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# A Writer's Guide to **Harry Potter**

UPDATED & EXPANDED

S.P. SITAL

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**S. P. Sipal**

Deep River Press, Inc.  
Sanford, North Carolina

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

A Writer's Guide to Harry Potter

ISBN 978-1945561009

Library of Congress Control Number 2016946412

Published by Deep River Press, Inc. July 2016

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# Dedication

To Lisa London,  
without whose belief and encouragement this new edition would never  
have happened.

and

In Memory of:  
Lydia Ondrusek, sister elf and friend,  
who started me on this journey, but boarded at King's Cross before its  
completion.

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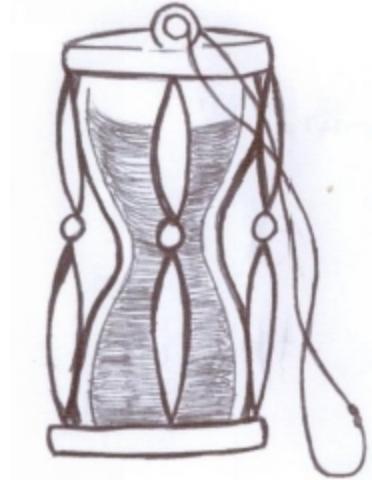
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# Introduction

Since the first edition of this guide was published five years ago, the wizarding world has suddenly come back to life, expanding at the seams like Perkins' tent or Hermione's handbag.

As of this writing, almost nine years have passed since *Deathly Hallows* was published, five since the last film was released. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is opening in London and the script book will soon be released. Already the hype is brewing, especially since reviews of the previews have begun to leak. Then, in November, all Harry Potter fandom will be treated to the first of a new trilogy of films, all set in the wizarding world, but with fresh new characters and storyline.

In the meanwhile, JK Rowling has successfully launched a new series and even sold the TV rights to her Cormoran Strike novels, which are slated for release on BBC in 2017. She proved what a powerful mind she had for business when, in 2008, instead of signing her e-book rights over to Scholastic or Bloomsbury, she formed her own corporation to self-publish and market the electronic world of Harry Potter going forward. Pottermore.com is now a massive online site dedicated to everything Potter, providing fresh content and news to keep fans engaged while inviting in new ones. *Pottermore* will also be the electronic publisher for the upcoming script books for both *Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts*. Last, but certainly not least, Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme parks have now spread to four locations!

Rowling and her wizarding world appear completely poised to capture a whole new generation of fans. Therefore, it seemed the time was ripe to update this guide and once again dip beneath the pages of her books to see why Harry Potter became the phenomenon it continues to be. So please join me as we weave our way through the halls of Hogwarts and nip into a classroom to learn before the Headmistress of Magic herself, JK Rowling.

## Private Lessons with the Headmistress

*Harry Potter*. The very name conjures up images of magic and books, movies and fans, and the extraordinary midnight release parties that looked more like mega rock concerts than a mere book release.

*JK Rowling*. For fellow writers, this name brings visions of wealth and prestige. Of an author so high in the publishing stratosphere that she could

eschew review copies and demand security so tight for her pre-release books that stores had to sign secrecy oaths in order to stock her latest release on their shelves.

The popularity of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series reached monumental heights, which were never before considered possible for a novel, let alone a children's story. With the release of the final book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in the summer of 2007, 8.3 million copies were sold in the first 24 hours in the US alone<sup>[1]</sup>. The series as a whole, throughout the world, has sold over 450 million copies and been translated into 73 languages<sup>[2]</sup>. Think of where just a small smidgen of this magic "Floo Powder" could carry many of us more mortal authors in our own writing careers.

*But, it's all hype, isn't it?* Though many an envious writer would like to think Ms. Rowling's secret to success is just a bunch of magical mayhem, we do ourselves a disservice by focusing on her writing imperfections and not appreciating—and more importantly learning from—the skills which have made her Harry Potter series more than beloved, but truly an obsession among millions.

While I understand the desire to criticize a popular-selling work, and indeed there is much to learn from understanding the mistakes of others, I think that the greater learning experience is to understand the techniques that made a NYT bestselling author what she is today. After all, millions of people on various continents and across many cultures do not plunk down their hard-earned cash solely because of hype. *Something* must ring emotionally true to a wide band of readers in order to create this hype in the first place. I believe that this something can, to some extent, be learned. All we have to do is delve into the pages of the bestseller with a writer's practiced eye and discover the techniques that we can then incorporate into our own work in our own way.

Writers learn first through imitation before practice and experience develops our own unique voice. Since antiquity, apprentices have studied by the side of their mentors. Just as Harry Potter learns the power behind the magic from the greatest wizard in a hundred years, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore, so too can writers across genres learn the power behind their words, to tell their own stories, by studying the craft of the headmistress of bestselling fiction, JK Rowling.

The evidence is all there, in black and white, on the pages of the books so dog-eared and well read by millions. And yet, the first Bloomsbury print-run, back in 1997 for *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was only 500[3]. Yes, 500 copies. Obviously the now beloved Harry Potter series did not burst through the opening gate by way of a high-level marketing campaign and push from the publisher. JK Rowling earned her success the old-fashioned way—*word of mouth*.

Word of mouth comes from crafting a story so engaging that satisfied readers hurry to tell everyone they know to immediately go out and purchase the book for themselves in order to share the same wonderful, emotional rush they just enjoyed. Word of mouth is born of the words on the page. With Harry Potter, I believe that there are three fundamental aspects that drove these fans to share with their friends from the very beginning—characterization, worldbuilding, and mystery.

First, Rowling breathes to life a motley assortment of quirky people with varied emotions and viewpoints—such as a half-giant gamekeeper who drinks too much, and a greasy-haired, nasty old professor who hangs out in dungeons and antagonizes Harry. She sets these fun and engaging witches and wizards into motion against the backdrop of an extremely large, delightfully depicted world, so rich with details that we want to eat their cockroach clusters and visit their Leaky Cauldron. And then, to tie the whole series together, and keep the reader forever looking forward, she envelopes each story in an ongoing mystery, one that takes place both on the superficial level and as a giant squid below text. She enticed her fans, engaging their minds as well as their imaginations, to scour old myths and legends in search for clues that would guide them to who was the next to die, or what had really happened in Godric's Hollow. In all ways, she gave the reader more than they were expecting.

Indeed, the greatest asset that Rowling had as an author was her reader involvement. From online searches for clues, to sharing their latest theories on forums, to fan fiction, wizard rock, and fansites, her fans were (and still are) completely immersed in her world. They felt compelled to continue living the wizard experience even after they'd put the books down. This engagement of the reader by giving them more than anticipated is the ultimate secret to Rowling's success.

Yes, there are many aspects Rowling didn't do quite right. She may have used too many adverbs. She probably didn't think through all the

ramifications of all the magic she created. And towards the end, she seemed to have bitten off a bit more than she could chew by leaving a few too many loose-ends untied. You can indeed go through her books and find countless problems that many writers love to jump on. For me, this imperfection is vastly reassuring. That a book with flaws can sell so astoundingly well assures me that my work doesn't have to achieve absolute perfection to sell a more modest amount.

What any book must have, however, is power. Some aspect must be so strong that it engages the reader and inspires them to tell their friends. It is my goal in *A Writer's Guide to Harry Potter* to nudge us all toward this empowering process in analyzing our own work. By dissecting Rowling's series, and learning what we can from it, we hope to improve our stories in such a way that will engage and inspire our readers. Through fifteen lessons, we'll analyze not only how to keep your reader reading, but how to draw them so deeply into your text, your world, that they become full participants in discovering and unlocking the mysteries and experiences you have created.

And then, hurry to tell their friends!

## No Polyjuiced Pretenders Here

While Harry's friends may very well have been willing to risk their lives to drink the Polyjuice Potion and transform themselves into six Potter clones, your reader (and especially agents and editors) will not look so fondly on your work if you choose to do likewise. This book is not about creating Polyjuiced Potter Pretenders, but rather an artistic study to learn and develop specific craft techniques. Combine these tools with your own voice and imagination to tell a story in your own likeness. Use the techniques learned here to improve your writing, making it fresh and unique and capable of streaming forth only from your own quill.

## The Fine Print at the Bottom of the Parchment

These lessons are not about how to write fantasy exclusively. Most of the techniques we will discuss apply to any form of writing. Some techniques may be more specific to certain genres, but every type of commercial fiction writer should find something in this study.

Downloadable PDFs of some of the charts as well as companion workbooks for adults and students are available at [www.DeepRiver.press](http://www.DeepRiver.press).

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# **Lesson One**

## **More Emotional Range than a Teaspoon**

### **(Characterization)**

The secret to JK Rowling's success lies in open view on the well-read pages of her much loved books. For almost two decades, readers from across generations, cultures, and continents have been drawn in to Harry Potter by her delightfully detailed world, her intricately woven mysteries, and her wide range of quirky people with varied back stories and viewpoints. Of these three primary elements, however, Rowling's vivid and diverse characters breathe life into the first two. A fantastic world and a compelling mystery are empty without engrossing and emotionally charged characters to pull your reader in and make your story beat inside their heart.

Rowling employs many techniques that successfully craft her characters into people her fans want to spend time with...constantly. In fact, she fashions her imaginary friends so well that many a fan fiction story has been written because her readers insist on spending more time with them than her mammoth books allow.

How does Rowling do this? More to the point, how can we create a cast as deliciously and disgustingly flavored as a magical pouch of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans? Perhaps, if we study the details of how Rowling shapes her characters, we can better breathe life into the figments of our own imagination.

#### **Overview:**

Techniques we'll examine:

- 1) Employ a wide cast of characters.
- 2) Plant a hook on every character.
- 3) Firm up each character with a fully realized and carefully revealed backstory.
- 4) Build a complete and complex world in which to place them.
- 5) Plot wide-ranging, interesting situations which showcase the characters' various abilities and development.
- 6) Challenge them with obstacles to overcome that force growth.
- 7) Probe into the heart of your hero and make him go where it is scary.

- 8) Know your character's internal logic: the rules, beliefs, and assumptions that guide their every move.
- 9) Pitch your stakes high enough to show your characters at their best and worst.
- 10) Give them loyal friends and dastardly enemies to increase the emotional tension.
- 11) Embolden your characters with the power of touch, used to show strong emotions rather than to tell.

## 1) A Cast of Thousands, almost

Rowling's cast of characters, including animals, ghosts, other magical beings, and even portraits, stands at well over 400! That's a lot of people (or creatures) to develop.

Of course, not all these 400 are fully fleshed and crucial characters, but a surprising number of them are. It helps that she had seven books to develop them.

Each character is carefully crafted to show a different aspect of the magical world, to highlight certain emotions or beliefs, or to hide or reveal important clues to the ongoing mystery. Every character has a purpose, and each one adds to the emotional depth and resonance for the reader.

With such a large cast, over time a wide spectrum of complex emotions can be revealed and studied. We're not limited to what a few teenagers are experiencing as part of their hormonal adolescence. There's truly something here for every reader, no matter their age, culture, or beliefs.

Fans do pick their favorites. I've spoken at many fan conferences and it's always amazing to me how many people, both young and not so young, latch on to the Slytherins, especially Snape and Draco. They're passionate about their misunderstood, maligned counterparts, surely reflecting their own experience.

Fans will greet each other with, "Are you a Gryffindor or a Slytherin?" "No, I'm a Ravenclaw," one says with pride. Then the adults—would you be in the Order, work for the Ministry, be sympathetic to Lupin teaching at your child's school, or pelting Dumbledore with owls for his resignation? Truly a wide world of conflicting, exciting reality comes alive for the reader. Everyone can find themselves in Rowling's cast.

While you may not be able to develop a cast of 400, especially in a single title, you do have the ability to know your readership and make sure

your fans will find themselves in the emotional ranges of your characters. With a cast of only a few, it's even more important to infuse each character with emotional depth and make them truly significant to your story. Each created person should count for something in the overall flow of your vision.

When developing your personalities, take a moment to step back and get an overview of the forest. Have you got a complement of characters to portray all sides of your themes? Are all the nuances of emotions and beliefs reflected that your story deserves? Have you envisioned both brave and righteous Order members and greedy and power-hungry Death Eaters? Within the Order, have you got a loyal but thieving Mundungus and a bumbling but good-hearted Tonks? Do your Death Eaters include a cruel, crazed Bellatrix *and* a Regulus with a core of decency? In other words, in the themes and beliefs that are important to your story, are all various viewpoints in their magnificent shades of gray covered?

Have you placed characters in sufficient places to fully flesh-out the world you have built? Even if you are dealing with a reality-based world rather than fantasy, you still must shape-up your vision of that world for your reader. Your characters are the elements that breathe that world to life. Have you got your Fortescue's shopkeeper who happens to impart wizarding world history while serving up Harry's favorite ice cream? Likewise, do you have the Healer in the Janus Thickey Ward at St. Mungo's, who in her tender care of Frank and Alice Longbottom, helps the reader understand the loss Neville has been hiding from his friends all these years?

Mundungus and Tonks, Bellatrix and Regulus, Florean Fortescue and the Healer—these characters not only serve to fill out a world, but they help to flesh out the primary characters as well. They are not throw-aways; craft them with great care and respect.

Finally, if you are plotting a mystery, have you scattered crucial clues among this forest of characters, so that one or two don't hold all the critical answers? Hide something with your Caractacus Burke, who buys the mysterious locket off the starving and pregnant Meropé. Or the fiercely loyal house-elf Winky, who guards Barty Crouch's hidden secret. If your clues are widely scattered, and hidden well within many characters, it will make it that much more difficult for your protagonist to seek out and

uncover each hidden gem, thus stringing your reader along for a far more interesting ride.

A high character count is not the secret of a well-crafted story. What *is* necessary is to craft the number of characters you need to ensure your world is fully portrayed—its themes, its emotions, and its plot. You want your story to feel robust and full-flavored. Employ sufficient characters and give them each an important role.

