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THE 90-DAY NOVEL

A Day-by-Day Plan for
Outlining & Writing Your Book

SARAH DOMET



THE 90-DAY

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Dedication

For my parents, Luke and Sally, who taught me life is a story; be proud of the pages you write.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AN INTRODUCTION, A CHALLENGE, AND A WARNING

So you think you can write a novel, huh?

The difference between a novelist and a would-be novelist is that one person actually writes while the other person simply *talks* about writing. Which one are you?

One person romanticizes the idea of being a writer — perhaps swilling some cognac in a moody red-lit coffee shop (dark-framed glasses and argyle sweater vest optional in this vision), pen hoisted in air, waiting for that old muse, Inspiration, to hit. The other realizes that writing is rather, shall we say, *unsexy*; there is nothing particularly spectacular about sitting in front of a computer, *alone*, pulling out your hair, wildly scribbling notes, regretfully saying “no” to that dinner invitation from your friends to try that fabulous new restaurant in town because you just *have* to finish this scene. In the fever of your writing, you feel your characters need you more than your friends do now ... and, well, another evening spent alone with the page. How’s that for romantic?

So you think you’re a writer. That’s why you’re here, no doubt. If you’ve picked up this book, chances are you have a vision for a novel or perhaps a fantastic plot conceit or a compelling character. But are you willing to do the work? Are you willing to trade the *idea* of being a writer for the *habits* that any successful writer must adopt?

Or maybe you’re just waiting for inspiration to hit. Let me guess: When it does, you’ll waste no time in that frenzied fugue state, typing out your novel, from start to finish. The problem is, inspiration hits you only in fits and spurts now — perhaps when you’re driving or walking the dog or sitting in your cubical at work or inhaling a pesto chicken wrap during your lunch break. This inspiration never sticks around long enough to compel you to write the entire novel — maybe only a paragraph or a scene here and there. Maybe it’s really less a novel and more a jumble of ideas. But someday, right?

If you’ve come to this book looking for inspiration, I’m going to give you your first dose of cold, hard truth: Writing doesn’t require large doses of inspiration. Writers who wait for inspiration to hit, particularly writers with other full-time commitments — a job, a family, a needy feline companion named Ponce de Leon — will likely find themselves waiting forever. They’ll find themselves sitting in coffee shops, pens poised in air, ordering another drink, looking around, talking to the locals (who saw the notebook and pen, and thus believe some writing was surely done that day), picking some lint off that argyle sweater, and then packing up to go home and watch another episode of *Seinfeld* on TV. That’s reality.

Frankly, I’m tired of writers talking only about inspiration. I’m sick of books that help you find the creative inner you, the idea that will spark that spark and finally compel you to write your novel. Novel writing isn’t always about finding the right ideas. It’s about finding the time and the energy. I’m a pragmatist when it comes to writing, so if you’re looking for some of that touchy-feely New Agey writer speak, you won’t find it in these pages. Instead you’ll find a practical approach, one that requires you to stop

talking and start writing.

Self-taught fiction writer Octavia Butler once noted, “Forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won’t. Habit is *persistence in practice*.” (Emphasis mine.) Yes, inspiration might contain the spark and life of your idea, but habit gets the writing done. Inspiration resides in your heart; habit resides in your fingers. Inspiration propels; habit completes. Art equals habit plus inspiration. It’s a simple equation.

If you do a quick Internet search for “workout videos,” chances are you’ll find DVDs with such titles as *8-Minute Abs Like Stonehenge*, *30 Days to a Teeny Tummy and a Tiny Hiney*, or *The 10-Minute Shrinking-Self Solution*. All these titles hope to persuade you that with a bit of daily persistence, you can become that muscled individual on the front of the DVD cover. The amazing thing about these videos is that they work! Who knew? When one routinely exercises, instead of offering up excuses (like I do), who would have guessed that he or she looks and feels better about themselves? Sure, you may not have biceps like the Incredible Hulk, but they’re better than you’ve ever seen on those thin arms of yours. Yet the daily dedication is the hard part. It’s just too easy to skip a workout here or there — to choose leisure over work. (Or, let’s face it, to choose work over work.)

Here’s something to think about: Your mind is a muscle, too — and writing, much like exercising, requires that persistence-in-practice if you hope to make the progress necessary to finish a novel. You’re going to have to write. Every day. Isn’t that what a writer is, after all? Someone who writes?

