



SEE WHAT COMES UP



5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1

CONSTRAINTS KEEP YOU PRESENT & PRESENCE IS FLOW

There are a number of reasons I prefer to write nonfiction over fiction, and at the top of the list is just how many possibilities there are to choose from. In fiction, I mean. The sheer realm of potential freaks me *out*. The tradeoff, of course, is that nonfiction is closer to the overt truth, which can create the opposite experience. What do you do when it all hits too close to home and there's no fairy godmother to bring in to save the day? You set some enabling constraints.

Trying to solve the whole problem at once is futile and exhausting. And a really good way to never, ever get your work out the door (sneaky, brain. I see you). The tools that follow won't make you turn into a pumpkin at midnight, but they can help you find that sweet spot between too many options and too little

breathing room. Keep your focus on one thing at a time, and trust that it's all building toward this project's happily ever after.

WHEN ONE ACCESS POINT IS BLOCKED, ZOOM OUT AND TRY ANOTHER

Quick caveat: Among other experiences and sources, Story Grid concepts factor heavily into this progression. However, these are not Story Grid specific tools, are not associated directly with Story Grid, and do not represent any attempt at teaching Story Grid concepts or any other organization or school of thought. It's just a really cool progression that has helped unlock folks over the years.

- First, run a **5**-minute outline to see what's at the surface (or hiding just under the surface) of your ideation. Recordings are available at brannansirratt.com/five-minute-outline for a guided experience.
- Next, map out a **4**-quadrant progression of your content.
- Now explore the way **3** narrative devices will get you there.
- Finally, reconnect with the **2** POVs that you can access as you're drafting and revising your **1** Big Idea.

What can I learn about my message in a 5 minute, no judgments check-in?

MINUTE ONE: What's the key takeaway—the one thing I need the reader to “get”?

MINUTE TWO: Why do we care about this topic?

MINUTE THREE: What stands in between us and the key takeaway? Why do we resist or get stuck?

MINUTE FOUR: What makes us believe the key takeaway is for us? What anchors us to it?

MINUTE FIVE: What's the big invitation for the reader? What's really on the other side of "getting" the takeaway?

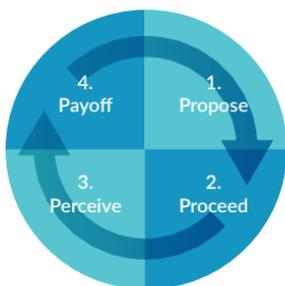
After writing freely for each minute, summarize what comes up here in outline form. **Important:** notice where each minute goes on the outline.

2	Minute two—create connection in the setup
3	Minute three—progressively build out the topic
1	<i>Minute one—name a specific takeaway</i>
4	Minute four—anchor the reader to the takeaway
5	Minute five—payoff the initial connection with an honest “other side” of the takeaway

Can I see this content structured into a 4-quadrant progression that guides the reader to a new perspective?

1. PROPOSITIONAL TRUTH: What insight, observation, experience, or process am I exploring?

2. PROCEDURAL STEPS: How can my understanding, exploration, or process be broken down into a sequence? (First, next, then...)



3. PERSPECTIVE SHIFT: What is the deeper shift in thinking that my content asks of the reader or demonstrates via my memoir?

4. PARTICIPATORY PAYOFF: What does integration of my propositional truth really look like?

3

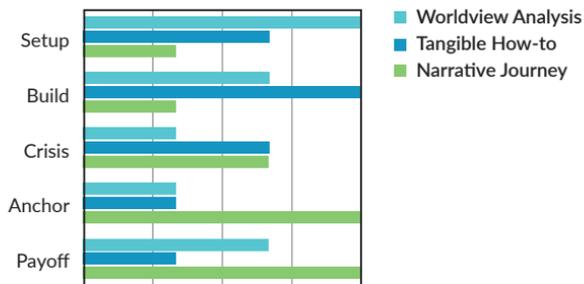
What roles do the 3 nonfiction narrative devices or genre dimensions (worldview analysis, how-to, narrative journey) play?