You may be surprised at how well HP fans know all Rowling's multitude of characters, even the minor ones. She has cast them in such a strong way, carefully distinguishing one from the others, that each is identifiable and memorable.

How does she do this? One way is through the power of character hooks.

## 2) A Hook for Every Character

In the section above, we looked at the overview—the forest of character count and development. Through the rest of this lesson we will analyze each individual tree, asking ourselves, what can we do to make each particular character come across stronger.

One technique Rowling utilizes to make each character stand out unique from the others is to give them a hook; a description, personality trait, or association which defines him or her and distinguishes them from everyone else. A hook is one of the earliest and simplest tools to help familiarize your reader with your people. Simply put, a hook is something the reader can hang their memory on, that helps them, especially in the early stages of your story, remember who that character is and what their place is in your world.

The hook may be **another character**: Fred and George are twins and are always together (which makes the ending of *Hallows* so sad). The same holds true with Padma and Parvati. However, each twin does have a distinguishing characteristic. Fred tends to be the one who takes greater risks, whereas George is the more serious and sensitive of the two (just slightly!). Padma is in Ravenclaw and had to go with the poorly dressed Ron to the Yule Ball, whereas Parvati is in Gryffindor and got to be escorted by Champion Harry.

Then there are the **animal counterparts** that act like hooks. Within Rowling's feline kingdom, Mrs. Norris represents Filch's stalking and spying through the castle for miscreants, while Crookshanks, who no one

else wanted, represents Hermione's care and concern for the undercat. McGonagall transforms as an uptight cat sitting stiffly on a brick wall for hours—all the while watching protectively for the arrival of baby Harry. Indeed, we see this constant transformation between sternness and nurturing with the transfiguration professor.

Hooks can lurk in **physical description** as well. Who can forget that Nearly Headless Nick has only a thin ghostly sinew holding his head, almost, in place? And Mundungus, well, his name suits him as he's most often described like a dung heap. You'll never displace Olympe Maxime. After all, how could you overlook an elegant half-giant with a French accent?

In fact, that leads to another hook—**accent or manner of talking**. You'd know Hagrid's speech with his dropped "g"s and West-country expressions anywhere in Potterverse, even without a dialogue tag. Fleur got the nickname Phlegm for a reason. Even if we don't hear the late, great Alan Rickman delivering the lines, Snape's method of slithering words together is far silkier and shiftier than McGonagall's clipped, direct speech.

**Character traits** also present a plethora of hook possibilities. Mrs. Figg is the lovable, batty old cat lady. Uncle Vernon is always angry—at least when he's talking with Harry. Aunt Petunia is a clean freak. Narcissa Malfoy, like her namesake, is quite narcissistic. And Dumbledore, of course, is the wizened wizard and mentor.

Dumbledore's function as mentor leads us to the next hook—**roles**. Traditional roles help us know a character more intimately from the moment we meet them and understand their role in the story. Sirius is the substitute father figure, Ron the loyal friend, and Hermione the know-it-all who helps Rowling insert necessary information into the story. Mrs. Weasley portrays the ultimate loving mother. In fact, the whole Weasley clan functions as Harry's adopted family. Finally, everyone knew Dumbledore's number was up long before Harry did—after all, what else do you do with an aging, gray-haired mentor?

Another highly effective character hook Rowling uses is that of **concealing a mystery clue**. No one will forget that it was Pettigrew who hid as a rat for twelve years and thus concealed vital information through the course of three books. Mad-Eye's frequent swig from his flask hinted for a full school year at a character who had more to hide than a drinking problem. And Snape...well Snape stands alone as the master of

concealment. Before *Deathly Hallows* was published, discussion boards overflowed with arguments as to whether Snape was good or evil—or the question more to the point—loyal to Voldemort or Dumbledore's man through and through. Snape's hook (besides his nose) is his very mystery, his delightful ambiguity.

Here are a few more ways to hook your characters:

**1) jobs**—Perkins is the old warlock who works with Mr. Weasley. Stan Shunpike worked as a conductor on the Knight Bus until he was wrongly arrested.

**2) family connections**—The red-haired, large family Weasley clan stands juxtaposed against the pale, single-child Malfoy snobs. Don't forget the mercurial Blacks. Family connections helps the reader place certain characters in context.

**3) physical abnormality or impairment**—This is related to appearance, but slightly different because in Rowling's world the impairment plays a greater role in the plot and is probably concealing a key clue or embodying an important theme. Mad-Eye Moody's mad eye, Rufus Scrimgeour's limp, and Lupin's furry little condition are prime examples. Not only does Mad-Eye's magical eye help us remember who he is next time we see him, but it also hides the clue that Mad-Eye is watching over Harry for a specific reason. Likewise, Lupin's monthly transformation into a werewolf not only distinguishes him from other professors, or hides a key clue for the *Azkaban* story, but also contributes to the theme of caring for the marginalized and oppressed that Rowling is very fond of. I expect that Scrimgeour's limp, like Dumbledore's blackened hand, marked him as a doomed man, a lame duck politician.

How do you incorporate these hooks into your own writing? You may not have werewolves and giants and merpeople to help give you the wide nuance of characterization that's possible in a fantasy world, but work with what you have. Diversity is real. We live it; we breathe it on a daily basis. Utilize the rainbow of humanity fully in developing your characters so that no two can be confused for each other. If you could take the dialogue from one and transpose it onto another without changing a word, you haven't properly developed either.

Use the aforementioned types of hooks to help distinguish one character from another and to aid in developing that character's role in the story. Make sure your hooks are mentioned in creative ways often enough

to help the reader remember, but not so frequently as to become annoying. Lastly, always make sure your hooks and their characters add a relevant nuance to the overall story.

### 3) Fully Realized Backstory

Rowling knows way more about her characters than she reveals on the page. She developed and collected stacks and boxes of notebooks and sketches over years before she ever published *Philosopher's Stone*.

However, she does not spill her guts at the first opportunity. All this carefully crafted backstory is greedily hoarded and doled out in crumbs to be fully revealed at the most opportune moment, when the reader is beyond dying to know. Some backstory will never be revealed (through the course of the seven-book series at least) as it is not necessary to the plot. But Rowling knows it, of that the reader is assured.

In this section, we'll focus on the development and preparation of your characters' excess baggage. When and how to reveal this carefully planned backstory will be covered in lesson seven.

All characters need to be as fully fleshed and realistically portrayed as time and space for their role in the story permit. Each character needs his own GMC—goal, motivation, and conflict. (See point six and seven in this list, as well as Debra Dixon's book *Goal, Motivation and Conflict* for more detailed information). With each character, you need to be clear regarding what they want, why they want it, and who or what else in the story is standing in their way of obtaining their goals. Each character's GMC relates to their backstory in that their motivation, the *why* they want what they want, is usually determined by what has happened to them in their past.

This type of careful character development takes time. Some of it will come from preliminary work before a scene is ever crafted, though much of it will come through the actual writing and especially through the endless round of revisions. Pen-to-paper or fingers-to-keyboard is the lightning-to-neck-bolts which spark to life the heart and soul of our characters.

Crafting backstory takes work, pure and simple. It also takes a lot of time. Rowling had six years between the inspired moment she first "met" Harry on that famous train trip[4] to the time *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was bought in Great Britain. She had five years to get fully acquainted with Harry and his friends—to develop his enemies, to plot their interactions, and to ground them with enough luggage to ensure the

reader an endless amount of surprises and a lengthy exciting journey into Harry's world.

Even Rowling herself has been quite amazed to see how seriously her fans have taken her backstory. Who knew that the exact years of their history would be counted up and an elaborately detailed timeline constructed? I doubt even she plotted her backstory in that minute detail. Thus, she acknowledged that she'd nip into *The Harry Potter Lexicon* when she was away from home and needed to look up a fact or a date (<http://www.hp-lexicon.org>).

Still, she's the headmistress of her backstory. She filled notebooks with rosters of classes at Hogwarts, including which student had Muggle parents, which House each was in, and meanings behind their names.

She knew enough of her backstory that she was able to drop Sirius Black into the first chapter of *Philosopher's Stone*, even though he didn't make an appearance as a character until two books later. Then she withheld enough of her backstory that fandom is still clamoring, even nearly a decade after the publication of the last book, to know exactly what happened at Godric's Hollow and those elusive missing twenty-four hours between Voldemort's back-fired curse and Harry's arrival at Privet Drive.

Some writers love to immerse themselves in developing their characters...to the point that they never write a word. Some writers just plunge right in, without introducing themselves properly to the people whose lives they plan to wreak havoc upon...and then must go back and revise. Every writer has to suit his or her own style, but by the end of the first draft, you should have a fairly comprehensive backstory for every major and secondary character. Backstory that makes it into the final draft must be relevant to the overall plot of your novel.

**Backstory that goes nowhere and has no meaning is a dead-end and will only weigh your story down.**

Take the time to fill your notebooks. Plot out your characters' personal histories. Some people like to do this by way of an interview, having their character answer questions in their own voice and role. Or you could fill out endless character charts covering aspects such as physical description, favorite foods, or astrological sign that then help to shape the backstory. Others get into real-world character analysis, such as the Myers Briggs personality types. Remember that every choice your characters make is dictated by their past, by who they are at the core of their being. Every

decision they make or every event that happens to them affects their next step in the course of your story.

Whatever method you use, make sure your people and their personal histories are fully formed in your mind, until you speak with them during the day and they haunt your dreams at night. This intimacy with your characters will see you through the grueling work of revisions as you layer the depth needed to make your manuscript stand out from the rest.

#### **4) Building a World for Your Characters to Enliven**

As worldbuilding will be more developed in a later lesson, I'll just touch upon it here as it pertains to character development. When talking about characterization, it's important to note that each character needs his or her own place in your world. Then, your world must be fully realized to assure each character's needs. The merpeople couldn't exist without the lake, the Triwizard Tournament could not have happened without Durmstrang and Beauxbatons, and Umbridge would never have been as menacing without the Ministry of Magic behind her.

We sometimes focus our stories too narrowly, and our world feels small because of it. When reading a Harry Potter book, especially *Prisoner of Azkaban* through *Deathly Hallows*, the reader has the sense of a full, bustling magical world surrounding the characters, even if the characters themselves are not aware of it. Diminishing word counts for many imprints are definitely restrictive to worldbuilding, but quite often, all it takes is a few meaningful words or phrases to give the reader that extra sense of depth.

Harry doesn't just buy a bar of chocolate off the snack cart, he buys a chocolate frog that hides the name of a person who holds a key plot clue. Normal horses don't pull the carriages from Hogsmeade to Hogwarts, but rather deathly Thestrals with a keen sense of direction. These little extras add greatly to worldbuilding as well as to character development. Harry, Ron, and Hermione had to become friends and work together before the key hidden in the Dumbledore card could lead them through the trap door, and Harry had to experience and understand the death of Cedric before he saw the Thestrals.

Indeed, setting is so important it should be considered a character itself. Spend the time to fully develop your world as it sets the stage for the range of motion of your hero or heroine. Carve out the differences that make your world distinct and unique from every other similar book on the

market. Most importantly, wrap your world firmly around each character, so that they are an integral part of their world.

## 5) Plotting Your Characters

Character and plot feed off each other, with the plot driving the character development and the character shaping the plot. We will focus on plot for its own sake in a later chapter. Here we'll study how to supercharge your plot to greatly enhance your character development.

Some writers start with a concept for a plot, while others are inspired by a character they want to explore. Rowling has always said that Harry Potter started with Harry. In her mind, she saw this young boy wizard, kind of scraggly and awkward, who had no idea of his magical powers. From there she had to get to know him, to explore who and why he was.

I can imagine, with my writer's training, how the character/plot dance may have tangoed through Rowling's mind. *Why did Harry not know he was a wizard?* Why, because he was an orphan, of course. *And why was he an orphan?* Because an evil wizard had murdered his parents. *So, how was he to learn he had magical abilities?* What if he received a letter inviting him to attend a school for witches and wizards? And what if, once there, he faced new challenges and made new friends that helped him grow strong enough to face his parents' murderer and eventually triumph over him?

As she continued to ask her imagination questions, and minute details of the plot formed, each beat, each twist would help shape Harry and eventually prepare him to drive the plot forward, to meet his story fate.

A prime example of plot driving Harry's growth occurs in *Goblet of Fire* with the Triwizard Tournament. Each challenge is designed to prove the mettle of the designated school champion. Harry, being the youngest and least experienced, faces even more dire threats than the other three. Each challenge forces a new lesson and new growth.

Facing the Hungarian Horntail, Harry engages a monstrously powerful beast, bent on protecting her young, and proves that he can use his talents to accomplish his task without hurting the eggs. He goes even further than this in the lake where he puts aside his desire not simply to survive but to win. He brings young Gabrielle, who is not his responsibility, safely to the surface. Even though he doesn't win the challenge, he's rewarded for his nobility.

Harry's nobility takes a direct hit in the final challenge. In the maze, the darkness of his jealousy of Cedric is both formed by and shapes the plot.

When Harry's deep sense of helping others and fair-play triumphs over his dark side, he encourages Cedric to take the cup together. The result of Cedric's death provides a powerful introduction to the fully-formed Voldemort and ignites a burning desire in Harry to defeat the Dark Lord.

Finally, when in a horrific, tormenting twist, Harry discovers that the man he considered a supporter and guardian has instead been setting him up all along, the maturing boy wizard is forced into a deeper, darker world where the innocent die young, the noble are betrayed, and even his wisest mentor cannot recognize evil in all its disguised forms.

It's this dark climax that provides the central turning point of the seven book series. From this point and beyond, Harry starts taking a more proactive role in preparing himself to seek out and vanquish this inhuman murderer.

