure: the protagonist's funny assistant.

R2-D2, Samwise Gamgee, Ron Weasley - you see comic figures in novels, plays, Disney movies and elsewhere so often that you have probably become partly blind to them. They are usually cited as providing 'comic relief' and they do - but their presence and their role is more profound than that. They represent a kind of innocence, the state of things at the upper end of the author's message.

They are usually 'untouchable', bumbling their way through all kinds of hazards and obstacles without any serious harm ever occurring to them. In fact they can sustain what might appear to be critical damage, and which would kill or maim anyone else, but recover easily, often in a comic fashion. In darker stories, they tend to fade into the background or make only fleeting appearances (think of the Porter in Macbeth); in the more usual kind of epic tale, they often end up 'saving the day', providing the protagonist with the key assistance that he or she needs at the key moment.

Try not to think of them as 'pseudo-people', as others might have instructed you to do: they are largely symbolic or allegoric or in some other way not quite 'people'.

Like all these archetypes, they fulfil precise functions within a story. Comic Companions say 'Look, this is what happens when you live the positive side of the message and reject the negative'.

Harmlessness, innocence, humour, warmth, light-heartedness and yet potency are amongst their usual characteristics.

Have fun with this and examine a few of them. You'll find them all over the place, doing similar things everywhere.

But there's one more category of receptacle to come - one of the most important and universal archetypes.

7. The Wise Old Figure

This one will be familiar to most readers in the guise of the old wizard in stories from ancient times, as well as modern works - this is the Gandalf, Dumbledore, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Merlin figure that we immediately recognise as an archetype, taking their close similarities for granted. We may not so quickly spot the Wise Old Figure in other kinds of stories, from Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the Inspector in J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, or Professor Godbole in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, or darker, more twisted versions like Jaggers in *Great Expectations*.

They often come equipped with a stick-like device - a magical staff or wand, or a gun, or a sonic screwdriver like the Doctor in BBC TV's *Doctor Who*. It's usually symbolic of their often-mystical power within the story - they are the ones who know more than anyone else what is going on in the story world, and they are normally the ones who explain things to the Protagonist and set him or her going on the central business of the tale.

As a receptacle for the author's message, they are the closest we ever get as readers to meeting the author himself or herself. They can more or less tell us the author's underlying message, and sometimes do - but, by working through the Protagonist, they compel that message to be acted out as the story.

For this reason, and to give the protagonist room to manoeuvre, the Wise Old Figure often disappears for a large portion of the tale, either 'dying' and then being resurrected, or just mysteriously vanishing, or becoming apparently impotent before re-appearing to wrap things up at the conclusion.

Your mind is possibly working overtime right now realising just how prevalent these figures are throughout fiction.

These seven archetypes or receptacles work together to dramatise the piece of fiction as a whole, whatever it is: Antagonists are the negative end of a spectrum, orbited by their Shadow Protagonists;

Submerged Companions either succumb or escape from that negative gravity; the Protagonist sways between the two polar opposites, while the Emerging Warrior shows the way forward to the light; the ending of the tale is assisted by the Comic Companion and the whole thing is guided by the Wise Old Figure. Most stories, even simple ones, require this set of characters, not just one or two. Shorter tales have no room for all seven, of course - but suggestions of them often appear even there.

Sometimes a character can have features of more than one, or move between a few of them, especially in prolonged serials like *Doctor Who*.

The key thing is to recognise that they are there.

How can you be sure that the reader's attention will be on the character who is central to your story? The Protagonist is the one who has the most to lose: that sense of loss or impending loss, usually exemplified by scars or wounds or orphanhood, and exacerbated by some kind connection to the Antagonist, ensures that the reader's attention will stick like glue to him or her.

Now you have some inkling of what makes one character senior to another and what their roles are in relation to each other.

Let's look at your fiction.

Have you been introducing characters for the sake of it?

Now you can structure your story so that each role is performed correctly. Your story will become energised and more attractive immediately.

Now you have some idea of what it takes to have the alchemy of characters functioning properly. Many more details about this are given in my books, *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author*.

Strangely enough, the thing that makes characters truly solid and realistic is their relative emptiness. The precise nature of this hollowness is described in great detail in *How Stories Really Work* but for now you can rest assured that a thick file of character 'facts' will not particularly help you to attract readers.

You might be happy with your fictitious people. It's possible that you can picture them clearly in your mind and have even grown to 'like' them as though they were real.

A word of caution though: one of the most common problems that would-be writers run into is that their characters are almost entirely derivative. The number of wizards who resemble Gandalf in many attempted works of fiction is vast. Even some of the most successful works of modern fiction have wizards that are ‘Gandalf clones’.

The same applies to any of these archetypes. Used without understanding, they become stereotypes and clichés.

You can perhaps appreciate now that there are reasons why these resemblances occur - and even reasons why they are largely unavoidable - but if you don’t know what those reasons are and have ended up with an invented figure frustratingly like a character in a book you admire, it’s time to step back and see if you can deepen your understanding of that particular aspect of your story.

Character Development

Character development is really the motion of one of these archetypes towards or away from the ends of this spectrum, or one of the other archetypes.

Antagonists don’t normally ‘develop’ at all, they are both trapped and unaware; Shadow Protagonists ‘vibrate’ in a painful vacillation, never able to escape their horrible awareness; Submerged Companions either fall or rise, especially if assisted to do so; Protagonists often run the whole gamut of archetypes, performing as each as they are the star of the show.

Emerging Warriors step out of the shadows and take on a leading role, becoming kings, queens, generals or other types of leader; Comic Companions don’t change much but brightly assist the Protagonist in the story’s quest; and Wise Old Figures remain wise and powerful, even though they vanish for large portions of the adventure.

The skill in all of this comes in two parts:

- you have to make your character archetypes similar enough to be recognised to the above but different enough to be exciting and

- you have to have a firm grasp of your basic ideas, the things that you are trying to communicate to readers through these characters.

With both those in place, your characters will seem like real individuals while also resonating with symbolic power.

You probably now have some kind of idea of why your characters behave as they do in your stories - or you might be able to see how this can be changed to make them more effective.