What kind of analysis or new understanding needs to be explored for the reader's worldview to change?

What kind of obvious, prescriptive, or tangible outcome needs to be delivered for the reader to know how to bring their new worldview into their day to day life?

What kind of narrative journey needs to be included for the reader to connect with the more challenging aspects of this change?

Which of these do you anticipate writing from the most?



2

How can I draw on the 2 key perspectives of this content (mine and my reader's) as I write?

Me: How can I tap into my process of exploration, tangible experience, or ongoing transformation? When I talk about this topic, is it personal or more general? What's natural to talk about and what's more of a stretch?

My Reader: How can I connect to my reader and a need I'd like to meet for them? Have I already met this need, or am I in search of answers? What's natural to talk about and what's more of a stretch?



TABLE OF CONTENT

THREE DIMENSIONAL ARCS COME TOGETHER ONE LAYER AT A TIME

The table of contents in a book is one of the last things to be proofed and a very sneaky place for errors to slip through anyway. It's an end stage formatting tool. Some books don't even have it. So why the hell do we think we need an outline that looks like a table of contents from the very beginning of our nonfiction projects?

Caveat, again: Our overarching goal, at any and all times, is for you to *go with whatever you have access to*. If you've got a vision for your chapter progression that feels fantastic, looks exactly like you want it to in the final book (for now) and inspires you to start writing, do the damn thing until you can't. Then come back if you need another access point.

Now. Did I have a sneaky error slip through in this title? Nope. Just a ridiculous pun that has stuck around. While I don't find it

necessary or often helpful to create a table of contents before there is content, I do like to make a table in which I plot out said content. That's what we're looking at next.

“ART IS NOT A THING. IT IS A WAY.”

—ELBERT HUBBARD, WHO I KNEW
NOTHING ABOUT BEFORE THIS QUOTE BUT
REALLY SUPER WANT TO LEARN MORE

The thing is, paintings aren't made from left to right or top to bottom, filling inch by inch of the canvas with a perfect slice of the image. They're built from the inside out, layer by abstract layer. The artist's vision keeps them going—whether it's to roll with the inspiration as it comes or to set the tone from the very first strokes. As a not-painter, I have exactly zero clue what's happening in any given moment. It just looks like a mess for a good long while. But that's the expectation, so I trust the process (and marvel as it unfolds).

Whoever set your expectations at “write clean from top to bottom or it doesn't count” needs to come see me. I have an unofficial TED talk I'd like to give them. Because (brace yourselves, all you who're still coping with the “author” identity): you're an artist too. You get to be messy. You get to play with tones and layers and refinement long past what anyone else thinks is done or to stop at a point of abstraction only a certain few will “get.” That may take a while to settle into if you're not already there, so for now we're

just going to name what some of those layers are. Hang with me. Get messy. Trust the process.

NARRATIVE JOURNEY LAYER

Here, sketch out the **process of transformative change** that your book conveys or asks of the reader. Reference your narrative dimension in #3 in the last section if you need a jumpstart. It can also be helpful to start with a prompt, like a Hero's Journey, Virgin's Promise, or any other universal process of change.

The goal of this layer is to name the steps of change from where you or the reader begin to the place of deeper truth where you or the reader will end. Naming the steps (crossing the threshold, caught shining, etc) is more important here than choosing specific stories...yet. But as always, if you've got access to it, go for it!

We're attaching deep change to a narrative journey because we do not like change, generally speaking, and do much better *watching* it happen than being told to do it ourselves. So when you attach the deepest parts of the work to real stories, the reader gets to relax into those emotions without being expressly asked to deal with their own. The stories can come from you personally, a specific case study, or collections of stories, but they should be told narratively and they should attach to a clear progression of change.

Important: Yes, you can work these layers out in any order, but when you're on a specific layer it's important right now to *stay*

WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS LAYER

For this list, the work is to figure out **how the reader sees the world** (or how you did, if you're closer to memoir) at the beginning of the book, how they'll see it differently at the end of the book, and what moves them along that journey.