The 90-Day Novel is a challenge to anyone who always said he or she wanted to write a book, but “never found the time” to sit down and do the work. Admittedly, it’s difficult to write without a deadline. This book, then, is the deadline, the impetus, and the framework you will need to get your novel written. This book is a practical guide that will lead you from the initial stages of brainstorming your novel, through the developmental stages of outlining, and into the final stages of writing your first draft. And, most importantly, it will keep you on schedule, giving you specific assignments and points of focus each day to help you compartmentalize your novel. That’s the trick of any large project, after all — biting off one small chunk at a time.

The premise of *The 90-Day Novel* is based upon four driving philosophies.

1. If you do not write on a daily basis, or a near-daily basis, you are not a writer.
2. Outlining is an essential component of novel writing.
3. Novels are written scene by scene, not character by character or action by action.
4. It’s possible to write a book in months, not years.

Sounds fairly straightforward, but this book requires something from you, the reader, too. First, it requires your commitment to sit down and write for *at least* two to three hours a day for the next ninety days, no excuses. Tell your family and friends you’ll not be available for weekly movie marathons or vacations or major home-renovation projects or nights out on the town that will make you too tired the next day to write. You’ll need to make sacrifices. For the next ninety days, you’ll need to view writing as

a job, and your payment will be the satisfaction you'll receive from your progress and, ultimately, your completion.

Secondly, in order to realistically write a draft in ninety days, you are going to have to critically assess your novel's ideas and components *before* writing. Therefore, the outlining process is going to be absolutely essential if you hope to make good progress in such a short space of time. I can hear the gripes already. Just the mention alone of the word *outline* strikes fear in the heart of many creative types. Many writers view outlines as a restrictive straight-jacket in an otherwise creative realm — or as unnecessary process work *they* don't need. If you have negative feelings about outlining, my suggestion is, kindly, this: Get over it. And quickly. Outlining is an excellent tool for plotting the arc of your novel and for ensuring you don't waste time on extraneous scenes that lend little in the way of support to your story. Furthermore, outlines can ensure that you have a balance and variety of scenes necessary to pace the novel and keep your readers' attention.

Joyce Carol Oates, one of the most talented and notably productive writers of our day, is notorious for her outlines, elaborate charts taped to the wall next to her writing desk. During a lecture she delivered at a writing conference I attended in Saratoga Springs in 2006, she was asked what it was like to be such a prolific writer, producing novel after novel after novel. Her response was both frank and humorous: She said, "I don't understand why most writers don't write *more!*" (I believe I quoted her correctly; I was too busy guffawing with my colleagues to write it down.) This is a woman who, after all, has written, to date, fifty-six novels, at the rate of two to three a year, not including a long list of short-story collections, poetry collections, children's fiction, and essays. Perhaps her outlining technique, part of her prewriting process, holds the secret to her abundant output. If I were a betting woman, I'd place my wager and up my ante.

Next, you must commit yourself to writing your novel scene by scene, from your outline, and in an orderly fashion. Though writing classes often discuss and teach fiction writing using the discrete elements of the craft — character, plot, setting, dialogue, and so forth — you'll need to focus on all these elements simultaneously through scene writing. You'll come to understand that these elements are interrelated: Character affects plot, which determines setting, which can reveal mood, tone, and voice. Though you may be tempted to jump forward and backward, focusing on the "good parts" and reworking your favorite moments, your novel will be best served if you approach it in a linear fashion. On the front end you should simply focus on pushing yourself to produce pages and completed scenes; on the back end you can worry about revising for your reader.

Finally, this book asks you to dispel any notions you may have that a novel takes years — even one year — to write. With dedication, foresight, and attention to time management, a novel can easily be penned in months, not years. Many authors, living and dead, have written their novels in a matter of months, sometimes even weeks. For example, Faulkner is purported to have written *As I Lay Dying* in only six weeks. Zora Neale Hurston wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in just under two months. Joyce Carol Oates cranks out her novels at a breakneck pace, sometimes publishing two or

three novels a year. While allotting ninety days for a solid first draft asks that you work quickly and diligently, it's certainly not the fastest a novel has ever been written. That is, I won't be asking you to reinvent the wheel here. Instead you'll be asked to follow the tried-and-tested schedule and writing assignments — and to put in a little extra elbow grease — to reach your end goal.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is organized into two parts. Part I should be read *before* you begin the ninety-day challenge, and Part II can be read as you are completing it.