Have your characters been simply 'going through the motions' that you have seen similar characters go through in other fiction?

Understanding your own characters entirely is one of the keys to writing a story which is not derivative or shallow but actually capable of generating meaning and satisfaction for readers.

It might seem a very strange thing that characters as a group fall into a pattern like that described above, a pattern described at length in *How Stories Really Work*.

For now, you should simply recognise that there is such a pattern and that it probably applies to your fiction in much the same way as the use of words and grammar applies.

If your created set of figures is 'meshing together' well, it probably means that you have stumbled upon this pattern accidentally.

On the other hand, if you are having difficulty with this, it may be a case of having one or two characters missing from the complete set; or it may be that your characters are not fulfilling their set role quite as well as they should.

Either way, a homogenous and coordinated set of characters can help your fiction even more than a recognisable set of letters and standard punctuation.

How to Bring Characters to Life

Take the character for whom you have built up the most convincing life-story in terms of facts and figures. Now remove something important from the life of that character.

Start by making life inconvenient in a mild way; then move on to removing friends or family. See what happens to your character.

Which of your characters is the reader's attention supposed to be on? That's your Protagonist. Make that character's life by far the most challenging.

There's much more on this in *How Stories Really Work*.

List out any characters who you feel may be almost entirely derivative. Try doing the same thing as above on each one of these and see what happens.

Attractive Power

Whether or not you have good ideas and working characters, the trick underlying everything is to be able to attract readers.

This is a much more mechanical process than you might think.

There are very definite and precise mechanisms used by successful fiction writers to pull in reader attention.

If you have reached the stage of showing other readers your work, and if they like it a lot and want more, you have obviously hit upon something that works. But are you sure you know what it is?

Perhaps you are experiencing the phenomenon whereby readers arrive to read your work and then leave without finishing. It's not enough to attract them with a good beginning - you have to retain them through to the end to be truly successful.

Probably 90% of writers simply 'write from the heart', unaware of the factors that we have examined so far. Creative writing exercises often encourage it. If you have managed to conquer Life's obstacles and get some writing done, you can generate as many pages of this kind of 'heart-writing' as you wish. It's happening all over the world, right now: page after page of creative writing, pouring out onto paper or screens in an inestimable flow of wordage.

However, if having someone read what you are writing - and read it perhaps with some interest or enthusiasm - is important to you, you will have to communicate in a language that they can understand.

That's the secret language of fiction.

It needs to be learned in the same way that you learned how to read and write.

The good news is that you already know most of it because you're a reader yourself.

The 'glue' that holds readers' attention operates on several levels, ranging from the overall structure and nature of the work to the word-by-word movement across the page. *How Stories Really Work* goes into this in great detail.

There is no arcane magic here: readers simply ‘bounce off’ texts (or plays or films) that lack this ‘glue’. The distinct force used in successful works of fiction to stick attention right to the end of a story was not present.

Does your work have that force? Does it have it in sufficient quantities?

‘Readers’ is a broad term. There are several billion potential readers on the planet, but obviously only a small proportion of them are a possible audience for your work. Knowing who that audience is and being able to make adjustments so as to make the most of that knowledge is a key to succeeding as a fiction writer. Imagine a small group of people gathered in your home to listen to you read from your latest book. Who are those people? Why did they show up? What are they like? What is it about your story that appeals to them? Why do they remain enthralled to the end?

What attracts you when you are reading or watching fiction? What key moments have you experienced in stories?

Have you ever attending a play that has haunted you for a long time afterwards?

Have you ever emerged from a movie theatre exhilarated by what you’ve just seen?

These kinds of effects have exact dimensions and precise engineering; they can be learned and replicated.

The basic thing is this:

Readers are attracted by holes, gaps, missing things, incompletenesses, cavities, openings, spaces, cracks.

In *How Stories Really Work* they are called ‘vacuums’, because the word ‘vacuum’ suggests the pulling power that vacuum cleaners have or the empty void of space has.

Your character archetypes as outlined above are composed of vacuums.

The Antagonist has nothing but emptiness - but he or she fails to recognise or acknowledge that fact and has built an entire existence and usually an empire on nothingness.

The Shadow Protagonist is much the same - except he or she is painfully aware of the void within and wrestles with it perpetually.

The Submerged Companion is, as the name suggests, drawn into vacuums but occasionally comes up for air. These figures can be rescued, or they can drown, depending on what the story is trying to tell us.

The Protagonist has the most visible and active vacuums. He or she suffers the most losses, feels the most threats, is in the most peril. It is his or her role to conquer the emptiness and incompleteness, or to be defeated by it, as determined by the nature of the tale being told.

The Emerging Warrior has experience of vacuums, but triumphs over them.

The Comic Companion observes vacuums from the outside - which is a definition of comedy.

The Wise Old Figure understand vacuums perfectly and seeks their fulfilment. This includes the string of vacuums which compose the plot.

Yes, the plot is also constructed from vacuums.

Four types, in fact. They are given in detail in *How Stories Really Work*. In brief, working together they pull a story along, give it depth and mystery, gluing the reader to it, and in the end they are what gives the whole thing meaning.

Attracting readers is wholly about commanding their attention using character and plot vacuums.

Getting readers emotionally involved in a story is simply a matter of having enough of them.

Emotional Commitment

Let's say that you have a work of fiction that you have written, jam-packed full of powerful ideas based on a cohesive philosophy. It's bristling with excitingly different but recognisably archetypal characters.

It's filled with the attractive power of various kinds of vacuum. Surely, you're going to have a successful story on your hands. Surely, readers will be unable to prevent themselves committing to it emotionally.

What could go wrong?

Average readers are stubborn beasts. Sensitive readers can be even more stubborn. They don't just want the above - they want so much of it that they will then yield up to you their most heart-felt treasure: feelings.

Once you have captured some of their emotions, they will forgive you many faults.

Think of the books that you admire deeply even when you can see that they are not perfect; think of the television shows or films you've seen which you love despite several irritating aspects. You can win as a writer if you can get enough of an emotional commitment from readers.

And the good news is that this isn't that difficult to do.