Note: This layer is called “academic” in a lot of my material and Story Grid’s material, which can be a bit of a misnomer or deterrent. Here’s the thing—**not all analysis is academia**, but there are some seriously good things we can learn from that space. Like creating a little bit of distance so that it’s safe to really pick something apart without feeling attacked, or leading with genuine curiosity and willingness to learn, experiment, and be wrong. I’d love to geek out more about that with you, but for now swap it out for “analysis” only and it gets you to the heart of the task.

To wrap your head around this list (and the corresponding analysis layer you named in #3 above), try taking the word “world-view” really literally: if your reader is sitting at home, holding your book for whatever reason, what is their view of the world in that moment? Going back to **your specific reader** workshoping will help here, with their pain points and what they say they want.

I like to picture an old pixellated video game—the kind where you can’t see the whole map until you move around a bit. The first steps in this list are you letting them know you see where they are on the map and telling them where you are (your world-view). Then you can **progressively bring light** to the places on the map between the two of you until there is a clear path they can follow.

HOW THE WORLDVIEW IS CHANGING	WHAT THE READER NEEDS TO KNOW FOR THAT CHANGE TO BE POSSIBLE
<i>e.g. Blissfully ignorant to aware</i>	<i>e.g. New Data Says "Look Out!"</i>
Brand New Perspective	The View Is Better from This Angle

TANGIBLE OUTCOME LAYER

This is another layer/list that is named differently on some of my other worksheets and articles: in those spaces, it's called "how-to." Like the academic analysis dilemma, this can be a distraction if you're not already writing a how-to. But if you've got a takeaway, you need a how-to layer—if nothing else to tell them how-to-take-away the takeaway.

What I really love about this layer is how it can shift their attention from want to need. Your reader is here for a reason, and that reason is primarily selfish. That's not a judgment, just the truth of how we spend our time. They want something. How you decide to deliver it is up to you, but the promise of that thing is going to keep them turning the pages.

So your "how-to" doesn't necessarily have to tell anyone how to do anything. You don't have to have a process or a set of steps or a listicle here. You just need something they can grab onto and say that they "got it" and can take with them after the book is back on the shelf.

Clear as mud? Here's an example:

My reader is here for me to help them get their book planned out. I know they need to tap into their own authorial sense of agency. I'm going to step them through the process of naming all the important parts of their book, but also step them through the process of naming all the important parts of themselves as a creator. At the end, they could have a book plan if they're still

TOP-LAYER TOPIC SYNTHESIS (OR: TAKE A STAB AT AN OUTLINE)

You might start here if you already have an outline, or play here until multiple iterations finally lock into one that feels good to write from. Or you might skip it all together. Sometimes it takes me a really long time to get to a “proper” outline for myself or a client, because there’s more that I need to uncover before the specific chapters feel clear.

Some things to keep in mind as you get closer and closer to a map of your draft or revision:

- Try to think of each line as a topic bucket rather than a chapter. If I had a dollar for every minute I’ve spent staring at an unfinished chapter, only to realize it was a complete idea that just needed to blend into another chapter...Don’t paint yourself into a corner.
- There are certain phrases in the writing community, like “page one rewrite” and “starting over from scratch” and “rewriting the whole thing” and “please God can we be done” that I wish we could eliminate. Try to think of your outlines as a hypothesis, and drafting as an experiment. If what you map out doesn’t work and needs to be retooled, you haven’t lost anything. Not time or effort or words. You’ve only gained data/inputs/ideas. It’s good work. Keep it up.
- Remember, there are a thousand iterations of your book that are “right.” We’re just looking for the one that feels

accessible to you and your reader right now. Save the outlines and ideas that feel good but not right. Who knows what they might become later.

Your play space starts here...

USING THE TABLE OF CONTENT

So when are the three separate layers (top-level doesn't matter so much here...not yet) "done" and ready to move into the table? You can probably already see that putting it all side by side could get complicated fast—so don't start here unless you're really good at holding your focus to one thing at a time.