In our own stories, we may not be able to battle dragons, swim with merpeople, or plot a dueling wizard showdown in a graveyard. However, we can expand our imagination to its fullest capacity to present our hero, as well as our reader, with the most interesting and unique situations designed to challenge them to their max. Design each turning point, each twist of your plot, to push your heroine in a new direction. Create the plot to develop your characters, and then force your characters to drive the plot to its conclusion.

Ask yourself:

- Is my plot in overdrive?
- Is it doing all it can to challenge my hero to his utmost, to force my heroine to discover and use all her inner strength?
- Can I take it further, deeper, and more compelling?

Design your plot to put your hero to his ultimate test, and you'll ace character development.

## 6) Obstacles to Overcome

A specific technique of character development related to plotting is to give your character an important obstacle to overcome. This obstacle can be either external or internal. The antagonist blocking their way is external. Overcoming their low self-esteem in order to believe in their own powers is internal.

Many times obstacles are both. The example of the maze in the Triwizard Tournament is a good example. The maze was a physical

impediment to the goal of winning the cup. Harry overcoming his jealousy was an internal accomplishment.

As in real life, when characters overcome obstacles, they grow. This is the crux of character development. Character development is not what you, the author, write out as descriptions of your character. Character development occurs when your character, through the plot of your story, makes choices—right or wrong—and changes because of it. When you look at a character from the beginning to the end of a story and see this change, it should be dramatic and noticeable. That is the character arc or growth arc.

We're all familiar with Harry's overall series growth arc. He goes from being an unloved orphan stuffed away in a closet to the celebrated savior of the magical world. Along the way, he must overcome many obstacles to obtain the maturity, skill, and wisdom to defeat the darkest wizard of all time.

Each book presents its own set of obstacles and challenges that Harry must face. Some of these obstacles are external—such as Snape's hatred, Dumbledore's slowness to reveal crucial information, and Voldemort's increasing shenanigans to kill Harry off. Other obstacles are internal—Harry's lack of belief in his own powers coupled with his lack of knowledge of the wizarding world. Internal conflicts also include his inability to trust in the manner of Dumbledore and his disbelief that love is more powerful than hatred.

Most writers understand the importance of carefully plotting their protagonist's growth arc. They'll spend much time and energy charting their hero's GMC, torturing their heroine, and assuring that the turning points are strong and powerful. However, the strength of a truly good novel often rests in how much energy the author puts into developing their secondaries as well.

Let's look at some secondary characters and their obstacles that take place in the Potter world. Download a PDF version at <http://deeperiver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Character	Beginning Situation	Obstacle to Overcome	Ending Triumph
Dobby	Enslaved to the Malfoys.	Cannot act on his own against Malfoys without punishing self.	Due to his loyalty to Harry, wins his freedom.
Ginny	Crush on Harry.	Tongue-tied around Harry.	Increases strength and self-confidence. Dates and marries Harry.
Ron	Youngest son with five older brothers.	In shadows of brothers. In shadows of Harry.	Overcomes his fears of living in shadows and returns to his best friends. Achieves greater fame than any of his brothers.
Neville	Living with grandmother, who belittles him. Unpopular at school.	Poor memory, inept, lack of confidence.	Shows the power of his magic in killing the last Horcrux, the one closest to Voldemort.
Snape	Hates Harry. Unlikable professor.	Death Eater background. Distrusted.	Helps to save the life of Lily's son and restore the Wizarding World.

Throw obstacles into the path of your characters. Challenge them to new heights with the problems they must overcome. Don't ever let their way be too easy. Otherwise, who does the reader have to cheer for?

Remember the power of the underdog. Everyone cheers when the underdog wins out against tremendous odds. But when an underdog is not challenged, or fails, he remains an underdog that no one cares about or remembers.

## 7) Torturing the Heart of the Hero (and Secondaries!)

What obstacles you choose to throw at your hero and how he goes about overcoming them, will all point to and flow from the nature of his personality at his very core.

If you listen to the self-help gurus and behavior theorists, all of our actions are governed by one of two motivating drives—to either move toward pleasure or away from pain. Which one of these your hero acts upon, and the source of that motivation, defines his personal inner core, his heart. This heart is what the reader will most understand and identify with.

To stroke your reader's heart, you must strike at your character's worst fears. You must force your people to battle their inner demons, to go where it's painful to achieve their pleasurable reward. This is the rationale behind the oft-given advice to "torture your characters." Only someone who has

been forced to triumph over his base nature, to probe his own wounds, to fly into the face of pain, and away from self-serving pleasure—only this hero deserves the elusive, final reward of “all was well.”

At heart, Lupin, a werewolf, is betrayed by society, an outcast, unwanted and unloved. Readers who feel the same really latched onto Remus. He is forced to move into painful territory, living among the unsavory of his kind—those truly deserving of the fear they arouse—until finally, Lupin is able to accept that he himself is deserving of love and acceptance.

Hermione, the only witch in her family, is thrust into an unfamiliar world where she is left out and unpopular. Knowledge is her only power. Thus she seeks initially to possess it above everyone else. Any child who has felt themselves to be a newcomer among a closed group of old friends will surely understand why Hermione acts the way she does—until she learns that friendship and bravery trumps books and cleverness. Hermione uses this hard-earned knowledge to help others who are left-out and powerless.

Any adult who has ever destroyed their life through a major mistake will understand (even if they disparage) the bitterness that seeps through Snape’s hate-filled words cast at Harry. His anger at himself is projected onto the one he hurt the most.

In the end, Lupin finds a home, first in his Defense Against the Dark Arts class, then the Order of the Phoenix, and, finally, with Tonks...even unto death. Hermione becomes the brightest witch of her age, who bravely and loyally helps to prepare her dear friend for his final battle. And Snape redeems himself by saving the child of the woman he hurt, and lost, but *always* loved.

When you seek out and probe your character’s innermost wounds and fears, you’ll not only draw your reader like an arrow to a target, but be better able to plot the course of your hero’s personal quest and final salvation. However, none of this applies only to your main character. The layers of secondaries that you weave this concept into will greatly enrich the depth and emotional impact of your book.

The chart on the following page shows the secondary characters and what tortures them through the series.

\*Harry is not a secondary, of course. This chart looks similar to the obstacle chart because the best laid obstacles will relate to the heart of the

character and what he must do to probe his pain. Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Character	Heart	Probing the Pain	Reward
*Harry	Seeking what was lost.	Accepts death, and then chooses life.	Finds his family, both old and new.
Ron	Always second best.	Returns to friends he betrayed.	Wins Hermione's heart.
Neville	Doesn't measure up.	Becomes leader of a resistance movement.	Kills the final Horcrux. Outshines his father.
Hagrid	Unfairly maligned and misunderstood.	Must visit the giants who first abandoned him and bring one home to nurture.	Creates a new, loyal family for self, both in Grawp and friends.
Voldemort	Unloved and unable to love.	Fails to do this. Always self-serving.	Loses himself to his inability to love.

One thing I'd like to point out through this analysis—Rowling seems to have a thing for insecure characters. Hermione, Ron, Neville, Hagrid—all of them share a sense of not fitting in, not measuring up. Perhaps this points to Rowling's own inner heart, her author's theme, so to speak.

Most writers will discover as their number of completed works pile up, that they pursue certain characters and themes above all others. This central issue is considered by many to be the author's theme, the heart of the writer that she is trying to heal through her work. (We'll explore this more in the next chapter.)

What is your inner core? What character hearts appeal to you the most? What wounds do you feel compelled to probe?

Stick it to your characters. Find their childhood fears, their gaping sores. Then, make them go where it is scary. Make them confront their natures and challenge their pain. Only then can you grant them their greatest reward.

## 8) Knowing Your Character's Internal Logic

In order to be able to torture your people and then finally grant them their reward, you're going to have to know each character's internal logic—the rules, beliefs, and assumptions that guide her every move.

A young girl who has been abused by the people who are supposed to love and cherish her the most won't think and act like the beloved daughter

of couple deeply in love with each other and at peace with their world. Likewise, a man who always received validation growing up for his impressive academic achievements won't choose the same profession and lifestyle as the football superstar.

Characters, like people, come from different families, cultures, religions, and socio-economic conditions. All these elements, plus more, will greatly affect each character's basic way of understanding themselves and their place in the world. Humans are creatures of habit, both in the way we think and in the way we act. Rarely do we stray outside our comfort zones. What those comfort zones are, however, can vary widely from person to person. A serial killer, for example, while committing an act that is horrific and atrocious to most of society, still performs these acts in fairly reliable *modus operandi*.

What this tells us about characterization is that to portray a person honestly on the page, we must determine that character's internal logic. To make our created world come fully alive, we want to draw from a wide range of characters with a rich diversity of internal logic.

In Harry Potter, it is Hermione, with her logical mind and her need to categorize and understand her world, who embarks on the most dangerous quest of her life toting a "mobile library," as Ron puts it. While it was the twins, with their humorous and outside-the-box outlook on life, who dropped out of school, established a joke shop, and sold bottles of U-No-Poo with advertising that made fun of You-Know-Who. Even Voldemort, though coldly comfortable with murder when it suited his purpose of gaining power and eternal life, spared the lives of two young trick-or-treaters on his way to the Potters' home in Godric's Hollow because that would have been an emotional killing that served no greater purpose.

Remember, the more exotic your character, the more foreign their internal logic needs to be. An alien who thinks and acts just like a human would be incredibly boring and unrealistic. Don't let your own internal logic get in the way of creating a character who sees the world drastically different than you can imagine. Imagine it. That is your job as a writer.

To determine a character's internal logic, ask yourself some questions. What is the primary force which drives your character? Is it his need to fit in? Her need to stand out? His desire to make up for a past transgression? Her determination to heal old wounds? His inability to act because of fears?

Her continual push to new adventures and exciting locations? How does all this shape the core of their being?

You must know this internal logic for each character if you're going to properly motivate your people to act honestly in your story rather than simply following the orders of the author-puppeteer.

*\*(I owe a thank-you to former workshop attendee Shelley Souza for inspiring this section. It was her determination to see and understand Rowling's internal logic of the story which made me contemplate character internal logic as well.)*

## **9) Staking Your Characters**

Strong character actions require strong emotions, and strong emotions result from high stakes. You want your emotions to hit the highest pitch possible. You must have the reader experience fully the passions of your characters, whether love or hate, trust or betrayal, laughter or sorrow. Escalate your reader's experience by raising the bar for what's at risk.

You don't have to write a story about a poor, unloved, defenseless orphan who must save the entire wizarding world, indeed the Muggle world as well, from the darkest and most powerful wizard who ever lived. Not all stories can be set with stakes at such high world-effect levels.

However, the stakes that are most important are uniquely emotional to your character. Whether writing a cozy mystery, a witty women's fiction, or a fast-paced thriller, your stakes need to be as high as is appropriately possible. Brainstorm—what is the worst thing that could happen to your hero or heroine, and then make it your plot. The higher the risk, the more rewarding that character's triumph will be.

One aspect of high stakes I feel is extremely important is that not just the hero or heroine benefit from their resulting success. The good of a community, no matter how large or small, must also be at risk. It's the carrying the elixir back to the tribe of the "Hero's Journey" (which we'll cover in lesson eight). Triumph over the antagonist is so much richer when there is a community of people who benefit from it.

With Harry Potter, we have the large end of the spectrum when it comes to a community benefit. Wizards and Muggles alike will enjoy a more peaceful world when Voldemort is no more. However, even a story that is focused tightly on the burgeoning romance between two people can include the return of the elixir. A family can be reunited, a neighborhood

returned to order, or a city relieved of a crime spree. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination.

High stakes should also show your characters not only at their best, but also at their worst. Many readers had trouble with Harry in *Order of the Phoenix*. This was Harry's fifth year of school, and at age fifteen, he was every bit the angry, angst, antagonistic teenager that no one but his own equally angst friends wants to be around. I got tired of Harry's tantrums in that book as well.

But it was real. After all, here was a teenager who had a lot of weight on his shoulders, so much that Dumbledore did not make him a prefect.

Note that when writing a series, the stakes must increase with each subsequent book. The hero's task cannot get easier, or there is no satisfaction for the reader. Harry goes from maintaining his own against a mere parasite at the end of *Stone*, to saving an innocent man from desouling in *Azkaban*, to leading the capture of a pack of Death Eaters in *Phoenix*, to facing the final showdown and making the ultimate sacrifice in *Hallows*.

Harry has been tested and tried since the beginning. He has been pushed into developing skills, such as producing a Patronus, that other witches and wizards his age would never consider. He must be pushed in this manner because he has an enormous task ahead of him.

No one will believe that a seventeen-year-old wizard could defeat the darkest wizard in 100 years, unless he'd been properly prepared and thoroughly tested. Nor will anyone feel your heroine deserves her triumphant ending unless she's proved to herself, along with the reader, that she can survive and triumph over any obstacle her mean-hearted author has thrown at her.

Your protagonist doesn't have to "save the world." Stakes are emotional, not physical. What your protagonist does have to do, however, is face his or her worst possible fears, probe that inner wound we talked about earlier, pass through the fires of refining conflict, and emerge a better, stronger person on the other side.

Have no mercy! Raise your stakes to bring out the full emotional depth your hero must face and rise above. Torture and torment your characters to make them prove their worth.

Don't let compassion hold you back! After all, you won't have to meet him in real life.

## 10) Loyal Friends and Dastardly Enemies

You won't have to physically meet your hero or heroine, but your supporting cast of characters will. Each character needs to connect with your hero in a way that is unique to that particular relationship and builds emotional depth.

On one hand, Harry meets the wildly enthusiastic Colin Creevey who follows him around like a puppy, while on the other he must suffer under *Professor Severus Snape* who absolutely loathes him. Harry's inner circle is composed of friends he can always rely on—Ron, Hermione, Neville, Luna, and Ginny (each with their own unique relationship to Harry)—and thus the reader experiences this comfortable base of support as well. Outside his circle, however, Harry must face the opposition of Draco Malfoy, Severus Snape, and He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, along with his legions of Death Eaters and Dementors.