The thing with emotional commitment is that it is usually a 'slow-build'. It's unusual to be able to capture genuine commitment from readers early on in a tale, without using melodramatic tricks like putting a vulnerable figure like a child or an animal in danger immediately in an opening scene (which of course you have seen many times precisely because it works).

To generate real warmth and pull off an authentic emotional effect usually takes a sustained effort. In practical terms, that means that you probably won't be able to gauge your success or failure on this score until you have produced at least one complete work and had several people read it.

So your main 'problem' here might be that you haven't written enough in the first place.

If, however, while you're writing, even if you're using all of the above, you feel that you are having trouble generating emotion, then you may be trying too hard.

Emotion is a byproduct.

Other things happen in Life and in fiction, and one of their effects is emotion.

Only by understanding what those 'other things' are and having a mastery of them can you hope to guide and control what those emotions will be.

Stories in general have two broad emotional effects: they can be happy and produce a positive ending, or they can be sad and produce a negative ending.

The genres of Comedy and Epic have happy endings; the genres of Tragedy and Irony have sad endings. If you can grasp what exactly those genres do to create their effects, you can begin to flesh out the emotion in your tale.

Just as a carpenter uses a standard set of tools in different ways to produce different items of furniture, so a writer uses a set of tools to devise stories which have different emotional outcomes.

If you yourself are having emotional difficulties, you may find that these interfere with, rather than enhance, your writing.

Creative writing can be therapeutic; writing stories that communicate effectively with readers usually requires that the author puts some distance between himself or herself and the material.

That's also why they can work as therapy: the distancing can bring relief.

It comes back to the first section on Ideas: if your ideas are stable and strong, the emotion you can generate can be powerful and consistent.

If your own emotions are clouding your ideas, the result will be equally cloudy and opaque to most readers.

But how exactly is emotion generated in stories?

Negativity

A swift glance any piece of fiction that you personally enjoy or would recommend to another will show you convincingly that negative emotion has a fundamental role to play in any story. Writers throughout history generate wave after wave of grief, fear, anger, frustration and antagonism, or all of them, in their work; those writing in the genres of Comedy or Epic have the story worked out so that these dark forces are overcome, usually right at the end; writers of Tragedies or Ironies plough on with the negativity, haunting their readers afterwards.

Negative emotion - grief, anger, fear, exasperation, antagonism and so forth - creates vacuums.

Vacuums, as we have seen, pull in attention.

Readers who have enough attention pulled from them will commit emotionally to a piece of writing.

This is best done subtly.

Emotional Language

One of the ways that authors try to deal with any concerns that they have about emotional content in their work is to attempt to be overtly emotional in their language.

The overuse of adverbs ('wildly', 'sadly', 'joyfully', 'energetically') or the replacement of the simple and undistracting 'she said' with 'she appealed' or the like, all suggest to the reader on a subtle level that the author lacks confidence with emotions.

An author who has full command of the different types of vacuums that a successful story contains has no need to inject emotion using adverbs or other clumsy mechanisms: feelings happen, often unexpectedly, often intensely, when vacuums are introduced and shifted around.

What those 'other things' are is covered in great detail in *How Stories Really Work*.

Using emotional words can be interpreted by readers as a clumsy attempt to directly control their attention. It's like saying to a reader or audience 'Now you're supposed to feel this'.

Musical soundtracks in films are an example of this: happy and bouncy rhythms for when you are 'supposed to' feel cheerful or

amused, building tension in the music when you are 'supposed to' feel sad or tense.

On the stage it would be as though a person stood on the edge of the scene and shouted to the audience what they were supposed to feel during the other characters' actions and dialogue. It's distracting, counter-productive, and potentially bounces audiences and readers out of the work.

A magician doesn't reveal the mechanics of his or her trick as the trick is done - the wonder of the audience depends on not knowing or not spotting how they were fooled.

So it is with fiction writing: the emotion comes as the result of actions taken that are not necessarily seen or felt while the scene is unfolding.

Work out which of the two broad, overall emotional effects your story is intended to produce: a happy, positive ending, or a sad, negative ending.

If positive, it will be either a Comedy or an Epic; if negative, it will be either a Tragedy or an Irony.

That doesn't mean that a Comedy or Epic has to have emotions that are entirely positive: negative emotion has a fundamental role to play in any story.

Similarly, a Tragedy or an Irony does not have to have emotions that are entirely negative: they draw their power partly by having plenty of positive emotion in them too.

Trace the overtly emotional language in your work and strive to remove it.

Devise other ways in which the emotion can be shown to readers. Replace colourful, emotional language with actions.

Plot

Ideas, Characters, Attractive Power and Emotional Commitment build up cumulatively over the length of a story. But most stories need a framework upon which to hang these things.

The interesting thing is that these frames normally come in a standard shape and do similar things.

Even in an Irony, in which the very standardness of things can be subverted, an author can only go so far 'off the rails' without spoiling the work itself.

Calling plots 'frameworks', though, suggests that they are static things and that the real importance or power of a tale rests elsewhere. This is not true: a good plot is energy itself.

If you have any difficulties with plots, they can usually be broken down into these categories:

- the momentum of the story needs adjusting using plot vacuums
- the mystery elements within the story need examining
- the moral choices given to the central character need work.

Too often writers who struggle with plot problems do so because they fail to see that a plot is a combination of engineering elements which produce certain effects, including momentum, mystery, morality and meaning.

Motion, or momentum, is something common to all stories. It is what makes a story a story and not just a still image or scene.

Putting a number of scenes together doesn't automatically make a plot: they have to be joined together in specific ways so that a reader is moved forward through them towards your conclusion.

Sometimes this motion is too rapid and the reader feels disorientated; more commonly, though, the plot 'sticks' or bogs down and loses its energy.

As mentioned, vacuums - missing things, gaps, holes, incompletenesses, threats and so forth - are used by successful authors to monitor plot pace and to adjust it where needed. *How Stories Really Work* explains in detail what they are and how they fit together.

Most would-be writers start their stories 'from their heads' and just continue to write one scene after another without much thought as to where the tale as a whole is heading. Most stories of this kind lose their integrity and fade away fairly rapidly, never to be completed.