Part I describes several outlining techniques and the strengths/limitations of each. The goal is to allow you to find the best outlining technique to suit your needs. However, you'll soon recognize that all outlining approaches will eventually lead to the same place: a well-organized and structured novel with a clear narrative arc. Part I will also introduce you to the basics of scene writing and scene structure. You should read Part I before beginning the ninety-day novel writing challenge. Don't worry, the clock won't start until you are ready.

Part II is divided by days/weeks and should be read in sections as you progress through the ninety-day challenge. For the first three weeks, each day's lesson will address a specific component of novel writing and provide a specific assignment. These assignments will build upon one another, culminating in a solid first outline. In week four, you will be asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your outline as we explore in detail the arc of the novel. Week five will focus on developing both major and minor characters in your novel, choosing the best point of view and adjusting your outlines accordingly. Starting week six, this book will guide you in a linear fashion through the eight-week drafting process. Borrowing on the outline you generated, along with the various assignments you completed, we'll tackle the daunting task of writing the novel, one scene at a time. Don't worry; I'll be here to encourage you and keep you on task.

Writing is difficult. It's work. Hard work. It's understandable if you don't want to put yourself through the agony of becoming a writer. Maybe you should become a candlestick maker instead. Or a hat maker. Make something else, if you want: A sandwich, a soapbox derby car, a scarf and matching mittens. Novel writing is not for everyone, and certainly not for those who don't have the patience to sit down for countless hours staring at a computer screen. Certainly, there will be times in the next three months when you don't feel like writing, and you'll have to write anyway. There will be times when you feel as though you're writing drivel, and it might be, but you'll keep pushing yourself to write. There will be times when you face writer's block, or you are tired, or you don't know what to write, or you don't know how to describe what you want to say, or you grow tired of thinking of the same characters, or you don't know what your characters want or if you even like them — and you'll force yourself through these moments because that's what writers do: They write. I promise you the pages will add up, but only if you keep writing.

In famed journalist Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Outliers*, he claims that in order to be

an “expert” at something, you must practice it for ten thousand hours. So, according to Gladwell, if you took to practicing writing as a full-time job (forty hours a week/fifty-two weeks), you’ll achieve expert status in about five years. That’s a lot of time. But this is good news for you, too. It means with practice, introspection, and a little bit (or a lot) of self-criticism, you’ll become a stronger writer with each word you pen, each page you write. Good writers aren’t born good writers; they develop into good writers through dedication and practice. Through hard work. Through habit.

So I’ll say it again: Writing is difficult. All serious writers — the seasoned and the rookies — know this. But, it can also be exhilarating work. You know this already, and that’s why you’re here. You have a great novel idea — good characters, a compelling plot, a vivid setting — but perhaps you don’t know where to start. Perhaps you’re afraid of what will happen if you stop talking about being a writer and start writing. What might you discover?

The 90-Day Novel is a line drawn in the sand with a challenge to cross it: On one side are the many folks who talk about being writers; on the other you’ll find those humble, disciplined, intrepid souls who expend the creative energy — supported by a sturdy outline and generous amounts of lonely *time* — to become real writers. If you follow this book’s advice, your reward will be simple: your very own novel in ninety days.

So you think you can write a novel? Prove it. Fill out the following contract, tear it out, and tape it next to your writing desk as a reminder of your commitment.

You have ninety days. The count starts when you say go. *On your mark, get set ...*

WRITING CONTRACT

Agreement made this _____ day of _____ in the year _____ whereby I, _____(FILL IN YOUR NAME)_____, do hereby commit myself to writing a minimum of two to three hours a day, every day, for ninety consecutive days, no excuses. The work will begin on the date I set forth in writing below.

I pledge to work diligently and habitually, even when I’m tired, hungry, cold, grouchy, or lonely, or have to get up early or stay up late, and/or even when I’d rather be doing something else. I am entering this agreement with myself because I recognize that the only way to write a novel is to dedicate myself to the project and to put in the necessary (solitary) time. I may or may not enjoy the process, but I also know there’s a little bit of agony in writing. The pain I inflict upon myself shall be my own.