If your readers are going to be driven into dark and scary places, even if comically presented, they shouldn't have to go it alone. Give them the security of friendship, through your supporting cast of characters, to see them through.

On the opposite pole, your hero's triumph will only be as forceful as his antagonist is strong. That's not to say that every antagonist needs to be the quintessential evil villain like Voldemort. However, every antagonist must be the strongest force pushing against your hero as is possible. Your villain needs to find every flaw, every Achilles' heel, in your hero in order to force him to develop into the fullest person he can be, and ultimately by defeating his antagonist, prove himself worthy of the reader's full support.

Perhaps the primary antagonist to Harry was actually Snape. After all, Snape was on hand, each and every day, to torment Harry in Potions, and later in Defense Against the Dark Arts, to act as sandpaper rubbing abrasively against Harry's skin, putting on display his imperfections and taunting his beliefs about himself and his parents. Harry did not have to defeat this antagonist, but instead learned to see him anew through Dumbledore's eyes of trust. Snape was designed to push against Harry and mold him in ways that a loving influence, perhaps, would not have been as effective. Everyone needs a bit of vitriol in their life, no matter how unwelcome.

One nuance we see that works effectively in Rowling's protagonist/antagonist relation is how Harry and Voldemort grow apace of

each other. There's only one way Rowling could effectively portray this immensely powerful dark wizard not killing off an eleven-year-old boy, and that was to strip Voldemort of his power. As Harry grows in his knowledge and magical skills, so too Voldemort transforms from Vapormort to parasite, to grotesque embryonic baby, to regaining his human form. Thus Harry did not have to face a fully powerful Dark Lord until he was a more skilled and powerful opposition.

Voldemort is in fact the shadow of Harry. He reflects the darkened nature of Harry himself, the imperfections Harry must overcome in his own transformation. Harry was forced to deal with anger, trust, and his own prejudices (primarily against Slytherins) before he emerged fully equipped to combat his Shadow.

When he did, he did not face his demons alone. Harry's loyal friends were there by his side, because his friendships were the ultimate show of Harry's true nature. This was the part of him that completely distinguished him from the Dark Lord. Harry loves and is loved. He has friends. While Voldemort was busy destroying lives, Harry saved them. Voldemort tried to capture eternal life through the murder of innocents; Harry willingly threw himself in harm's way, since the tender age of eleven, to save those he loved, and those he didn't even know.

Your heroine won't look very smart if she triumphs over an idiot. Spend as much time crafting your villain and his goals, motivation, and conflict as you do your heroine. Maybe even more. Make your antagonist strong enough to force the ultimate growth within your protagonist, as Voldemort and Snape forced Harry to explore the darkest recesses of his own soul.

Carefully construct your hero's base of support whether that is one loyal friend or several. Whereas some thriller stories give their protagonist no friends or trusted allies, I think the reader experiences an innate need to know that there's at least one true safe base the hero, and they, can rely on. After all, a large lesson in life is recognizing and appreciating those we hold most dear.

How to go about showing this depth of friendship and loyalty? One good way is through touch.

## **11) The Power of Human Touch**

One technique Rowling uses excessively well is to employ the power of human touch to *show* emotion rather than to *tell*. Throughout her stories,

she utilizes words conveying touch between her characters to express the heights and depths of what her people are feeling. You can guarantee, in a high-intensity scene, there will be a lot more touching going on.

Study these examples, noting the bolded action, to see how in crucial, emotionally charged scenes, the physical act of touch is used to great effect:

“Where are we?” he [Harry] said.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, **pulled Harry to his feet**, and they looked around....

And then, before Harry’s mind had accepted what he was seeing, before he could feel anything but numb disbelief, he felt himself **being pulled to his feet**.

(p. 636 & 638, *Goblet*)

This example above works double duty: not only does the paralleled wording show the touch of loyalty between Harry and his former competitor seconds before Cedric is killed, but Rowling also uses the same words to emphasize and contrast Harry’s relation to Wormtail just two pages later. Harry has gone from being the loyal friend to being betrayed by his father’s friend and betrayer, and must now fight for his life.

Then **a pair of hands seized him roughly** and **turned him over**.

“Harry! Harry!”...

Harry let go of the cup, but he **clutched Cedric to him even more tightly**. He **raised his free hand** and **seized Dumbledore’s wrist**, while Dumbledore’s face swam in and out of focus.

(p. 671, *Goblet*)

With touching words such as “seized” and “clutched,” the power of Dumbledore’s fear and Harry’s mounting anxiety are powerfully conveyed. The reader can feel the emotions, rather than being simply told that Dumbledore was afraid and Harry traumatized.

“RUN!” Harry yelled, and as the shelves swayed precariously and more glass spheres began to pour from above, he **seized a handful of Hermione’s robes** and **dragged her forward...**”

(p. 787, *Phoenix*)

It touches the reader’s heart, the force with which Harry protects Hermione. It also fueled a lot of Harry/Hermione shippers, but we won’t go there.

...Harry **seized** him and **helped** him back to his seat...

And pulling Dumbledore's uninjured arm around his shoulders, Harry guided his headmaster back around the lake, bearing most of his weight...

"I am not worried, Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. "I am with you."...

"When did it appear?" asked Dumbledore, and his hand clenched painfully upon Harry's shoulder as he struggled to his feet.

(p. 577-581, *Half-Blood*)

How satisfying is it for the reader to see, to feel, Harry taking care of his mentor. Here, Harry becomes the strong one, actively conveyed through numerous "touching" verbs.

Just so we don't think that the power of touch resides only with our hero and his friends, notice this from *Half-Blood Prince*:

...Snape had burst into the room, his face livid. Pushing Harry roughly aside, he knelt over Malfoy, drew his wand and traced it over the deep wounds Harry's curse had made, muttering an incantation that sounded almost like song. The flow of blood seemed to ease; Snape wiped the residue from Malfoy's face and repeated his spell. Now the wounds seemed to be knitting...

...When Snape had performed his counter-curse for the third time, he half-lifted Malfoy into a standing position...

... "There may be a certain amount of scarring, but if you take dittany immediately we might avoid even that...come..."

He supported Malfoy across the bathroom, turning at the door to say in a voice of cold fury, "And you, Potter...you wait here for me."

(*Half-Blood*, p. 489 Bloomsbury, p. 523 Scholastic)

"Pushing," "knelt," "traced," "wiped," "lifted," and "supported." The power of human touch, of healing...in Snape's hands.

Look for places where you can weave more touch, in all its varied forms, into your story. Especially consider scenes of high intensity and action. Don't limit touch to your hero and his friends. After all, even villains can love their children, and not all touches are good.

Touch is elemental, archetypal even. It transcends centuries and cultures, and the sexes. It has the power to convey emotions as far ranging as love from hate and trust from betrayal. It is a powerful tool in your arsenal. Use it well.

## **Take Away**

I hope that studying these techniques from Rowling has given you some ideas for how to better craft your own pen-and-paper people. Your characters must be real for your reader to invest time with them. If your characters fall flat, no matter how intricate the plotting or fast the pacing, the book will be set down not to be picked back up.

Get to know your people fully in your own mind before you finalize them on paper. Make sure you delve deeply into their hearts and know their darkest fears and highest aspirations. Challenge them to go where it is scary. Then prepare them to meet their storied fate.

Portray your world accurately and vibrantly through the diversity and strength of your characters. Bond your loyal friendships as deeply as you alienate your adversaries. Then show all this emotion through the power of human touch, and you'll stroke the heart of your reader as well.

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## Lesson Two

### Freeing Your Prisoner of Azkaban (Voice & Reader Fulfillment)

One of the features fans love best about JK Rowling's Harry Potter series is the exciting new worlds to explore—city streets, castles, and whole villages that are fresh and intriguing, yet diagonally connected to our own. The magical world is the same as the one we inhabit, yet special and unique.

Doesn't that sound familiar? It's exactly what editors want from writers in our stories. *The same but different*. In other words, we must meet our basic reader expectations for the particular genre in which we write, but we must do it in such a way that gives the reader the sensation of exploring an exciting new world of interesting people. Just like Harry does.

This new world exploration is not limited to the fantasy genre. It can happen in any style of story if you bring a fresh perspective. Here is where the juncture of *you* joined with the *reader* becomes so incredibly important. That fresh perspective sure to draw your reader in comes from *inside you*.

### Discovering Your Author Voice

The central question of your writing career is *what do you have to offer the reader that no other writer has offered before?* Yes, you do have something fresh to share. Everyone does, just not everyone will seek hard enough to unearth it within themselves.

Harry Potter did not spring out of nowhere. It burst forth out of someone's life—Joanne Rowling's life. The story of a young boy alone in his world, discovering talents he did not know he possessed, and struggling against deep-seated prejudices and hatred was born of a woman discovering her own place in the United Kingdom. A woman who during the course of writing her first book experienced marriage, childbirth, and divorce; poverty, single-parenting, and the British welfare system; and who had grown up amid a centuries-old culture that valued purity of blood.

Her parents had joined the British military at a young age, and she'd listened to stories of how they met on a train out of King's Cross Station. (I always knew Ginny was meant for Harry from this very fact—they met on Platform 9¾ at King's Cross. The romantic in me recognized that Rowling had inserted her parents' meeting into her story from the beginning).

Rowling had also named her first child, a daughter, after a woman she'd admired since childhood—Jessica Mitford. Ms. Mitford was a woman who turned her back against her noble heritage during the turbulent, war-torn days of WWII and beyond to protest the systemic prejudice and ethnic genocide which was tearing her world apart.

That took guts. Jessica Mitford was probably the original Gryffindor in JK Rowling's eyes.

Harry Potter sprang from somewhere. He bubbled forth from a deep, flowing spring of a lifelong concern with equality and racial justice. Rowling, who once worked for Amnesty International, has since used her well-heard public voice to take stands against what she sees as the Death Eaters of our day—the orphan institutions throughout the world that maintain a system where children are locked in cribs or separated from their family due to poverty or disabilities; the social deprivation of women and children; and most recently, certain political campaigns which she considers oppressive, especially to minorities.

The messages in Rowling's work are always cloaked in fantasy forms, with many of her themes coming to the reader through subtext. Her writing shows that she understands clearly that the best way to reach a mind is to open it first through entertainment. Whether to write overtly about social or political causes is an individual choice. However, as Rowling's example clearly shows, messages can be woven into subtext through engaging storytelling.

Each writer must find their passion inside themselves. Let your passion flow from your perspective on life. This passion can shape your voice and make your story powerful, unique, and recognized and adored by readers.

Ask yourself a few questions—what is it in real life that gets you riled up the quickest and the angriest? Channel this energy and rage in some form into your antagonist. What in real life gives you so much pleasure and satisfaction that you're willing to devote many unpaid hours in its pursuit? Channel some of those emotions and ideals into your protagonist. Finally, what are some of your experiences in life, your educational background, your travels, your friends? Channel all these real-life details when creating your full, vibrant world.

We hear a lot about *voice* in the business end of writing and how every editor is looking for fresh, new voices. It's easy to get confused and think this means, perhaps, a sarcastic way of delivering our words, something hip

or flippant, as often found in young adult. Or maybe voice is dark and tortured as in romantic suspense, paranormal, or a gothic. I believe this explanation only scratches the surface of voice.

Voice goes much deeper than how words are strung together on paper. Voice reflects what you believe, what you know, what you understand, what you have experienced in life. It reflects where you choose to put enormous amounts of your time and energy.

You may be entertained by reading many divergent books that take up a few hours of your day. But when it comes to spending several months of your life writing **one**, it's going to reflect who *you* are deep inside. Your cares and concerns, your beliefs, and your passions. Your Voice is You. Voice reflects your writer's soul.

That's why there's such a strong spiritual aspect to writing for so many people. We're not only trying to make a living, or even better, communicate with our readers and our world. We're expanding and enriching our souls. And that's why voice cannot be duplicated. No two souls are alike, and every soul has something unique to contribute.

Please note here that the voice I am speaking of is the author's voice, not a particular character voice. Once developed, you take your author voice with you from story to story, and it is quite distinct from the sound of the characters within those stories. Your author voice is what guides you to the type of story you choose to write, the conflicts between the people you write about, and the themes and resolutions you work toward in your climax. Your voice encapsulates your reason for writing.

Author voice is what prompted Rowling to write *The Casual Vacancy*, her first novel after the end of the Potter series, a book where her concern for social justice shines through, to the Cormoran Strike detective series, where she is once again pursuing her love of a good mystery. Even though her upcoming releases are a jump in format, with a stage script for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, and a film script for *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, she is definitely taking her author voice into these new frontiers.

So, take some time and explore your own. As Snape would ask, where do your loyalties lie? What type of story do you want to spend months or years of your life crafting and sharing with your world? What experience do you have, unique to you, that can touch the hearts of thousands, perhaps of millions?

Find your passion, recognize your voice, and clothe it in an interesting, entertaining garb.

Just like JK Rowling did.

## Reader Fulfillment

The subtitle of this lesson is “Voice and Reader Fulfillment.” It may not be self-evident how these two subjects relate and why they are lumped together in one lesson. Put quite simply, the stronger the voice, the deeper the reader fulfillment—as we will explore side-by-side through the rest of this lesson.

Whereas the **Voice of You** takes a lifetime to develop, there are a few tricks for putting that voice down in black and white that will make it come across stronger on the page. To me, this is where voice and style join. While our voice guides us in the big decisions we make, such as setting, characters, and conflict, it is the style in which we write, the way in which we choose words and string them together, that carries the weight of our voice onto the page.

Here are a few techniques we can learn from Rowling’s example:

### Overview:

- 1) Soar to imaginative new heights for each story
- 2) Challenge each scene’s structure
- 3) Employ strong verbs and pinpointed nouns
- 4) Challenge your POV.

