

Novel Planning Kit

By Kate McMurray

Working Title: _____

Elevator Pitch (2 sentences max): _____

Length/Word Count Goal: _____

Protagonist 1:		
Appearance	Physical traits	
Basics	Occupation, defining personality traits	
Thumbnail Sketch	What do they want? What do they believe? Where are they in their life?	
Deep-Seated Desire	What have they wanted for a long time?	
Defining Misbelief	What holds them back? How must the character change in the course of overcoming the obstacle?	
Other notes		

Protagonist 2:		
Appearance	Physical traits	
Basics	Occupation, defining personality traits	
Thumbnail Sketch	What do they want? What do they believe? Where are they in their life?	
Deep-Seated Desire	What have they wanted for a long time?	
Defining Misbelief	What holds them back? How must the character change in the course of overcoming the obstacle?	
Other notes		

Plot Beats

Beat	Description	Plot Event
The Opening	This includes: an opening image that is a snapshot of the character(s) and the struggle and tone of the story; any set-up necessary to show where the character is in his/her life and what s/he is missing; introducing the theme(s) of the story; introducing the protagonists. Caveat: Don't waste a lot of narrative time on set-up. The start of the story is the moment when the status quo changes.	
Meet Cute/Catalyst	This is the moment when the protagonists meet, or it is the moment that launches the story. If following a hero's journey structure, this is the Call to Action.	
No Way/Debate	Change is scary! Show that here. In a romance, this is the first time the character says, either aloud or to themselves, "He's cute and all, but I will not fall in love." This could also be an internal debate in which the character wonders if s/he has what it takes to answer the Call or tackle the challenge of the story. This could be the hero refusing the Call to Action.	
On to Act 2	This is a plot thrust that takes us into the second act of the story, or the first threshold. The protagonist(s) make(s) a choice. The protagonists cannot walk away from each	

	other. At this point, there is no turning back.	
Inkling	The characters begin to understand that their defining misbelief is false, or that something they think they understand about themselves is untrue. This should relate to the story's theme and set up how the characters will change throughout the story. This could be the beginning of the journey or trial.	
Deepening Desire	Each protagonist gets a glimpse of who the other is. The romance develops.	
The Promise of the Premise	This is the moment when the characters think, "Hey, maybe this could work!" The characters explore their new world or each other, perhaps give in to the temptation they have been trying to resist. This is the part of the story that gives the reader a giddy thrill about what kind of ride they're on.	
Midpoint	This is usually a false high. Everything is great! Except it's not! The character may get something they want, but it's not how they expected it to be. Or it's the moment when the characters start falling in love... just before you pull the rug out from under them. This could also be a temptation away from the true path.	
Doubts/Bad Guys Close In	Internal bad guys creep in: doubt, jealousy, fear. External bad guys may	

	<p>achieve a victory here, too. Think about your No Way beat and develop a reason why <i>these</i> characters think they can't be together. Here, the high of the midpoint begins to fall apart.</p>	
Deepening Doubt/Retreat	<p>The intimacy between the characters may grow, but the seeds of doubt planted in the first act are starting to sprout as well. Characters begin to retreat from each other in order to protect their own hearts.</p>	
Shields Up	<p>This is a moment that confirms the No Way beat. Example: No Way: "I don't believe in love/will never love again/don't deserve love because ____." Shields Up: "I knew better than to believe in love/love again/think I deserve love because when I let my guard down ____."</p>	
Break Up/All Is Lost	<p>This beginning of the "dark moment" confirms the characters' fundamental misbelief, and is a moment when characters choose to hold on to their fears/flaws/wounds instead of opening their hearts. This doesn't need to be an actual breakup but should indicate to readers that this may not all work out. This could also be a moment when something is removed or dies so that something new can take its place. This could also be a refusal to return to the true path.</p>	

Dark Night of the Soul	The protagonists hit bottom. The characters wallow in helplessness/turmoil.	
On to Act 3	The characters wake up from the dark moment. They choose love over fear. They get a fresh idea or new inspiration. The characters choose to try again.	
Grand Gesture/Climax	This is when everything comes to a head. Stakes are at their highest point, perhaps even life or death. The protagonist takes a major risk to defeat the bad guys or win love or both. All of the subplots come together in this moment, too. This is the most exciting part of the story.	
Finale/Whole Heart/HEA	This is where everything wraps up, with a final image that shows us that the characters are together and can take on potential challenges again.	
Epilogue (optional)	We check in with our protagonists to show that, at some point in the future, they are a team, ready to conquer challenges together and be happy.	

Sources, alternate approaches:

Save the Cat by Blake Snyder

Romancing the Beat by Gwen Hayes

Story Genius by Lisa Cron

Jami Gold's Beat Sheets, <https://jamigold.com/for-writers/worksheets-for-writers/>

Hero's Journey: <http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/Workshop-stuff/Joseph-Campbell-Hero-Journey.htm>