I will begin my novel on _____(FILL IN DATE)_____ and expect my first completed draft to be finished on _____ (FILL IN DATE)_____, approximately ninety days later. No penalty shall be found for failing to meet this mandated deadline, but the reward for meeting it shall be the satisfaction of having written my own novel. I shall blame no one but myself for the delays along the way.

This pledge is made with my full consent and awareness, and under no

obligation to anyone but myself.

(SIGNATURE)

Part 1:
**OUTLINING TECHNIQUES & SCENE-WRITING
BASICS**

CHOOSING YOUR TOOLS: An Outlining Primer

All artists have their tools. For a painter, it's a paintbrush; for a photographer, it's a camera. For a novelist, it's an outline.

But not just anybody with a paintbrush or a camera is an artist. You must first learn how to use your artist's tool properly in order to create something that will invite others — complete strangers, most often — to spend time with what you've created, to think about it long after they've left the art gallery or museum. Or even after they've closed the book. That's the deepest hope of every serious artist — to create a lasting, thoughtful reflection on the human experience.

However, when some writers hear the word *outline*, they run screaming for the hills. These individuals believe that writing is about the process of discovery — that their characters reveal their personalities *through* the process of writing. And how, pray tell, can you know what a character will do before he has even done it?

My response: Yawn. Eye roll. Sigh. *Oh, petunias*. The line for excuse makers begins here: X. (Not that the excuse line actually leads anywhere. Plan on standing there for a while.)

As you may have guessed, I feel strongly about outlines. In the past, when I've taught college writing courses, I've had students initially resist outlining as though it were the most tedious task known to mankind. It was as though these students were poor Luke in the famous ditch-digging scene from *Cool Hand Luke*, where the haggard protagonist is ordered to dig "his dirt" out of Boss Keen's ditch, then to remove "his dirt" out of the prison yard and fill in the hole he'd just made. Through the process of digging and refilling the ditch, digging and refilling the ditch, and digging and refilling the ditch, feeble Luke's strengths and limitations are tested, as is his sanity. There was just no purpose to all that digging.

Outlining is nothing like this, of course.

Here are some common myths about outlining: outlines eliminate the need to think through the writing process once you begin writing. Outlines are restrictive. There is only one correct way to write a proper outline. Outlines stunt creativity. Outlining is a painful process. Once you write an outline, you cannot stray from what you've written. Outlines are for individuals who can't organize thoughts in their heads or who don't know what they are doing. Outlines are used primarily by control freaks.

Why do some students hold such beliefs?

I remember back in grade school when Mrs. N__ taught my class the essentials of a proper outline. The lesson lasted an eternity: Use Roman numerals. Each heading and subheading must have at least two parts. Do not mix up the types and variety of outlines you use. You must use either complete sentences or sentence fragments — but only one and never both. You must use capital letters for main points, lowercase letters for subpoints, and numbers for sub-subpoints. Ack! Back then, Mrs. N__ taught us that there was only one proper way to write an outline, and it was just so. Day 2 into our outlining lesson, and the entire class had found the blessed release of sleep, heads

resting heavily on our desks, exhausted by the rules and the sheer boredom of it all. Was it time for recess yet?

Luckily, we no longer sit at the mercy of our grade-school teachers. Mrs. N__'s ideas weren't wrong — maybe it was just her approach. (I don't blame Mrs. N__; in fact, I rather liked her.) Not everybody processes and utilizes information in the same manner, and so not all outlines will be equally effective for all individuals. A traditional outline might work for some, while a charted outline might work better for others. The trick is to find an outlining technique that jibes with your style and personality, with how you visualize your story line. Are you a more spatial learner? A visual one? Do you conceive of your novel's characters and events in a chrono-logical fashion or in a nonlinear way? Are you a big-picture person or a detail-oriented thinker? These questions, and their answers, will help you determine which kind of outlining style will work best for you.

Once my college-writing students (reluctantly) found an outlining process that worked for them, these same individuals who griped and bellyached about being forced to compose an outline — oh, those outlines, scourge of all humanity! — sheepishly admitted that “well ... maybe it did help a little bit after all.” And their grades showed it. No longer did their papers and narratives offer up rambling and unfocused ideas. No longer did they jump from thought to thought within the same paragraph or present their visions to a reader in an illogical or confusing fashion. Their characters become more complicated, their plotlines more developed, their stories more compelling.

The outlines worked.