### 1) Soar to Imaginative New Heights

You’ve taken some time to reflect on your voice as a writer. You have developed some basic understanding as to who you are and what you’re about—what unique gift you can share with the rest of the world. So far, this has all been about “you” and not a particular story.

Now you need to evaluate the same process for each story you write. Get the broad picture first. Challenge the forest view of your story before you look at individual trees.

What is your current work in progress (WIP) about? What is its theme? What is its message (though keep this one as far away from preachy as possible)? Its feel? What is the key emotional chord you seek to strike in your reader?

***Then, spend some time imagining how you can take your story to the next level.*** How can you intensify the setting, characters, and action? How

can you take your reader to a place they've never imagined before (even if in a contemporary real world)?

Let's examine these questions by applying them to a recent book you've read. Every month hundreds of new novels are released, and that's from the major publishers alone. How in the world could an author, even a talented one who understands her voice, find a way to deliver a story that is fresh in this over-flooded market?

I'm sure you've read a novel recently that captured your imagination. A book you couldn't put down and then lingered in your mind long after you'd turned the last page. Take a few minutes and analyze, what was it about this particular story that made you lose track of the fact that it was two in the morning and you had a long day coming up? What feeling did the author evoke inside you that forced you to keep turning those pages, to find out what happened next? What *more* did this book give you over others you've read? Was it in a more exciting setting? A compelling character who you identified with? Or a concept that gripped you and never let you go until the end?

Now, step back. Have you read reviews on that book which you loved? Did every other person who ever read that book feel as passionately about it as you did? Or did it not strike the same chord with someone else coming from a perspective different than your own?

Here is the importance of voice. Not every voice is for every reader. Quite often, the stronger the voice, the more passionate the readership will be—both *for* and *against*. If you try to appeal to all, you will wind up appealing to none.

You have a voice. You have a certain world view to share, and those who are opposed to your world view are more than likely not going to like your stories. This is a reality that all writers must deal with. But, in the end, if you're going to have an impact, you must share your voice with all your power. You do this within each story by challenging your imagination as you create your characters, the conflict that envelopes them, and the world in which they live.

You've looked at stories that have remained on your keeper shelf for years, you've re-read the passages that are loosening from the binding because their dog-eared pages have been scoured time and time again, and you've started to analyze how to put this same passion, with your own

personal twists, into your own story. How can you push beyond boundaries to give your reader more?

This is what it's all about, **giving the reader more**—reader fulfillment. Give your reader more through kicking your imagination into overdrive. Give them more of your passion. Give them more of your voice. Then give them more through all your writerly resources—characterization, plotting, worldbuilding, and even subtext.

Even though I'm not a *Simpsons* fan, I read an interview once with the creator, Matt Groening, who attributed one of the secrets of the show's success to the fact that "**for those who paid attention, their attention would be rewarded.**" What he meant by that was that there was more to the series than simply the sarcastic, off-beat humor the show is known for. There is analogy, there is innuendo, there is subtext.

Rowling does this in spades. If you've not checked out any of the online fan forums, take a moment, or ten, to do so. Look around *Mugglenet* ([www.mugglenet.com](http://www.mugglenet.com)) or *The Leaky Cauldron* ([www.the-leaky-cauldron.org](http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org)). See what the fans were discussing before the release of *Deathly Hallows*. By and large, what they obsessed over were the allusions, the subtext, and especially the underlying mysteries.

Rowling rewards her readers in abundance for their attention. She is the mistress of British understatement in weaving in her clues and analogies. We will discuss the trail of clues better in a later lesson; here I want to focus on how to give the reader more through the settings, action, and characters.

Would Harry have captured our attention if he was only an orphan and not suffering under the narrow-minded and thoroughly Mugglish Dursleys? Would Hogwarts have been as interesting in a regular school building without the ghosts, dungeons, and the exotic, dangerous animals of the Forbidden Forest? Would Quidditch have been as fascinating with one ball played on the ground?

The Thestrals are a wonderful example of an overactive imagination. They are a multi-layered creation. Not only are they deathly horses, a symbol emphasizing a series' theme—how facing and understanding death changes a person—but they also seem to be rather intelligent and loyal (at least to Hagrid). Plus, they have a keen sense of direction.

Also note how Rowling's mind works—these deathly horses take Harry and friends to the Ministry of Magic, to save Sirius, where instead

Harry witnesses his godfather's devastating death. It was like riding a hearse to a funeral. Rowling's plotting and symbolism are so tightly interwoven. That is taking your imagination for a ride.

You don't have to write fantasy to do this. Early in my career, I was working on a category romance, and one of my characters was a sweet, little old lady—with quite the attitude. On one hand, she was passing out candies and home baked goods, and with the other she was filling water balloons to toss at the children she babysat.

To help with this quirky attitude, I had her walking cane wrapped in red and white ribbon like a candy-cane, which she also used to poke at the hero when he wasn't doing what she wanted him to. This is a simple example, but it takes just a few extra words to wrap that red and white striping around that cane, and yet it gave just a little extra spirit to the woman who wielded it and fit within the genre.

Look at your WIP as a whole overall. Where can you challenge your limits, both large and small? Where can you add that extra bit of imagination to raise your story to new heights? So much of what I'm asking here is in the form of questions for a reason. Challenging your imagination requires exactly this—that you ask the right questions, especially at the beginning.

What more can I do? How can I deepen the theme? How can I make the setting even more atmospheric? How can I enliven the characters and make them even more fun or sympathetic? And what extra twist can I add to the plot to make it the most satisfying for the reader?

Know your story over all, then push it a step further. When it's all done, redo it again to add in that deeper level of subtext, the analogies, the trail of mysteries, the reward for the reader paying attention.

## **2) Challenge Each Scene's Structure**

You've looked at your story overall, you've pushed beyond your imaginative boundaries, and now you're ready to supercharge a particular scene. To do this, we will examine each scene's setting, conflict, and characters.

First, where is each scene set? Is it somewhere your reader will find fresh or interesting, or a location you've already used many times before? I recently critiqued a mystery where the author had several scenes set in the office of the detective agency. That setting was good for a certain number of scenes, but not the best choice for all. Readers quickly get bored and want

to explore new places. If the same location is necessary, it needs to change and deepen along with the story.

Beef up those scenes that must be set in the office. Make the office a bit quirky, unusual. Describe what sets it apart from the ordinary office environment. Re-envision it in a way that contributes to the mystery and themes of the story. Then, each time you revisit that setting, show a new aspect, a new vision, either from a different POV, or the changing POV of the protagonist. Show us, through the setting, the increasing conflict and mystery of the novel. Most importantly, whenever possible, choose a different setting.

The beginning of a new project is a crucial time in defining your world. If you're like me, once you get words down on paper, especially a significant number of words, you're much less likely to initiate dramatic change—such as stripping out a setting and substituting another. From the start, challenge your settings. Is this room, this town, this fantasy world the most interesting and unique I can show to engage my reader? And what are the details inside which will attract, engage, and distinguish it as fresh and original? Get that right first and you'll do a lot less revising later.

This same technique of questioning, challenging, and re-envisioning (preferably before you write a word or at least in the early drafts) you'll repeat with each scene in regard to conflict and character as well. Conflict and character go together because it is through conflict, and our characters' reaction to it, that they change and grow.

Each scene absolutely must have conflict. The best conflict is not simple bickering or fighting. Conflict is the protagonist pushing against existing boundaries and the antagonist pushing back. Conflict involves something happening, something changing, something created anew. I won't go too deeply into conflict and the necessary GMC because that is a book in itself (see Deb Dixon's book *Goal, Motivation, and Conflict* for more). One of the strongest tips is to look at each scene and examine where your conflict lies. Is it strong enough? Where is the urge for the reader to read on? Where is the restlessness, that need for the protagonist to push forward, the antagonist to push back? Where is your protagonist being forced to change?

I picked up my copy of *Half-Blood* and flipped it to wherever the book fell open to examine the conflict in a random scene. The scene revealed is Christmas Eve at the Weasleys in "A Very Frosty Christmas." It's a

beautiful, homey scene. You have a large, loving family with friends gathered 'round, a Christmas feast, festive decorations—including the delightful detail of the garden gnome who gives the setting that extra bite.

Stupefied, painted gold, stuffed into a miniature tutu and with small wings glued to its back, it glowered down at them all, the ugliest angel Harry had ever seen, with a large bald head like a potato and rather hairy feet.

(p. 309, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

**Note:** This is a zoom lens worldbuilding detail which we will discuss in a later lesson, not conflict, but I include it here because it's such a delightful note in this scene we are discussing.

Even though this is a warm, loving, homespun Christmas scene, conflict abounds. You've got the budding mother-in-law against soon-to-be daughter-in-law with Mrs. Weasley ruffling at Fleur's criticism of her favorite singer, Celestina Warbeck. As the others scurry to stay out of the fray, we have the hushed conversation between Harry and Mr. Weasley regarding the conflict within the Ministry, with Harry echoing Dumbledore's questioning of the Ministry's false arrests. However, all this preliminary conflict simply sets the stage and builds toward the main conflict of the scene, which is delivered in a one-two punch.

Harry repeats the overheard conversation between Draco and Snape the night of Slughorn's Christmas party, conveying his suspicion to Lupin that Snape is up to no good. In a brilliant laying down of one of the most disputed texts which kept readers speculating between the release of *Half-Blood* and *Hallows*, Lupin replies:

"People have said it, many times. It comes down to whether or not you trust Dumbledore's judgment. I do; therefore, I trust Severus."

(p. 311, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

At this point, Harry doesn't trust Snape, not for a moment. He's pushing against Lupin to agree and help him do something about it. Lupin pushes back with the trump card of Dumbledore's trust. Which is all fantastic foreshadowing as we know what happens at the end of *Half-Blood....Sob.*

Lupin's gratitude for Snape preparing the Wolfsbane potion faithfully each month during his tenure at Hogwarts is contrasted sharply by the image of Greyback positioning himself before the full moon so he can strike to maim or kill more powerfully. The Snape image we're left with is

one of healing (an old enemy, even) contrasted against a true Death Eater who savagely kills indiscriminately.

But the conflict doesn't stop there. In the second punch Harry tells Lupin about his Half-Blood potions book and tries to find out if the Half-Blood Prince could have been one of the Marauders...his father even, which Lupin denies. Harry is searching, still, that connection to his lost family, to his father especially. How ironic is it that the author he thought might be his father is instead the man he distrusts most in this world—Snape?

Delightful detail in scene setting, conflict layered upon conflict, building to the most important at the end of the scene, with character growth emerging as Harry is forced to see Snape through Lupin's eyes, eyes that are a bit more tolerant than Harry's own. Lupin has lived among the vilest killers of his world, he has been shunned by his own society, he's a true "half-breed" in the sense of not belonging to either group, and yet he looks with compassion on a man whom he could hate, but instead sees him with more understanding than Harry is yet prepared to accept.

This is writing to the max. This is a supercharged scene. This is imagination carried into every detail, and yet there are no murders, no exotic locale, and no explosions (except for a bit of exploding Snap).

Oh, one more thing. There's subtext. Take a moment and look again at those unimportant lyrics Celestina warbles out that Fleur finds so distasteful.

"You Charmed the Heart Right Out of Me"...

"Oh, my poor heart, where has it gone?

It's left me for a spell..."

"and now you've torn it quite apart

I'll thank you to give back my heart!"

(p. 311-312)

Who do all these torn and missing, charmed-out hearts remind you of? Voldemort and his Horcruxes. He's there, he's lurking, he's still at large causing disaster and heartbreak and could intrude on our merry Yuletide scene at any moment. Voldemort's heart, his soul, with the aid of the Horcrux spell, has been torn into pieces and removed from where it belongs. In the next book, Harry and friends will have to search and destroy those missing, torn pieces of Voldemort's "heart."

This is just a simple little scene, not a turning point, definitely not a climax or a dark moment, and yet it pays off. This is the kind of subtext that

gives the reader that extra reward for paying attention, that gets reader buzz buzzing. And this is the kind of delightful exuberance in setting, conflict, and character which makes Harry Potter such a joy to read.

Every scene must stand strong. Each scene must present something new and interesting to the reader. Every scene must have conflict that forces character development, that pushes your protagonist toward his fate. If you do it right, and if your voice is strong enough, each scene will surpass your reader's expectations.

### **3) Employ Strong Verbs and Pinpointed Nouns**

One of the things we're seeing in regard to voice and reader expectation is that it's all about giving the reader more. If you want to truly excel; if you want your passion, your voice, to shine through, then every single word must contribute to the overall sparkle and depth of your story. Your reader cannot get inside your head to see what you meant to say.

Our voice is only as good as the words that convey it on paper (or screen).

One of the primary lessons in writing is to make each word count. Every single word must carry its weight. It needs to get the job done with the strongest impact in the most compact package possible.

I liken it to pregnancy. For those of us who have nurtured a baby inside our own for nine months, how often did you hear and did you internalize, "Make each bite count. Nutrition, nutrition, nutrition. You're not eating for yourself alone; you must think of your baby."

The same is true for writing. In nurturing ideas into a story, you must make each word count. Sculpt, weave, and trim. If you're seeking publication, you're not writing for yourself alone. You must think of your reader.

To further refine this creation analogy, I like to think of a sculptor. Now, I have no sculpting training, so forgive me if I get a few technical terms wrong. A sculptor must first take their block of wood or their slab of marble and cut hunks away to give it general shape. This process is more rough than refining.

For the writer this first crude step is like vomiting on your page. Get it all out. Dredge up all the passion, all the conflict, all the emotion, intertwined with your characters and your plot, and slap it on the page. Don't worry about making it neat and pretty. The refinement comes later.

Then, once you've got your basic shape, look at your emerging sculpture and determine where to refine. I read once that, when asked how he created his masterpiece David, Michelangelo said something like: "I see David inside the giant marble, and I simply chip away all that is not David."