Grounded in sound ideas, and with well-crafted character archetypes and everything else described above, a plot has more chance of holding together and assisting a writer towards completion, but authors still need to use vacuums skilfully to grip the reader throughout.

An apparently 'disorganised' plot is often a good thing in an Irony, which overall aims for the impression that Order itself is subverted - but this has to be carefully managed to avoid risking undermining itself. In Epics, Comedies or Tragedies, plots generally follow a strict pattern and therefore need a certain amount of organisation.

List which of these factors your story has:

- Momentum, the pace of the story; the joining of scenes together in specific ways so that a reader is moved forward through them towards your conclusion. Momentum is created by the question 'What is going to happen next?' Is this being asked by readers? Or are they able to predict the plot too easily? This question is part of what compels readers to turn pages.

- Mystery, gluing readers to the page, or the 'unputdownability' of the story. Mystery is created by the question 'What's really going on?' Are readers being kept hooked by hints that they aren't seeing all that there is to see? Or is everything a little too obvious?

Mystery also virtually takes control of readers and makes them unable to put a book down.

- Morality, the engagement of the reader with choices in the story to add personal meaning. Morality is created by the question 'What is the right thing to do here?' Are characters - and through them, readers - being asked to make difficult choices? Or is the morality plain and unengaging? Remember, your Protagonist is the character who is moving up towards the 'light' or down towards the 'dark' in relation to your theme. Moral choices are not 'add-ons'; they are at the heart of what makes a story tick.

- Meaning, the overall effect and power of the work. Meaning is prompted by the question “What is this really all about?’ Is your message, your theme, what you want the story to leave the reader with, peeking through sufficiently? Or are there no hidden depths, leaving the reader disappointed?

Without these elements, as mentioned above, a story can dissolve into a mere mishmash of scenes with no coherence or direction.

What To Do

Name each scene on your story on a small card.

Lay these cards out on a table, if possible.

Note which cards appear to slow the story down or speed it up; mark which scenes glue the reader to the page.

Indicate in some way which scenes involve moral choices.

Are any scenes burdened with excess wordage?

Which scenes contain the clearest indication of your overall theme or themes?

If you have worked out earlier that you are writing an Epic, a Comedy or a Tragedy, lay out the cards in the strict pattern which each of those genres demands. (You can find out much more about this in *How Stories Really Work*.)

If you wish, draw up another set of cards featuring your major character archetypes and move them along through the train of scene cards.

This is quite likely to have the effect of making a plot leap into a correct position. Suddenly, your story will make more sense - even to you - and come alive.

Quality

Style is the way in which a writer uses words and other devices right there on the page in front of the reader.

Whereas Ideas, Characters, Attractive Power, Emotional Commitment and even Plot could be described conceptually to some degree apart from the story itself, style is the story itself as it appears to readers: it's the words we end up with once all the planning and structure and background development have been done.

As this is the aspect of fiction most clearly seen by the reader, and the one in which he or she has the most direct contact, this is the thing upon which the quality of a piece of work is most often judged.

Style can exist for its own sake. A writer can write in whatever way he or she chooses - poetically, straight-forwardly, mechanistically, aesthetically and any combination of methods. Writers often concentrate on style in order to try to develop a distinctive 'voice' so that they will stand out from the crowd.

But is the resulting style attractive to readers? Or does it disinterest or even repel them?

Let's take a look at two vastly different writing styles and see what insights we can gain.

Hemingway

One of the most widely-read and well-known authors of the 20th century, Ernest Hemingway's more famous works, *The Sun Also Rises*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea* cemented Hemingway's place among the best writers of his day. Beginning his writing career in the 1920s, Hemingway became known for a short, straightforward style that is simplistic and unadorned, as opposed to the flowery, complex style popular at the time.

Hemingway's early background included journalistic training, a style of writing which depends on presenting facts in a crisp and

concise way while allowing dialogue and conversations to come to the forefront.

Hemingway's style is sometimes described in terms of an Iceberg Theory, which is based on the idea that a writer should take a minimalist approach, without explicitly pointing out underlying issues or themes: all you see is what is above the surface of the narrative - the depths are only hinted at.

The Old Man and the Sea, for example, was written and re-written hundreds of times before it was ready to be published. Hemingway believed it to be the best thing he had written. On the surface, it is a story about a fisherman attempting a great catch, told in short, simple sentences using, simply, 'and' to connect thoughts together:

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.

There is no elaboration in the language or emotion explicitly conveyed.

If we apply what we have learned so far about 'vacuums', something interesting emerges: what is left unsaid on the page acts to create in the reader's mind an emptiness, a gap, a sense of something missing. In the above sentence, for example, the old man fishing alone for eighty-four days creates a subtle sense of wonder and implies the unspoken emotions that such an ordeal must have evoked.

Hemingway's 'secret', if you like, the hidden part of the 'iceberg', is the 'vacuum power' of what is not said or seen but is suspected to be there.

Dickens

As a contrary example, Dickens loves detail, elegant language, and creating whole new mini-worlds within an overarching story. Take a look at the excerpt below from *Great Expectations*:

The Queen of Denmark, a very buxom lady, though no doubt historically brazen, was considered by the public to have too much brass about her; her chin being attached to her diadem by a broad band of that metal (as if she had a gorgeous toothache), her waist

being encircled by another, and each of her arms by another, so that she was openly mentioned as "the kettledrum."

Dickens here describes one of the actresses in Mr. Wopsle's *Hamlet*, in a long, rambling sentence full of the colour of language like 'gorgeous toothache'. Dickens' language is so notorious for this kind of minutiae that some consider it to be overblown - but think about it here in opposition to Hemingway's approach: gossip, beautiful detail, subtle (and not-so-subtle) humour, the richness of images, all accumulate to convey a sense of wealth in the writing itself. No iceberg here - Dickens sets out to pack as much colour as he can into every sentence, to leave as little out as possible, to transmit to us the total picture of the scene and its implications. But this does not mean that Dickens fails to use vacuums: he is the master of misdirection and illusion. While he is conjuring up the comedic scene of which we have had this glimpse, he plans to trick the reader into a thrill. This comes when we realise that, throughout this performance of *Hamlet* that is being witnessed by Pip, the Protagonist of the novel, just behind Pip sits the brooding master criminal Compeyson, whose machinations have created the entire scenario of the novel. Pip is unaware of the proximity of his arch-enemy until later - and we are left with goosebumps. So we have style used to directly convey an emptiness which pulls in reader attention (Hemingway), and a very different style used to manipulate that attention with a kind of sleight-of-hand (Dickens). There's a spectrum there, and fiction contains everything within its range.