Outlines are not just for beginning writers, though certainly fledgling novelists might benefit the most from them. Plenty of novelists, from all ranges in their careers, rely on the outline to help them generate a solid story. E.M. Forster, in his often-taught *Aspects of the Novel*, notes, “the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence.” (Though, to be clear, Forster makes a clear distinction between story and plot, and we'll discuss this in a later section.) Outlines help us not only to generate stories, but to organize stories — to clarify (to the writer herself), before drafting the novel, when particular events happened within the context of the novel's time frame. Though you'll find plenty of examples of famous novelists who do not work closely with outlines — Stephen King, for one — you'll also find a plethora of writers who find outlining to be indispensable.

In this chapter, we'll examine the types and varieties of outlines you may find helpful in the writing process. I encourage you to experiment with each and to find the method that's most compatible with your own writing habits, your work space, or your processes. But keep in mind that each method is going to lead to the same place: a well-organized and structured outline with a clear narrative arc. You'll find no easy shortcuts. You'll conceive of your novel before you write a single word of your novel, and in this manner, you'll ensure you have your thoughts organized enough to complete your novel in ninety days.

You'll undertake this process work before you begin, of course, just as a long-distance runner prepares for a marathon with a regular series of shorter runs before the big race.

And if you skip a lesson here or there, or don't spend the necessary time drafting and critiquing your outline, don't be surprised when you find can't finish your novel in ninety days. The secret to success, after all, is not your inspiration, remember, but your habits. In an interview, curmudgeonly humorist Andy Rooney once said, "My advice is not to wait to be struck by an idea. If you're a writer, you sit down and damn well decide to *have* an idea. That's the way to get an idea." This idea strikes a similar chord with novelist Margaret Atwood's thinking when she advises, "Put your left hand on the table. Put your right hand in the air. If you stay that way long enough, you'll get a plot." William Faulkner shares a similar sentiment: "I write only when I feel the inspiration. Fortunately, inspiration strikes at 10 o'clock everyday." None of these writers waits around for inspiration to light a fire beneath them. Instead they rely upon routine, upon self-determination. You should, too.

We'll be spending four weeks — yes, FOUR WEEKS! — developing our outlines, and while this may seem like an excessive amount of time to someone just itching to get started on her novel, remember: patience is key. Mr. Miyagi taught the Karate Kid martial arts by having him wax his car (*wax on, wax off*), paint a fence, and scrub a deck, among other mundane household tasks. Writing a novel in ninety days will take equal parts diligence and patience. You must put your faith in the process. The racing ahead will only lead to the falling behind. *Ah, thank you, Mr. Miyagi. I see now.*

But before we even begin, it's important to remember this: Outlines change. People change. Characters change. Plots change. Even change changes.

I encourage you to think of an outline not as a paper map but as a personal tour guide taking you through an unknown terrain. "Can we go over there?" you might ask, pointing to a pristine spot off in the distance. When navigating by paper, you'll not be able to do so, as the area you've pointed out has not been marked on the map. When navigating with a tour guide, however, you'll get a different answer. "Yes, we can go there if you like, but the pathway is rather steep and narrow. You'll have to climb that jagged rock over there, too, and cross a rapid stream. You might be uncomfortable. Do you still want to go?" the tour guide asks. Yes. Yes, of course you do.

Outlines are not meant to strictly enforce adherence to one rigid perception of our novel. That's the myth. Instead think of your outline simply as a suggestion. Think of it, perhaps, as a recipe. Sure, you can follow a recipe for, say, a cheesecake exactly. Or you can add a bit of chocolate to the batter, and poof — chocolate cheesecake! Or, you can add some pecans, maple syrup, and rum, and you've got a different, delicious version of the same classic. Recipes guide us — but the creativity still belongs to the head chef.

As your novel progresses, you may find yourself editing your outline — and as your novel more fully develops, you might find yourself discarding your outline altogether. What's important, however, is that you take the necessary time to think through characters and plotlines to make sure your initial ideas are sustainable. Police detectives are required, by their job description, to follow all leads, even dead ones. Fortunately, novelists bear no such responsibility. In fact, the more time we spend up front eliminating flat characters and dead plotlines, the less time we'll waste during the writing process itself — and the more time you can dedicate to actually writing.

Think it's a great idea to write a novel about a young man who realized he has the magical power to generate solar energy through the touch of his hand? That'd be pretty interesting. What about a character who is allergic to all foods except pickled bologna and parsnips? Wouldn't that be a hoot? What about a woman who plays Mary in her small town's live manger scene during the holidays, even though she's Jewish? That'd be clever. But clever does not sustain a novel.