Michelangelo worked from a philosophy of art called *disegno* (design in Italian), which believed that the human form was there, captured within the marble, lurking in the heart of every slab he carved. His job was simply to find it and release it. *To chip away anything that was not David.*

I feel this in my writing. The story is there inside me. I may not know its form in detail when I start out, but by constantly chipping away and polishing all that is not *it*, the story is released. It comes alive, the soul of the work is freed. I'm merely the tool to release it. To do so, I must chip away all that is not true.

You, too, must find your inner story and release it to the world. You do this with your tools of word refinement: hammers and chisels to give initial shape, rasps for honing and detailing, and vast amounts of sandpaper to sharpen and smooth. Brainstorming, plotting, character analysis, and writing a rough draft are your hammers and chisels. They create the rough, basic shape from which your story will emerge. Next comes revising and editing, endlessly. With these rasps you add the details you couldn't see before, and chip away at anything that is not David. Finally, minute analysis of word choices, strong verbs, pinpointed nouns, overused words, and varied sentence structure will work sandpaper to your creation, polishing and shining it for readers to enjoy.

Two of these refining tools that Rowling wields masterfully are strong verbs and pinpointed nouns. Use the strongest verb to convey your action that doesn't sound unnatural or ludicrous. Why say, "He turned around and walked quickly to the door," if "He pivoted and raced for the door" conveys your meaning stronger and better?

Likewise use precise descriptive nouns or adjectives instead of a generic word that paints a bland picture. Why say, "Liz wiped the wetness off her hands on her new clothes," when you can say, "Liz rubbed sweaty palms against the rough tweed of her new suit."

Instead of general descriptive words, use detailed, pinpointed ones to create a fuller image. Of course, this can all be overdone and become purple prose, but judiciously used and interwoven with action and dialogue, strong,

detailed description will allow your reader the feel of watching a vibrant movie on the wide screen.

Rowling does this so much better, so let me give you an example from *Chamber of Secrets*. Notice the bolded key words or phrases.

“Let me introduce my **assistant**, Professor Snape,” said Lockhart, **flashing** a wide smile. “He tells me he knows a **tiny little bit** about dueling himself and has **sportingly** agreed to help me with a short demonstration before we begin. Now, I don’t want any of you **youngsters** to worry—you’ll still have your Potions master when I’m through with him, **never fear!**”

“Wouldn’t it be good if they finished each other off?” Ron **muttered** in Harry’s ear.

Is **sportingly** a word any of you would use in regard to Snape? Lockhart is clearly, as usual, all fluff and nonsense. He tries to pump himself up with words like **assistant** and **tiny little bit**, **youngsters** and **never fear!** But we know who the true master of dueling is.

Snape’s **upper lip was curling**. Harry wondered why Lockhart was still smiling; if Snape had been looking at him like that he’d have been running as fast as he could in the opposite direction.

Lockhart and Snape turned to face each other and bowed; at least, Lockhart did, with much **twirling of his hands**, whereas Snape  **jerked his head** irritably. Then they raised their wands like swords in front of them.

“As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position,” Lockhart told the silent crowd. “On the count of three, we will **cast our first spells**. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course.”

“I wouldn’t bet on that,” Harry **murmured**, watching Snape **baring his teeth**.

While Lockhart is posturing and **twirling**, Snape is **curling** his upper lip, **jerking** his head, and **baring his teeth**. Wonderful word choices that characterize each man delightfully and accurately.

“One—two—three—”

Both of them swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent; Snape cried: “Expelliarmus!” There was a **dazzling flash of scarlet light** and Lockhart was **blasted off his feet**: He flew

backward off the stage, **smashed** into the wall, and **slid** down it to **sprawl** on the floor.

Malfoy and some of the other Slytherins **cheered**. Hermione was dancing on tiptoes. “Do you think he’s all right?” she **squealed through her fingers**.

“Who cares?” said Harry and Ron together.

Lockhart was getting unsteadily to his feet. His hat had fallen off and his wavy hair was **standing on end**.

“Well, there you have it!” he said, **tottering** back onto the platform.

(p. 189-190, *Secrets*)

With a **dazzling flash of scarlet light**, Lockhart is “**blasted off his feet**: He **flew** backward off the stage, **smashed** into the wall, and **slid** down it to **sprawl on** the floor.” The action punches from **blasted**, **flew**, **smashed**, and **slid**, to **sprawl**. No wimpy **looking** or **turning** here.

Then, of course, we’ve got Ron and Harry **muttering** and **murmuring** while Hermione **danced** on tiptoes and “**squealed** through her fingers.” Each character acts in a manner appropriate to their personality, but with interesting, strong verbs with punch.

You have to laugh as Lockhart **totters** back onto the platform. No staggering for him.

Indeed, certain words choices in and of themselves hint at a masculine or feminine character. It is interesting to highlight the words choices of Snape, Lockhart, and Hermione, because with Snape we’re basically getting a strong, angry adult male, with Lockhart, a puffed-up, slightly effeminate male, and with Hermione, a young girl. Therefore, we should see some strong contrasts in the descriptive words used:

- **Snape**: upper lip curling, jerked his head irritably, baring his teeth
- **Lockhart**: flashing, tiny little bit, sportingly, youngsters, twirling of hands, getting unsteadily to his feet, wavy hair standing on end, tottering
- **Hermione**: dancing on tiptoes, squealed through her fingers.

Notice the Snape word choices are very strong, almost animalistic with that **baring of teeth**. Traditionally speaking, you would not paint a flattering picture of a female by using any of those descriptions, but you can paint a strong angry male with them. Snape does not “almost” bare his teeth, nor does he “grimace.” He doesn’t “wince” or “twitch” his head

irritably—none of those words choices are what is traditionally considered masculine.

With Lockhart, however, we've got **flashing**, **twirling**, **unsteadily**, and **tottering**—while all good strong verb choices, they paint an entirely different picture, also rather juvenile. The words he speaks, **sportingly** and **youngsters** are also more feminine than say something like “grudgingly” and “brats.”

Then Hermione—we see her here, in the midst of her twelve-year-old infatuation, acting positively schoolgirl giddy—**dancing on tiptoes**, **squealing through her fingers**. Could you see Snape dancing or squealing? Word choice makes the man, and the young girl!

Finally, notice the spell Snape uses. *Expelliarmus* becomes Harry's signature spell, the one he used to defeat Voldemort. And this is where he learned it.

For me, this kind of word editing takes place in the various revisions that follow a completed first draft. The Word find function and the thesaurus are my greatest friends with this chore of fine-tuning each word. Seek out the words that you know you overuse or fall back on, especially the ones that may make your male characters sound as if they were written by a female. Then use your thesaurus to pinpoint the exact word to give you that masculine or feminine nuance...if that is your aim.

Aside from strong verbs, Rowling also uses detailed and pinpointed nouns and adjectives to bring her fresh and vivid worldbuilding to life. For a great example, I turned to a section in *Deathly Hallows*, where Harry, Ron, and Hermione are approaching Luna Lovegood's home for the first time:

...Ron was pointing upward, toward the top of the hill on which they had appeared, where a most strange-looking house rose vertically against the sky, a **great black cylinder** with a **ghostly moon hanging** behind it in the afternoon sky. “That's got to be Luna's house, who else would live in a place like that? It looks like a giant **rook!**”...

...The gate creaked as they opened it. The **zigzagging path** leading to the front door was overgrown with a variety of odd plants, including a bush covered in the **orange radishlike fruit** Luna sometimes wore as earrings. Harry thought he recognized a **Snargaluff** and gave the **wizened stump** a wide berth. Two **aged crab apple trees**, **bent with the wind**, **stripped of leaves but still heavy** with berry-sized red fruits and

bushy crowns of white-beaded mistletoe, stood sentinel on either side of the front door. A little owl with a slightly flattened, hawklike head peered down at them from one of the branches.

(p. 397-98, *Hallows*)

There's so much here to notice in such compact space! In the first paragraph, the use of the one noun **rook** carries more than one meaning. Not only is it specific in describing the tall cylindrical "castle" in which the Lovegoods live, but it also provides a link between them and their Ravenclaw (birdlike) heritage. Furthermore, and this is the coolest part, that **rook** along with the ominous moon **hanging** in the sky provide the reader a warning that something is about to go down. Rowling has used much chess imagery in her novels before, especially in *Philosopher's/Sorcerer's Stone*, and here's she's using this **black** rook as an allusion to a chess "siege tower" to hint that the trio is going to be attacked once they enter.

In the second paragraph cited, the **zigzagging path, orange radishlike fruit**, and the other fruit images characterize the Lovegoods as nature-lovers, but a bit wacky. Notice that the specific, detailed descriptions help the reader to visualize clearly what Harry is seeing: "aged crab apple trees," "berry-sized fruits," "bushy crowns of white-beaded mistletoe." No generic "they passed by trees and flowers" here. The "**bent with the wind, stripped of leaves**" I marked in green because it is an added phrase which provides more description in a slightly dark tone. And see how cleverly she uses the foreign word **Snargaluff**, but then provides us with the description **wizened stump** in a natural, non-instructional manner to help us remember what it is.

The last thing I wish to point out about this packed scene description is the undertone of warning carried through from the first paragraph. **Sentinels** stand by the door, and the owl with the **hawklike head** spies down on them. Not only is that "hawklike" another nod to their Ravenclaw heritage, the use of these guarding, spy-like words is a warning to the reader: be on the lookout. Something dangerous is afoot.

One distinction I'd like to note before we go on—Rowling utilizes many more '*ing* verbs (the progressive form) than we've been taught to use in our own writing. I've heard it said that the progressive form is more common in British literature in general. Whereas some critique partners and contest judges get quite zealous about marking any and every use of '*ing*, I also try to watch it in my own writing. The '*ed* conjugation (the past tense)

is stronger, but not meant as the sole diet by any means. Variety is the spice of life, especially when it comes to word choices in writing.

Every writer has words they overuse. Quite often, unfortunately, these are also weak words. Some of mine are just, quite, almost, there are, about, might, stepped, moved, turned, smiled, nodded, shrugged, and looked. These are perfectly good words that must be used upon occasion. But **quite** often, I mean, **almost** always, **there are** better words. Let me restate this past sentence better: *Stronger word choices abound*. Words like “just” and “quite” are often unnecessary and can *just* be eliminated. Cut them out. Others like “almost” and “about” are found frequently in women’s writing, who not usually brought up to be as aggressive, tend to neuter even their word choices.

I was **about** to take out the “women’s writing” comment, afraid **that I might** offend, I **almost** tweaked it, but then I stood my ground. I wrote it. I made a statement. Don’t be wishy-washy around your words, especially if you want a strong hero and heroine. (Though these weak, bolded, words could be a wonderful tool for showing a hesitant character, if not overdone to the point of driving your reader mad).

As far as **turned**, **looked**, **stepped**, **smiled**, and **moved**—I liken these words to oatmeal or mashed potatoes. Good old comfort words. Easy to use, getting at necessary action, but not requiring much in the way of chopping, spices, or imagination.

These weak words are mine, plus many, many more. Define your own weak or overused wordlist, then conduct your own word hunt. *Word search* is a powerful tool. Use it well. Seek and destroy any weak, impassive, or overly used words that keep your prose from sparkling. Make your verbs, your descriptions, the absolute strongest they can be *without turning purple*—you **can** go too far. Keep your reader glued to your every single word until the satisfying end.

#### 4) Challenge Your POV

Point of view is one area in which I tend to criticize Rowling a bit. Wait, notice how I worded that: **tend** and **a bit**. That’s like “almost” and “about.” I’m backing off my statement, afraid to offend.

Okay, let’s rework. Rowling could write better point of view. Notice, I’m not saying something as strong as “Rowling sucks at POV,” because that’s not true either. She handles POV strongly, just not as strongly as *I* think she could.

Many of you will be familiar with the term ***deep POV***. Generally speaking, deep POV is the technique for getting your reader as deeply into your character's head as possible, aside from writing in first person. In fact, it is likened to first person in that one exercise for constructing a scene in deep POV is to write it initially in first person, and then go back and simply switch all your *Is* to *he* or *she* (or *they*, if non-binary).

With deep POV, you want every word to reflect your character. Every turn of phrase, whether in dialogue or exposition, should sound like it is coming out of their mouth and from their brain, not filtered through a narrator.

Rowling does not write deep POV, (though she does approach it in her latter books) at least not consistently, and especially not in the first few books. Her POV is mostly a traditional third person, but sometimes early on borders on omniscient. This is not a criticism. Deep POV is a tool, it is one tool, it is not the only POV available to a writer. However, it is one tool that, when done well, creates a powerful voice.

Personally, I prefer to use deep POV as much as possible, but that's just my choice. I have scenes, however, which are deliberately constructed outside deep POV because of the needs of that scene.

What Rowling gains by not writing in deep POV is, again generally speaking, a lack of long introspective passages. Most of her emotional scenes are revealed through action and dialogue.

Look back to lesson one, to the last section, the "Power of Touch." Notice how little of those scenes analyzed, if any at all, are introspection. Yet she conveys high emotions powerfully through the use of action and dialogue.

Here's a passage with highlights to give you a visual example of her ratio of action and dialogue to introspection in a high-crisis scene:

Harry turned to look where Neville was staring. Directly above them, framed in the doorway from the Brain Room, stood Albus Dumbledore, his wand aloft, his face white and furious. Harry felt a kind of electric charge surge through every particle of his body—*they were saved.*

Dumbledore sped down the steps past Neville and Harry, who had no more thoughts of leaving. Dumbledore was already at the foot of the steps when the Death Eaters nearest realized he was there. There were yells; one of the Death Eaters ran for it, scrabbling like a monkey

up the stone steps opposite. Dumbledore's spell pulled him back as easily and effortlessly as though he had hooked him with an invisible line—

Only one couple was still battling, apparently unaware of the new arrival. Harry saw Sirius duck Bellatrix's jet of red light: He was laughing at her.