Your Style

To attract readers, any work of fiction must possess certain rhythms and patterns in its structure and also at this level of language on the page. Without these particular rhythms and patterns, readers will not move forward or become emotionally involved.

Style can be a very subtle thing: its close examination has given rise to almost every school of literary criticism that exists. And yet the concept of the 'vacuum' can be applied to forensically inspect what is going on on the page with almost any writer.

Take a look at your own writing style. Would you say that you write poetically? straight-forwardly? mechanistically? aesthetically? some combination of methods?

Is your writing more like Hemingway's? Or Dickens'?

When readers pick up a page of your writing are they 'hooked' by the suggestion of unspoken depths as in the Iceberg Theory? Or is their attention being masterfully misdirected so that you can spring emotional thrills on them later?

Do a close sentence-by-sentence analysis of your writing. Look specifically at

- use of all the senses. Readers need to vicariously experience what they read as much as possible. Using the range of perceptions in your writing style encourages them to stick with you.
- using the vocabulary that you are comfortable with. Writers who try to use over-flowery language to impress the reader often create an unnecessarily burdensome style.
- using your own experiences to increase your reach to readers, especially emotional experiences including tears and laughter.
- leaving out anything that doesn't advance a character's personality or the plot, however beloved a piece of writing might seem.

Fulfilment

Now we reach the moment of truth. Does your fiction achieve its desired result?

You have worked out Ideas; you have mastered the Seven Character Archetypes; you have built into your work's structure the necessary vacuum power to attract readers and gain from them emotional commitment; your plot pulls them along to the end; your style controls their attention from page to page. Your story doesn't have to be perfect, as long as it has enough of all these things to create an overall effect.

Think of the number of works of fiction which you have read or seen or experienced in some way which you felt were faltering in some way during the story, but which managed to recover to produce some kind of fulfilment at the end; conversely, think of those works that seemed to be going along fine and then which failed to deliver the goods in the closing chapters.

Where is your work in terms of Fulfilment?

Ultimately, if your Ideas have survived the transition from within you to the hearts and minds of readers, your job is done.

You could just summarise your ideas on a piece of paper and hand it to readers. But as a fiction writer you have chosen to disguise what you want to say, or perhaps broaden it aesthetically into a message which cannot simply be summed up in words but which must be *experienced* using all the tools at your disposal.

Readers have very little vocabulary, usually, for expressing whether or not they have understood what you had to say - they simply 'love' your book or they don't. If they are literary critics, they may try to put that appreciation into words or seek to explain how it was accomplished.

A powerful ending means more than just an emotional one, though emotion plays a part. The power comes from the satisfactory culmination of a dozen different things that are going on in any successful story. It's similar to the completion of an engineering feat like the building of a bridge: if it has been built well, the bridge will take the strain of the traffic that wants to cross it; if there is a

weakness, then readers will be wary and not want to take the risk of passing over.

Your Story

Is it hard to see how to wrap your story up so that it meets all these requirements?

This happens often, even with great fiction: a world has been created, wonderful characters have sprung to life, emotion has been evoked, and now the author feels that he or she has to kill the thing off.

But the secret is that the death of a thing is part of its life: the ending of a tale is as much a portion of it as any other portion. Authors who recognise this take us to new heights of appreciation in their final scenes. It's a maturity point: authors who can't 'let go' haven't yet plumbed the deaths of their own creation, and will find that, when they do, the thing has taken on new levels of meaning and will resonate with more people.

The key question to ask, as it is all along, is 'What effect am I trying to create?'

Which ending then best achieves that effect?

Ironies often leave it up to the reader to complete the tale. As most Ironies end with a nightmare scenario, the reader is effectively asked to 'rescue' the situation by providing his or her own positive turn of events, or to leave things to degenerate further.

Comedies, Epics or even Tragedies, however, normally don't hand this task to the reader. In fact, they lose power and credibility, normally, if they do.

Are you worried about the overall effect of your story?

Summarise your central idea on a piece of paper. Try to express it in a few words and reduce it until it seems irreducible. Then look at the characters, vacuums, plot lines, setting and language - are they all contributing in some way to the communication of that idea?

Tweak the work accordingly.