If you're like me and cannot, then play with each list separately until it looks like a decently logical progression from point "hm this book looks interesting" to point "woah, I (see the world/myself/my want) differently now!"

By logical, I mean you're setting the reader up as Kurt Vonnegut's Man in a Hole plot. And if you haven't seen that yet, drop everything and go to brannansirratt.com and scroll down till you see his name. Click. Watch. Enjoy. Come back.

Ready? Ok, so you're meeting the reader wherever they are—probably "mostly fine, but curious about how things could be better"—then dropping the bottom out from under them with whatever curiosity or problem or pain you're digging into.

That'll happen somewhere in the first few chapters: your *proposition* space. You propose that the world could actually be significantly better, because look at how hard it really is.

After that, you've got to build them a ladder and help them climb out of it. That happens step by step (*procedurally*, if you will), and too big a leap may mean they can't stay with you to get out of the hole.

Then, just as their head pops out to blue skies above ground, you help them see how much their *perspective* has shifted after

all that undergroundness, and they've got to reckon with real change they hadn't quite expected. If you don't prepare them for that or meet them there in that discomfort, you may lose them altogether.

If you don't lose them, if you're able to move them along with you beat for beat of this journey to a new way of thinking or doing or being in the world, then they get the option to *participate* with you in that way of thinking. And if you're really honest with them, (and you should be) that won't be all blue skies either. But it'll be worth it. And you'll tell them why.

You can see how each point of that process is about keeping the reader with you. It's not "drop man into a hole and leave him there." The arc has to come back up. So making sure your lists make decently logical sense in terms of what it's asking of the reader, what you'll need to give them along the way, and how far you can realistically take them...that's what "done" looks like here.

When you have that for all three arcs, plug them in, as they are, again without any judgment or panic. Then your table becomes the hypothesis, and the chapter maps become the experimentation space. Pull the text out from the table to the map. Run a 5 minute outline for just that chapter. See if *that one row* makes sense. If not, play around with what would make *that 5 minute outline* make sense. See what we're doing here? One focus at a time, one solution at a time, one experiment at a time. It's all good data. And hey, if at any point you get the itch to just write, step away from the spreadsheet. Go write. You've been unlocked. Come back if you get stuck.

CHAPTERS	TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY LAYER	WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS LAYER	TANGIBLE OUTCOME LAYER
Introduce your proposition			
Make a case for the proposition			
Anchor the proposition to reality or need			
Build the idea procedurally			
Build the idea procedurally			
Build the idea procedurally			
Shift the lens to deeper topics			
Intro the perspective shift			
Build the perspective shift			
Anchor the perspective shift			
Invite participation			
Name honest outcomes			
Proposition comes full circle			

CHAPTER 1

Transformative Journey:

Worldview Analysis:

Tangible Outcome:

Reader wants:

But needs:

OUTLINE :

1. *Hook/Why we care*
2. *Topics/What's in our way*
3. *Takeaway*
4. *Anchor/Why we'll believe*
5. *Payoff/What's the invitation*

TOTALLY RIDICULOUS EXAMPLE

Transformative Journey: Caught Shining / the Fairy Godmother Story

Worldview Analysis: What makes fairy godmothers pick someone to help

Tangible Outcome: Hope that anyone can be helped

Reader wants: To go to the ball like I did

But needs: To see herself as worthy of the ball

OUTLINE:

1. *Hook/Why we care:* Fairy Godmother found me and saw something in me and dressed me up and sent me off
2. *Topics/What's in our way:* Why would she do that? What's a fairy godmother's M.O. anyway? Why would she do that for me?
3. *Takeaway:* My invitation has always been waiting—so has yours
4. *Anchor/Why we'll believe:* Empathy - I need to get more vulnerable here. Probably go deeper into what I was thinking when she first appeared.
5. *Payoff/What's the invitation:* It wasn't what she gave me, it was how she helped me see myself differently—the way she sees us all.