"Come on, you can do better than that!" he yelled, his voice echoing around the cavernous room.

The second jet of light hit him squarely on the chest.

The laughter had not quite died from his face, but his eyes widened in shock.

Harry released Neville, though he was unaware of doing so. He was jumping down the steps again, pulling out his wand, as Dumbledore turned towards the dais too.

It seemed to take Sirius an age to fall. His body curved in a graceful arc as he sank backwards through the ragged veil hanging from the arch....

And Harry saw the look of mingled fear and surprise on his godfather's wasted, once-handsome face as he fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil, which fluttered for a moment as though in a high wind and then fell back into place.

Harry heard Bellatrix Lestrange's triumphant scream, but knew it meant nothing—Sirius had only just fallen through the archway, he would reappear from the other side any second....

But Sirius did not reappear.

"SIRIUS!" Harry yelled. "SIRIUS!"

He had reached the floor, his breath coming in searing gasps. Sirius must be just behind the curtain, he, Harry, would pull him back out again....

But as he reached the ground and sprinted towards the dais, Lupin grabbed Harry around the chest, holding him back.

"There's nothing you can do, Harry—"

"Get him, save him, he's only just gone through!"

"It's too late, Harry—"

"We can still reach him—"

Harry struggled hard and viciously, but Lupin would not let go....

**“There’s nothing you can do, Harry...nothing....He’s gone.”**

(p. 805-806, *Phoenix*)

Key:

- **Green highlight** (or darkly shaded) = action
- **Yellow highlight** (or lightly shaded) = dialogue
- Left blank/white = narration or introspection

Note: I marked “they were saved” as dialogue because even though it is technically not voiced, by the fact that it’s in italics and written as direct Harry’s thoughts, it has the impact of voiced words. My analysis isn’t perfect as not everything can be labeled only action, dialogue, or introspection, but this visual shows how little introspection Rowling uses.

Sirius’ death is a hugely important and emotional scene for Harry, the reader, and a critical turning point in the series. Yet, only one and a half sentences and a fragment could be considered introspection. This from a book which I consider to have the highest amount of introspection Rowling had used to that point. Sirius falling behind the Veil delivers an active, visceral punch.

I love deep POV, but one aspect we can learn from Rowling is to let our dialogue and our actions carry as much of our emotional hits as possible. Introspection is good and has its place, but too often we overuse it and depend on it to carry the full load. That is abusing the tool as well as the reader.

Work with your POV to make it as true and strong to your character as possible, then carry that POV through to every word of your action and dialogue to deliver the maximum emotional hit. Don’t make your introspection carry the full load of your voice and reader impact. In some ways, *POV is everything*. It’s all about understanding someone else outside our own head.

One other aspect of crafting point of view concerns multiple POVs. For each scene, you must determine which is the best one to use. Except for five key scenes, all of HP was presented from Harry’s POV:

1. **The first scene of Stone** was delivered from an omniscient POV, because, as Rowling has said, Harry’s viewpoint at the time was quite limited.

2. **The first chapter of *Goblet of Fire***, in “The Riddle House,” was delivered from a mixture of an omniscient and Frank Bryce’s POV, even though we are then shown it manifested in Harry’s dream.
3. At the beginning of *Half-Blood Prince* we have two scenes outside Harry’s POV
  1. **“The Other Minister”** from the Muggle Prime Minister,
  2. and **“Spinner’s End”** from a mixture of omniscient and Bellatrix’s POV.
4. In *Deathly Hallows*, **the first chapter and scene of Snape at Malfoy Mansion** is presented in a largely omniscient POV—omniscient, because getting too deep inside Snape’s POV would reveal too much.

Notice Rowling’s technique—when she used a POV outside Harry’s, it was in a circumstance in which it was impossible, or she did not want, Harry to be present. All of these scenes come at the beginning of books, and then firmly switched to Harry’s POV for the remainder. All of them are either from omniscient POV or from a character who has less secrets to share than the others present.

She did not go into Voldemort’s or Wormtail’s POV in “The Riddle House” because that would necessitate revealing too much. Same for Snape in “Spinner’s End” and “The Dark Lord Ascending.” Information can be withheld depending on whose head you’re in. This is why some mysteries are written in first person, to more easily hide from the reader clues that other characters would know. Harry Potter is definitely a mystery, among other things.

Which POV to choose when you have multiple characters will be framed by many choices:

- 1) Which character has the most at stake?
- 2) Which character has the greatest conflict?
- 3) Which character has the most growth in that scene?
- 4) Or, who has the most to hide?

Choose the POV that is the most compelling, the one sure to draw your reader in. Where appropriate, write as deeply from that perspective as possible. Get your reader into the head of your character and let them feel from the inside what can never be experienced from the outside in real life: the intimacy of complete empathy with another human being.

## Take Away

Rowling has challenged us as writers to break free from the inhibiting bars of our own Azkaban prison. Imagine limitless possibilities. Ask yourself at the end of every scene, and especially at the end of every story, have you given your reader something extra, a touch they can only get from you? Have you included a piece of magic in everything you create? If not, go back and revise.

I find that this magic comes through most strongly in revisions. It seems to take me several edits of cleaning, paring down, beefing up, and fine sculpturing to finally polish that necessary gleam into my stories.

The commercial market is extremely tight right now. Yet I firmly believe that if you consistently strip your soul bare each and every time you sit at the keyboard, if you strive always to take your writing and your imagination to new and more enriching heights, and if you never ever give up, you will eventually catch your own Golden Snitch—that golden prize of captivating and fulfilling your reader’s expectations.

We can even take some advice from Barty/Mad-Eye—know your strengths, and play to them. Understand your writer’s soul and release her into every story, every scene, every carefully constructed word you produce on the page. Above all, chisel so deeply into your characters’ POV that you free your own David from his block of marble.



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# Lesson Three

## Flying High Above the Quidditch Pitch (High Concept)

If you've been writing for even five minutes, you've probably heard the buzz about high concept and your need to have one. High Concept and voice seem to be the two crucial elements writers feel they must put together in order to sell a project.

But, what is high concept and where do you get one?

High concept started off in Hollywood as a way for industry professionals to pitch a project that their caffeinated, high-powered counterparts could hear and understand in a matter of seconds. In our fast-paced, attention-deficit, 140-character Tweet society, this idea has carried over to the book world as well. Basically, high concept is a strong story premise that can be summed up simply and shortly in a way that many people will understand instantly.

There is another crucial aspect, however. Not every quickly-comprehended logline or pitch conveys high concept. It's not simply a summary of what your novel is about, but also contains that all-important element of mass appeal. ***It's a premise with punch.*** A high concept is one that jumps out and grabs the attention of a large hunk of the population. It's an idea they can grasp immediately, identify with, and want to plunk down money to buy or see.

For example:

- ***Jurassic Park***—A theme park of cloned dinosaurs. Captures simply both the awe of dinosaurs among humans...and the terrifying possibilities.
- ***Snakes on a Plane***—Instantly, you know—there's no escape. If you're into scary movies, it's got your attention.
- ***Titanic***—One word, but you know what's going to happen and how it's going to end. What's intriguing and left to discover is how it will play out on a personal level.
- ***Jesus was married and had a baby***—This one takes a few more words, but sums up the mystery and appeal behind *The DaVinci Code*.

When seeking the high concept within Harry Potter, we start by breaking down the first book into an initial summary:

A young orphan discovers he's a wizard and goes off to a magical boarding school where trials and adventure lead him to face his parents' murderer.

That's clear, concise, and intriguing. It gives the reader a glimpse of character, setting, conflict, and plot. Thus this makes an excellent pitch or logline. When defining high concept, however, only two elements in that pitch really pop as something freshly unique and wildly appealing—the magical boarding school and facing his parents' murderer.

Think about it—how many children's books have you read that involved an orphan? It might be easier to count how many have not. A child discovering he has unique power...also cliché. "Trials and adventure"—isn't that the basic plot of almost every children's book or fantasy novel as well? The magical boarding school, however, was fairly unique for its time. The deeply imagined magical boarding school was the unusual twist that first brought this interesting concept into the "high" realm.

Then there was the darker element—a child facing a murderer and surviving. First as an infant, then again as an eleven-year-old. Certain elements of Harry Potter such as this were considered too dark and risky for a children's book. But only by adults. Children found it wildly appealing.

For another example, let's look at the upcoming film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, where almost all we know so far is the officially released summary:

Arriving in New York for a brief stopover, [Newt Scamander] might have come and gone without incident... were it not for a No-Maj (American for Muggle) named Jacob, a misplaced magical case, and the escape of some of Newt's fantastic beasts, which could spell trouble for both the wizarding and No-Maj worlds.

([http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Fantastic\\_Beasts\\_and\\_Where\\_to\\_Find\\_Them\\_\(film\)](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Fantastic_Beasts_and_Where_to_Find_Them_(film)))

From this summary, we can draw the following high concept:

A visiting wizard loses a suitcase full of magical creatures inside 1920s New York and must recover them before disaster strikes.

The selling point here, besides revisiting the wizarding world is the magical creatures and their escape into a non-magical world. Basically the title. It's a fantasy adventure with the high concept focused on magical creatures running loose among non-magical people.

Keep in mind that high concept only takes you so far. High concept will get you noticed. It may get your manuscript picked up from the slush pile. Whether it stays picked up or tossed into the rejection pile is all based on execution. You can have the most brilliant idea in the Muggle world, but where novels are concerned, and especially a debut novel, unless the execution is as equally brilliant, it will not get you the golden snitch of publication.

Harry Potter is an excellent example of this. While there were novels prior to HP set in a boarding school for witches or wizards, it was in Rowling's creative hands that the concept popped—that it truly came alive. Those prior magical novels may have had a great concept, but it was Rowling's execution, the delightful characters, the amazing worldbuilding, and the completely engaging mysteries, which made her high concept cash out with phenomenal sales.

So, think for a moment—what is your concept? Don't try to start by defining a high concept right off the bat. First, just try to summarize the book you've already written, or the idea you're planning to write. Get a simple summary down. If you're like me, your initial effort will probably be a couple of paragraphs long. Take that and whittle it down to the premise. Keep hacking away, cutting out all that is detail but not essence. What you're shooting for is a pitch of one to two sentences.

Once you have this summary, then examine it like we did Harry Potter's above. Break down the elements: which are your common currency, your orphans and quests (of course with your wonderful details that make them unique) but still standard, and which are your gold, your original spin that will set you apart from the rest? Is this unique element something truly fresh and interesting, that people will understand at a glance, and that will hold mass appeal? If so, congratulations, milk it for all it's worth. Craft it into a wonderful logline, then make sure you include it in every query and lead with it in every face-to-face pitch.

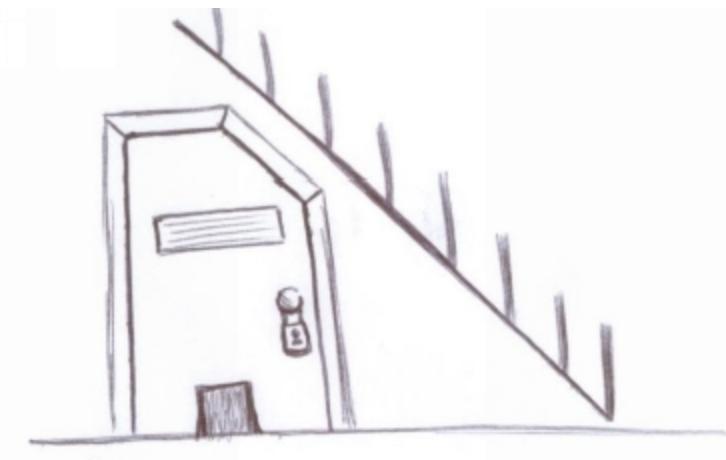
Some of you may know your high concept already. Maybe this idea is what started you writing the book from the beginning. You're lucky. Now all you have to worry about is the execution. Simple, right?

For most of us, however, high concepts do not leap into our minds fully formed. Concepts, yes, ideas a plenty, but a true high concept, not so often. Not every book gives up a high concept. Sometimes it is there for the unmasking, once you've fully explored your idea and your world, and have

boiled it down to its essential elements. Then you may discover the grain of sand capable of forming a pearl to give your story its fresh, unique shine.

**Note:** You'll read or hear many disparaging remarks about high concept when you talk with some people in either the publishing or film industry. Many writers equate high concept to low-brow, sensationalistic, and poorly written or filmed. While that may be true in some cases, it doesn't have to be. A high concept novel can be just as rich in character and as deep in meaning and emotion as any other novel. Once again, it's all in the execution. Make sure yours shines!

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# **Lesson Four**

## **Return to the Dursleys**

### **(Establishing and Breaking Story Patterns)**

Children feel more secure when they have known rules and established boundaries to their world. Likewise, readers feel more comfortable when certain conventions or patterns are maintained in a story. Many of these expected patterns are boundaries of a particular genre. You can understand the anger a reader would experience to discover the death of the hero or heroine at the end of a book clearly marked romance. Similar expectations hold true for any genre of commercial fiction.

A mystery protagonist is bound to follow clues until the mystery is solved or the villain unmasked. A fantasy should in some fresh manner propel a hero or heroine on a quest that culminates in the triumph of good over evil. And a good thriller will keep readers on the edge of their seat, knowing the hero or heroine's life is in peril, and they must race to stop the villain before he can kill again.

These are genre patterns that readers have come to expect and desire from their chosen books of entertainment, and woe to the author who breaks one of these established boundaries. Some authors will deliberately choose to shake up the reader by flying against genre convention. Depending on the skill of the author, it may work.

However, the patterns I'm more interested in studying in this chapter are those that are created by the author to contain and enhance a particular story or a series.