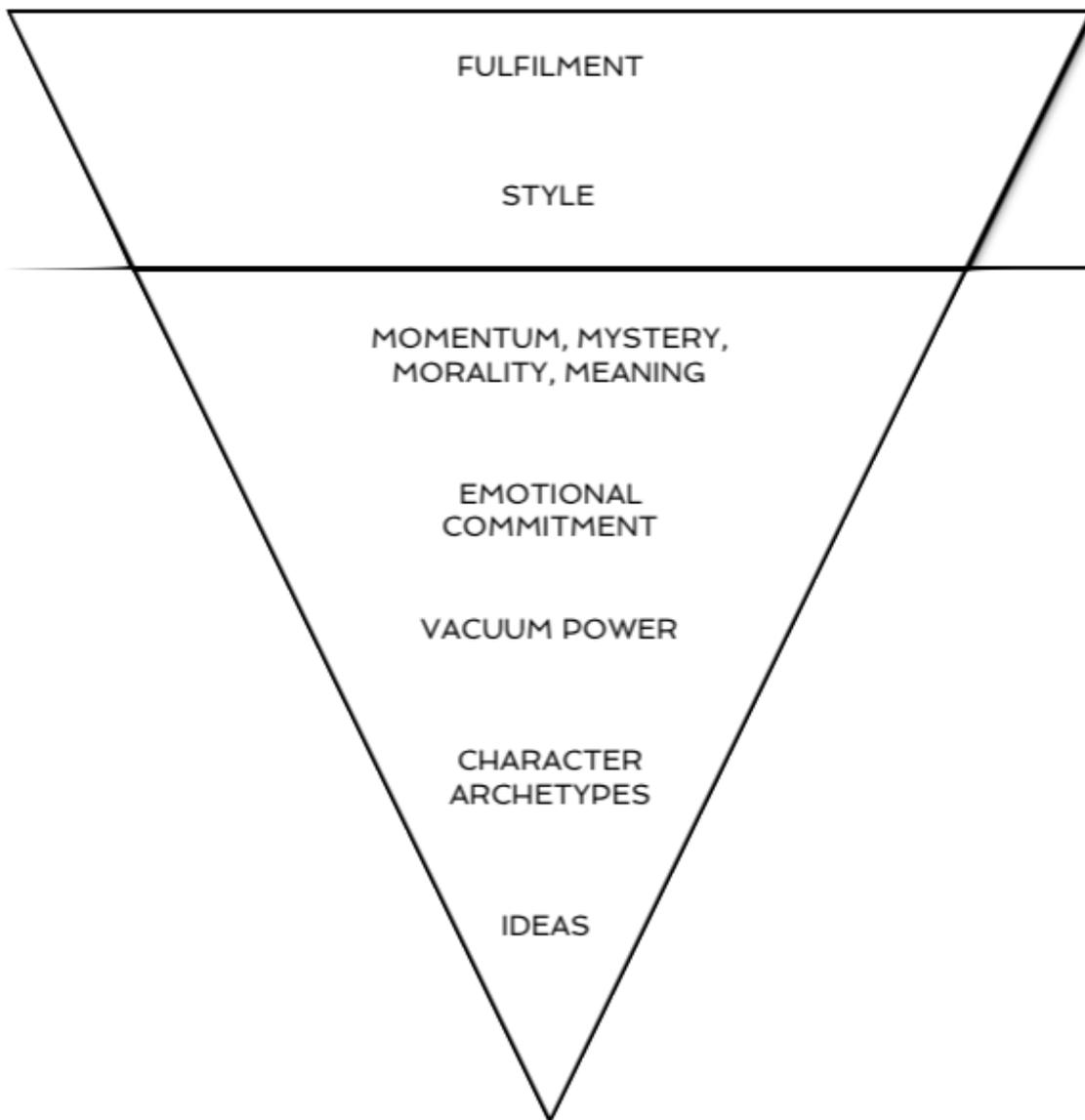
You'll get much more help from the books *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author*.

Summary

These then are the Seven Secrets of Successful Stories:

1. Powerful, well-thought-out Ideas which accumulate around a theme.
2. Clever use of the Seven Character Archetypes to convey those ideas, with the Protagonist either moving towards your message (Comedy or Epic) or away from it (Tragedy or Irony).
3. Mastery of the kinds of vacuum needed to attract readers.
4. Sufficient vacuum power to produce emotional commitment.
5. Plotting which uses Momentum, Mystery, Morality and Meaning to engage and hold the reader's attention throughout.
6. A writing style which controls attention at the level of language.
7. A cohesive grasp of all the above to create an overall effect upon the reader.

Together, they form a reverse pyramid.



Readers are only usually consciously aware of what lies above the line that is drawn below Style in the diagram above.

Ideas form the foundation.

Character Archetypes extend the foundation into fictive form.

Vacuum power attracts readers (usually below their awareness).

Enough vacuums working together evoke emotional commitment.

Use of vacuums to produce Momentum, Mystery, Morality and

Meaning ensures that the reader's attention is held till the end.

Translation of all this into a consistent and effective writing style

brings it into the realm of the reader's consciousness.

And the effect of the work is generated.

Take this diagram and lay it mentally over your fiction.

What you see, what the reader sees, is the style of your writing;

what lies beneath the surface is everything else.

Adjust your work accordingly.

If you need further help, *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author* explain much more about all of this and include dozens of examples, from ancient tales to modern screenplays.

Good luck in becoming a successful writer! Keep reading for your **bonus section**.

BONUS SECTION:
Revitalising Your Work

As a writer, you've probably made various attempts over a period of time to write your 'masterpiece'.

This usually goes a number of ways:

- you just haven't had the time to write the tale, due to 'life's pressures'.
- if you have managed to commit something to paper or hard drive, you would scarcely call it 'complete'
- if you have edited it into a shape with which you are reasonably happy, there's still a nagging feeling that it needs 'more'.

In either case, there's a great deal of uncertainty that hangs around a writer, like a cloud or shadow: uncertainty that the work will ever get written; uncertainty that it will ever be finished; and uncertainty that it will glow with a requisite energy all of its own, like a newborn child, free from you as a writer and ready to make its way in the world of readers.

Not all of these uncertainties can be removed.

You'll find drills and other tips to overcoming the pressures of Life, and actually getting writing done, on my website:

www.clarendonhousebooks.com

You'll also find templates and a great deal of guidance there, and in the books *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author* to help you to get to a more finished stage.

As for giving your work the needed boost once all these things are in place, if you still feel that something is absent, the following set of exercises is designed to inject your work with new energy of one kind or another.

You don't need to apply all the exercises; you may not find that you need to fully apply any of them. But in looking over your fiction using the guidance below, you will probably find that something stirs and that you are once again experiencing the joy of writing. With that will come renewed energy and life which will find its way into your work.

Happy writing! -Grant P. Hudson

Outlining Your Dream

What was it that you wanted to achieve with your story?

The first thing to do is to outline, in 1,000 words or less, your dream.

What was your original vision?

Try to include not only the basic shape of your story, but the effects which you ultimately wanted it to have upon readers.

Attempting to reduce this to 1,000 words will help you to focus.

But feel free to begin much bigger than that and then 'edit' it down to its core.

Now what if you could expand upon that to create whole new streams of ideas and thereby open up channels to whole new worlds of readers?

By answering the following series of questions, your eyes should be opened to many and varied possibilities.