Testing your character and plot ideas — through the out-lining process — will allow you to examine whether or not your idea is rich, compelling, and sustainable — or simply a clever notion that's better left for cocktail-hour conversation. "Hey, did you hear the one about ..."

Following are just a handful of outlining techniques that may work for you during your ninety-day novel writing challenge. Read through the descriptions and decide which is best suited for you.

THE "STRUCTURE-PLUS" OUTLINE

The structure-plus outline is the most traditional method of outlining presented here. In other words, it's the kind of outline that looks most similar to the outlining method you were likely taught in elementary school by Mrs. N____. These outlines contain detailed written descriptions of the individual scenes you'll be writing, which will progress in a linear fashion throughout your novel.

The most common kind of structural outline can be roughly divided into three parts, or three "acts," as they are often termed. We'll discuss the structure of a novel at length in a later section, but, in brief, Act I introduces (characters and plot situations), Act II complicates (character wants something, but plot complications stand in her way), and Act III resolves (character gets what she wants or doesn't get what she wants).

The "plus" in the structure-plus outline will ask you to name the setting of each scene, the characters involved, and the motivation or the purpose of the scene.

A structure-plus outline might look something like this:

I. SETTING: The back room at Spaghetti O'Plenty; 5:00 in the evening

CHARACTERS: Rhys, Trina, and Trina's manager at the restaurant

PURPOSE: To complicate the plot and build tension between Rhys and Trina

- a. Rhys gets his acceptance letter to a prestigious art school and, excited, goes to his girlfriend, Trina's, work with the intention of telling her.
 - i. Trina goes on break and takes him to the back room.
 - ii. "I need to tell you something," Trina says. "I'm pregnant."
 - iii. Trina's manager interrupts, "Trina, we need you on Table 7."
- b. Rhys is shocked and can feel his dream of being a painter slipping away.
 - i. "What are you going to do?" Rhys asks.
 - ii. "Me? What am I going to do? We're in this together," Trina says, upset.
 - iii. Trina's manager comes in and sees her crying. "Leave her alone and get

out of here,” he says. “Trina, I said Table 7.”

- c. Rhys leaves the restaurant, crumpling up the letter and throwing it away on his way out.

The structure-plus outline is the most thorough of the out-line varieties listed here. Drafting a structure-plus outline will likely take you more time on the front end, *before* you write your novel, but working with an outline of this nature can potentially save a tremendous amount of valuable time on the back end, *during* the writing of your novel. Remember, the more thinking you do up front, especially thinking that involves the logistics of your novel, the more time you’ll free up later in the process for creating, developing, and writing.

At a glance:

Outline Pros: Very detailed — you can add as many layers of detail as you’d like.

Outline Cons: Not as easy to physically manipulate the information once you are writing.

THE SIGNPOST OUTLINE

Those of you who are resistant to the outlining process might find the signpost outline to be of better use. In this kind of outline, you’ll fill in “placeholders,” which briefly note the kind and type of scene you’ll need, the characters and the setting and a general idea of what happens — but not necessarily *all* the details of the scene. (For a more detailed description of scene types.) In this type of out-line, you’ll need to know only the basics, which will still leave plenty of room for you to develop the nuances of the scene while you are writing. Mark Twain used a kind of signpost outline when writing his novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. That is, he had a general idea of where the novel would go and how the novel would be organized, but the specifics were left until the drafting stage.

For instance, you might know that in one scene your protagonist, Sully, confronts the man he believes to be stalking his wife, Berta. You might know this scene contains a lot of action, a chase, some dialogue toward the end, and the dramatic realization that the stalker is really the biological father of Berta — a man who abandoned her (and her mother) when she was young.

Here is an example of a signpost outline:

SCENE 6: Action scene

SETTING: Sully’s backyard and the woods surrounding his property

CHARACTERS: Sully, the Stalker

PLOT: Sully sees the Stalker again, peeking in through the kitchen window to get a glimpse of Berta. Sully grabs his pistol and confronts the man, who runs through the woods. Sully chases him. The man stumbles, and Sully finally catches up. He points the gun at the Stalker and forces him to talk. Dialogue ensues. Man reveals he’s Berta’s father.