New Forms

How could you tell the same kind of story but using a different medium?

In other words, if you've written a novel, how could it translate into a play?

Or a screenplay?

Or an epic poem?

Or a children's picture book?

Or a graphic novel?

Or a series of letters?

Or a combination of some of the above?

Play with these notions and make some notes.

How could you deliver the same kind of tale but in a completely new way?

Also, how could you develop your story using the forms of technology that are available? Does your work translate into a games format? Are there possibilities for apps associated with it? What about a television series?

You don't have to start re-writing the whole thing, just use your imagination for a while and throw the story around.

New Combinations

How could you make your story work in new ways?

In other words, how could you open up the tale and redesign it so that characters and plot work together in more attractive combinations?

If your story is character-driven - that is, events are motivated by whatever is motivating your main characters - how could it be more plot-driven - that is, how could it be shaped by events?

Conversely, if your story is plot-driven, how could it be shaped by characters?

Is the climax of the tale divorced from the Protagonist's needs?

Or do the two come together seamlessly?

Does the climax actually make sense in terms of motivations?

Is there another way of achieving the climax? Could it reach its peak earlier?

Could it reach its peak later?

Could you insert some surprises?

Could an unexpected thing happen to a character? Could an unexpected thing happen during an event? Could someone say an unexpected thing?

Make some notes!

New Adaptations

How could you use new or different elements to make your work more accessible?

You may have thought of things that you want to alter or 'tweak' about your fiction - small things, things that just don't quite 'work'. Think now about accessibility: who is it that you are wanting to make these alterations for?

An older audience?

A younger audience?

A male audience?

A female audience?

A non-binary audience?

A movie-going audience?

A technology-hating audience?

A technology-loving audience?

A child audience?

A foreign audience?

An American audience?

A British audience?

An audience with a higher vocabulary?

An audience with a lower vocabulary?

An audience with a specialist vocabulary?

Jot some ideas down!

New Sizes

How could you make your story bigger or smaller?

Perhaps you've written a complete tale and think that you're done with it.

Think outside the box that you've created: what happens next?

Are the events of your story part of a larger tapestry?

Are there other characters lurking on the edge of what you've written, trying to get in?

Perhaps you've only written one in a long series of episodes.

Perhaps your tale is either the end or the beginning of a much larger adventure.

On the other hand, how could you make your story smaller?

Is there a key chapter or element of it which forms a story all its own?

Is there an 'untold' bit of story worthy of some attention?

Are sections of the story only there because of other stories which you are trying to emulate?

Are there parts to the tale which act as 'padding' and aren't really necessary to the drama of it?

Make some sketches!

New Functions

How could you simplify your fiction or make it more complex?
This isn't quite the same thing as size above, though they may overlap.

What is your story really all about?

Is the core message or central drive of the plot being obscured by too many distractions?

Strip away as much as you can and see if you can see the heart or skeleton of what you are trying to do.

One trick for doing this is to have your Protagonist step out of the pages of the book, sit opposite you and tell you what he or she wants.

Go ahead, imagine it.

What would he or she say? What would he or she do?

On the other hand, perhaps things are too simple. Maybe when you look at your story you see someone else's framework staring out at you - yours seems too derivative, far too similar to another tale.

How could you make your story do other things than stories like it, go other ways?

What if something major were to go wrong with your plot - on purpose?

Imagine things moving along more or less as you had envisioned and then something completely unexpected cuts in from nowhere and changes everything.

Ramp it up!

Scribble down some possibilities!

New Economies

How could you write more economically?

This isn't a case of editing the story down, as in New Sizes above: this is looking in detail at your writing style.

Are you flamboyant with words?

Do you use too many adjectives or adverbs in the hope that you can persuade readers to feel what you want them to feel?

Take a page or two of your writing and cut it down to its bare bones. Take out any flowery expressions; take out any adjectives or adverbs at all. Clip the dialogue; have characters show something with a gesture or action rather than say it.

Does this improve things?

How could you trim down your writing?

How could you remove something from the page- by-page movement of the prose to make it more efficient?

Are you over-using a particular word or turn of phrase?

Are you using too many clichés?

How could you show something with an action rather than an explanation?

Conversely, perhaps your writing style is too 'dry'.

Zap it up: take a paragraph and add in colour, sound, other sense perceptions, a new perspective.

Lay the words on thickly; lay the images on with a trowel.

What happens?

Try making some changes!

New Horizons

Into which other genres does your story translate?

There are four major genres - Epic, Tragedy, Irony and Comedy - with lots of sub-genres and combinations of genres.

If you have written an Epic adventure story - and Epics form about 90% of what we call 'stories' - then does it read well as a Tragedy? Make the Protagonist older, stronger, but not wiser. Have him or her display a fundamental weakness to the reader or audience. Does the story improve?

Similarly, if you make some further adjustments, you'll end up with an Irony: have a death occur early; have things scrambled and not making sense to your Protagonist. Is that the genre for your tale? Does it seem to come to life when you do this?

Does your story work better as a Comedy? Or could it do with some comic moments injected into it? Insert some jokes; lighten up the dialogue. How does it seem?

You'll find out much more about genres in the books *How Stories Really Work* and *Become a Professional Author*.

What is the opposite genre to the one your story was originally written in? If you've written an Epic, what does it look like as an Irony? If you've written a Tragedy, what does it look like as a Comedy?

How could you develop a story which is the mirror image of what you currently have?

Play around with this and see what happens.

What You Should Do Now

Before you finish with this book, you would probably benefit from doing the following:

- Go through each exercise again and fill in any blanks or points where you couldn't think of anything the first time.
- Using the insights you gleaned from later steps, re-do the earlier ones and see if anything changes.
- List out potential audiences that you could open up with what you have now glimpsed.
- Ask yourself what are the main points of change that you now want to make in your fiction based on what you have gleaned here.

THEN GET THESE BOOKS:

How Stories Really Work:

Exploring the Physics of Fiction

This book is a powerful tool for understanding fiction and for transforming creative writing and taking it to new levels of clarity, energy and effectiveness.

Learn

- what a story really is and what it is actually doing to and for readers
- how all successful fiction follows universal patterns to attract and grip readers
- the magnetic power that draws readers into a work of fiction even before the introduction of any character
- what the thing called a 'character' actually is, and the secrets of how to rapidly build a convincing one that attracts readers
- the things called 'plots', what they are and how they are actually made (rather than how you might suppose they are made).

Find out about the writing model which, if followed, will create a machine generating unimaginable numbers of readers and

heightened reader satisfaction for you, based on some of the most successful pieces of literature in the English-speaking world.
Get *How Stories Really Work* now!

What the experts say:

As with all professionals, I too read craft books every day, to stay on top of my game. Over the last thirty years, I've read (literally) hundreds of writing books. And, lemme tell ya, the VAST majority of them are garbage. The relative few that are decent still aren't great. Writing instructors usually spend 60,000 words saying what could've been said in 60.

EXCEPT for yours, Grant. Your books are hands down, bar none, exceptional. You get down into the nitty gritty and talk about real stuff that's immediately useful. I especially like *How Stories Really Work*. You really nailed it with that one.

And, Grant... it's REALLY hard to impress me. But, you had me hooked from the very first sentence. In fact, I've already turned a number of my past clients onto it.

So... thank you for giving the writing world something of merit. Your book is a breath of invigorating fresh air. May it breathe new life into this great industry of ours so that writers may once again set the world on fire.

-J. C. Admore, Professional Writing Expert

An amazing book. Fascinating application of physics theory to the art of fiction writing. Presents new ways of understanding how stories work. I now look for 'vacuums' everywhere. Excellent case studies covering all genres. Thought-provoking and inspiring. I highly recommend this book to all readers and writers of fiction.

- G. Leyland (B Social Work, Grad Dip Writing, MA Creative Writing)

What the authors say:

I'm reading through *How Stories Really Work*. I've studied writing books for years but I've never seen anything like this!

I learned about your work after reading an article you wrote. I was intrigued by the premise, but at the time, there wasn't an Amazon review (something I must rectify when I'm finished). I decided it wouldn't hurt to read the preview. . . And promptly bought it. This book is REVOLUTIONARY. Everything is made so simple and precise that other methods of writing seem clumsy by comparison. It's not just a way of writing, but a way of seeing.

-A. P. (Author)

It's beautiful, informative, essential reading for anyone who wants to write fiction. It's almost a responsibility point, you're committing a crime if you don't get it into peoples' hands!!!

-B.R. (Author)

Loved the book. Have used the principles in many a story. It all makes so much sense. If you want help in drawing readers in - this is the book to get.

-M W-B (Author)

This is a book every author should own. Grant P. Hudson does an outstanding job explaining story structure and the mechanics involved in creating a story or novel that readers will love. His examples are explained in an engaging manner so this book doesn't seem like reading a text book. I have already implemented many of his ideas in building a novel. This book contains great advice and I highly recommend it to all authors.

-D. T. (Author)

After reading this book, I'll never look at stories the same way. This step-by-step how-to book is full of wisdom about how classic stories are structured. You will see how to apply these principles to your own stories and novels, converting them to page-turners.

-P. V. A. (Author)

An essential purchase for anyone wishing to not only improve their writing but understand the art of story telling. You will never read a book the same way again. Nor watch a film or play without seeing the theory, that Grant so eloquently describes. Brilliant, worth every penny.

-D. S. (Author)

I have had nearly 100 short stories published and thought I knew about writing. This book taught me new ways to look at my own writing as well as other writing. Grant Hudson doesn't recycle old ways to look at the writing process, he invents new ways for a writer to examine almost every aspect of writing fiction, and provides a new vocabulary for how to do

it. Very highly recommended for anyone who writes or wants to write fiction.

-A. C. (Author)

I wish I had found this book sooner. It was fascinating and insightful. I am now very annoying when watching films as I apply the techniques learned in this book, and quickly guess the twists! Very helpful in planning and forming ideas and I use this technique when writing stories.

-S. C. (Author)

I love the way Grant has approached the whole subject in this excellent book, in a very different and almost 'obvious' way compared to other books that attempt to teach the craft of writing. As a writer myself I now see in a different light what I am writing. Where was this book 35 years ago when I first started writing? One of those 'I wish I'd known that years ago' books.

-J. W. F. (Author)

I finished this book over two nights and had an epiphany. Such common sense and thought provoking ideas. This should be a mandatory text book for any serious writer. I'm excited to inject more purpose to my writing. This book will become a constant reference book for me now. Highly recommend it.

-R. C. (Author)

Your book is teaching me all the stuff that the other books don't! I can learn all about three-act structures and all that stuff elsewhere - this book is telling me exactly what to put INTO the structure! It makes writing so easy and you can immediately spot where you're going wrong! Excellent!

-L.J. (Professional)

This is an absolutely amazing achievement! I highly recommend it to anyone interested in writing fiction.

-T.R. (Student)

I was extremely impressed. This is not idle flattery. You've done a superb job in uncovering the factors that go into making a great piece of literature.

-B.R. (Executive)

How Stories Really Work has helped me look afresh at my plots and characters. I'm certainly very grateful I was introduced to Clarendon House.

-L.M. (Author)

Become a Professional Author

So you want to be a professional author?

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This book is not for the squeamish — but it will answer many questions for you, including the following:

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J. McCulloch, Author

Clarendon House has what the majority of other publishers lack; the personal touch. Grant Hudson draws people into his cosy library (also known as the Inner Circle Writers' Group), sits them down and works his magic. Many new writers lack confidence in their ability, so Grant fine tunes their perspective, boosts their morale and sets them up to win. I have been humbled by his untiring efforts to help us all. We are his people. He is our mentor, our eccentric English professor and our much valued friend.

D. Taylor, Author

As I was scrolling fb, and seeing all these ads from people claiming to help authors do this and do that, I thought to myself, Grant Hudson is the genuine mentor. Thanks for your solid advice.

P. O'Neil, Author

Grant is the model mentor for this new age of writing.

A. Delf, Author

The world is better with all this beautiful work seen at last.

M. Ahmed, Author

A place where good literature is nurtured.