## **Overview:**

Patterns we will discuss from Rowling's series include:

- 1) Beginning and ending with the Dursleys
- 2) Establishing and breaking Harry's POV
- 3) Each book a school year at Hogwarts
- 4) Seeing "spots" and villain cameos in chapter 13.

Each of these patterns are designed to serve certain functions within the story.

- 1) Reader involvement
- 2) Character development
- 3) Furthering the plot
- 4) Enhancing the conflict, and
- 5) Containing and revealing mystery clues.

Not only does Rowling establish patterns, she also breaks them to great effect. Knowing how to weave patterns into your work, and when to disrupt them, will give you a powerful tool in crafting your story.

### **1) At Home with the Dursleys**

Each story of the HP series begins at the home of the Dursleys and, until *Deathly Hallows*, ends with Harry returning there<sup>[5]</sup>. To be more precise, the first chapters of *Goblet of Fire* and *Deathly Hallows* as well as the first two chapters of *Half-Blood Prince* begin elsewhere. *Goblet of Fire* begins at the Riddle House with Voldemort and Wormtail. However, the beginning of chapter two reveals that this scene manifested itself as a dream for Harry. So technically, it was still at the Dursleys.

*Half-Blood Prince* and *Deathly Hallows* are a totally different matter. By showing us the Muggle Minister and "Spinner's End" in *Half-Blood* and Malfoy Manor in *Hallows*, these latter stories firmly begin apart from Harry's POV and the Dursley home. We will discuss this breaking of patterns later. *Half-Blood* also ends with Harry still at Hogwarts, but he makes it clear he will return to the Dursleys, if only briefly.

Even in *Half-Blood* and *Hallows*, however, Harry's own personal storyline begins with him at home with the Dursleys. So, the pattern has been established and maintained through the first six books.

As with many techniques Rowling employs, there are both author-driven and story-driven reasons for using this technique. A writer will choose to employ certain characters, plots, settings, themes, and patterns

because she knows it will work for the genre and target audience. For example, if a writer chooses to write in first person because the market has shown that teens readily identify with this intimate narrative, then that is an author-driven decision as opposed to a storyline decision (in which it is necessary to that particular story). Of course, a talented writer will then make sure her first person choice becomes necessary to the story.

For the story-driven reason, I believe Rowling uses this Dursley pattern as a medium to channel her readers. The Dursleys provide a real-life touchstone to aid her Muggle reader's transition into her fantasy world. Having Harry start and end his journey in the world we all know and inhabit makes him more readily understandable and sympathetic.

Many fans of HP, myself included, will tell you that they're not normally fantasy readers. One reason we get into HP is that Harry's new world is much more accessible than a traditional medieval fantasy. We find the wizarding world comforting and familiar because it's not so unlike our own, just wonderfully more interesting and exciting. In fact, Harry's new world is diagonally connected to ours. This reflection is established and fortified with Harry coming firmly from and returning to the Muggle world each and every year, each and every book.

The reader also feels greater sympathy for Harry because of having to return to a place where he's so mistreated. Once Harry gets to Hogwarts, he's someone special. He's the famous Boy-Who-Lived. The Dursleys bring him down to earth each summer. To them, he's nobody. I'm sure many young readers experience a kinship with Harry in feeling unwanted and unloved and fantasize about escaping to a magical world where everybody knows their name. These are all reasons Rowling as an author could have chosen to start her story each time in the Muggle world.

Her storyline reason for the return to the Dursleys touches on various craft goals as well. As a reader, I always wondered why Harry had to keep going home to a family that obviously detested him and where he was so unhappy. It was not revealed until the end of *Order of the Phoenix* the mystery rationale. Dumbledore used the shared blood between Lily and her sister Petunia to seal a charm which would protect Harry from Voldemort as long as he could call Petunia's home his own. Therefore, until Harry reached adulthood at age 17, he was forced to return for a short time every year to the Dursleys.

The septological mystery clue that hides in the Dursley home involves Petunia and her connection to her sister. Petunia withheld crucial information throughout the series. She possessed intimate knowledge of Lily and her life before Godric's Hollow—especially in regard to Snape. She gave us a brief tantalizing clue of this with her knowledge of Dementors and in her reference to Snape, “I heard—that awful boy—telling *her* about them—years ago” (p. 34, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury).

Petunia’s crucial knowledge regarding Snape and Lily wouldn’t be revealed until *Deathly Hallows*. Therefore, from the mystery standpoint, Harry had to return to the Dursleys each year in order to string along and finally reveal key critical information. True, Petunia did not end up revealing this info to Harry herself, but it is possible that Rowling did not know from the start how she would finally reveal the Snape/Lily connection. Plus, that connection between Snape/Lily/Petunia was stronger when finally revealed because Petunia was not some distant memory from Book 1.

Thus, the pattern of Harry starting and returning to the Dursley home in each book helps establish reader connection to Harry and his world, provides additional conflict through this antagonistic home environment that aids his character development, provides a frame for plot structure, and hides and reveals secrets. Returning to the Dursleys covers all the craft goals for establishing a pattern.

## 2) Inside Harry’s Head

Another pattern Rowling utilizes which is closely related to the Dursleys is the establishment of Harry’s point of view. It’s related because the precise places where Harry’s POV is broken are also the scenes which deviate from beginning at the Dursleys (“The Riddle House” of *Goblet*, “The Other Minister” and “Spinner’s End” of *Half-Blood*, and “The Dark Lord Ascending” of *Hallows*). Also, while the first chapter of *Stone* takes place with the Dursleys, it’s not in Harry’s POV.

The Harry Potter series is primarily a children’s/young adult fantasy, but it crosses genre borders while remaining true to each genre it encompasses. We have the hero on a quest as fantasies require, but we also have a deeply laid mystery with hidden clues, red herrings, and ongoing unanswered questions encompassing the whole series.

Many mystery writers choose to limit their POV to one character because it greatly aids in pacing the revelation of clues. After all, the more

heads you get into, the more information is available, and the more difficult it is to hide evidence from the reader without a good explanation. In other words, Dumbledore can have knowledge that Harry does not possess, and it's not cheating the reader because we never get into Dumbledore's head.

To make this withholding of information between Dumbledore and Harry even more believable, Rowling establishes a clear guideline from the outset.

Don't ask questions—that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys.

(p. 20, Sorcerer's Stone)

Harry rarely asks questions, at least early in the series. This hard-learned lesson serves as a tool to help keep the mysteries afloat.

Another mystery technique is revealed to the reader at the end of *Phoenix* when Dumbledore explains how his great love for Harry has kept him from revealing painful information before it was necessary. Dumbledore holds onto knowledge that will hurt Harry or that he feels Harry is not yet ready to handle. This withheld knowledge has also helped to keep the reader guessing through five books. You must be careful when choosing techniques which will withhold information from the reader, because if your reasoning doesn't make sense to the reader, they will not consider your mystery well-crafted, but will instead feel cheated.

However, a tool for withholding information is usually necessary when stringing a mystery along for seven books. Thus, POV is always bound to Harry, who having been raised a Muggle and only entering the wizarding world in the course of Book 1, is learning along with the reader. We know what Harry knows and at the beginning that's not much.

When Rowling dipped into other POVs (a mix of omniscient and Frank Bryce in "The Riddle House," the Muggle prime minister in "The Other Minister," a mixture of omniscient and Bellatrix in "Spinner's End," and again omniscient in "The Dark Lord Ascending"), she was very careful to choose a character's POV that would not necessitate revealing clues prematurely. That's why she could never have gone into Snape's head in "Spinner's End" or "The Dark Lord Ascending."

Another benefit that occurs with staying based in Harry's POV<sup>[6]</sup> is that the reader experiences Harry's growth and maturing directly and intimately. Harry's POV in *Stone* is that of an eleven-year-old, while by *Half-Blood* he's seeing and understanding his environment and people more

wisely. At eleven, Harry is concerned with troll bogies and collecting wizard cards. At sixteen he's in a romantic relationship and facing the fact that he must kill or be killed.

With the aid of the pattern of progressing a school year in each book, Rowling is able to show the growth of her young characters. Each book has a slightly different feel for this reason. This developing maturity can be charted in three key areas: romance, school work, and personal growth.

Harry and his friends' growth and development is not spun at the frenzied pace to reach adulthood of many of our teens today, at least in the US. However, it is still realistic, especially for someone facing the responsibilities Harry has thrust upon him. While Rowling acknowledged that her series would never include teenage pregnancy and hard drug use, she carefully included (in its wizarding form) the temptation to try banned substances to help with test performance, spur love lives, and for fun practical jokes (aka Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes).

Point of View is a powerful tool which utilizes all the craft goals. Through use of a Harry-based POV, the reader identifies with the series protagonist, while Rowling carefully controls pacing the plot and mystery revelations. The maturing perspectives of the main characters add new conflicts and tensions both within the Trio and between them and their world at large.

As writers, we must choose carefully which POV we use and for what reasons. The patterns established by limiting ourselves to one POV, or by utilizing multiple, will directly affect our readers' involvement and understanding of our story.

Ask yourselves certain questions as you begin crafting your story.

- Which POV will fit your genre and reader expectations while still remaining fresh and original?
- Is there a need to withhold information from the reader?
- Will multiple POVs enhance or hinder the telling of this particular story?
- If you're planning a series, will the POV(s) you establish in the first book be the best to maintain the series? Or do you plan for a different POV with each book?
- What other patterns for reader expectations can you establish with POV as a tool?

POV is not just a story pattern, but it can be used as one. Carefully craft your POV to help give frame and depth to your story and to increase the suspense.

Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Book	Stone	Secrets	Azkaban	Goblet	Phoenix	Half-Blood	Hallows
		Pranks, jokes, and rule-breaking abound; bonding as friends a major accomplishment in it.	Questions of personal identity begin with Harry's fear of his <del>Pusseltongue</del> increasing awareness of the intolerant world around them.	The internal search for personal identity intensifies with Harry's fear of his reaction to the Dementors and Ron's strain of being sidekick to the Boy-Who-Lived. 1 <sup>st</sup> huge spat among friends.	Harry on the crux between child and man; Hermione's developing political/human (elfin) rights interest as reflected in SPEW; Ron attempts to establish own identity apart from Harry.	Blemishes, teen angst, and anger run amok, disagreements between friends; Ron and Hermione made Prefects; Harry takes on adult responsibility through the DA.	Harry reconciled with Hermione as his full partners searching for Horcruxes, Harry is stripped down to his bare soul. He comes to terms with what he is willing to fight, and die, for. Then he willingly lays down his life for those he loves and to combat an evil that will not end without his sacrifice.
Romance	School Work	Wide-eyed discovery, school work hard, but time to fool around.	Increasing coursework and interest with the Dueling Club.	More choices in his league and challenged by the much older champions.	Growing responsibility with the OWLs, Harry taking charge of own education with Dumbledore's Amy.	NEWT level classes, intensive coursework.	On-the-job training. The theories learned, and beyond their training, as the needs arise.
		Girls with cooties (or at least the butt of jokes).	Harry's indifference to Ginny's crush and Hermione's crush on Lockhart.	Burgeoning interest in the opposite sex (with Hermione maturing the fastest.)	Harry's first romantic relationship; Ron and Hermione's constant quarreling increases.	Hot and heavy relationships and the frustrations they entail.	The two main romantic relationships severely tested—Hermione and Ron's through his defection and jealousy; Harry and Ginny's through separation.

### 3) The Alchemy of Hogwarts

Having the first six novels run apace of a Hogwarts school year (including the seventh with Harry not there) basically serves a craft function for setting reader expectation of plot pacing. You know as a reader what to expect with the school year. A major twist is happening with Halloween, a key turning point around Christmas, and the climax with final exams.

However, I think Rowling set the pattern of seven years at Hogwarts mostly for subtextual reasons. Seven is the key number to the series. Seven books covered seven years. Seven is the most powerfully magical number and the portions of Voldemort's soul. And seven are the stages of alchemy which turn base metal into gold. Alchemy is both a frame and a metaphor for the series.

Alchemy was not only a system of scientific inquiry preceding chemistry; it was also a spiritual discipline. For the alchemist, each level of transmutation represented a stage in their own spiritual transformation. It was the alchemist's quest to transform his soul from base human to the gold of enlightenment. Through symbolism and metaphors, Rowling showed each year at Hogwarts as an increasing stage of alchemy[2]. Thus the seven-year pattern marks Harry Potter as a coming-of-age story with Harry's transformation from spiritual orphan to enlightened adult (as discovered through death and resurrection).

Rowling's school year pattern sets reader expectations for long, steady growth toward a goal, gives time for character growth and development, and hides through subtext key analogies and understandings of the series' underlying themes and mysteries.

What type of story patterns or frames should you use for your particular story? The answer to that question will be as individualistic as each story created—an adventure series might be framed in the context of a new journey for each book, a young adult novel could be based around a series of dates or athletic competitions, a thriller might be crafted around the trail of one murdered body to the next. Though there are as many ways to pattern a story as there are writers, there are certain elements which will help you to determine whether a story pattern is in service to your novel or not.

- 1) Does the pattern provide structure that helps convey all your wonderful ideas, or is it limiting and confining?
- 2) Is the pattern one which will feel natural and reasonable to your reader, or does it come across as a gimmick imposed by the author?

3) Is the pattern one which can be broken to show tremendous change and increasing conflict, or if it is broken, will the story fall apart?

4) Can you use the pattern in various ways to develop your characters, increase your conflict, pace the plot, and add a level of mystery and interest?

If you can answer all these questions in a positive way, then you've latched onto a structural pattern that can add great depth to your story and help shape it into something that will feel comfortable and familiar to the reader, while also providing another tool for growth and change.

#### **4) Seeing Spots and Spotting Cameos**

This last section departs from the previous three in that we'll discuss techniques used almost exclusively to hide and reveal clues rather than aid in character development, framing the plot, or intensifying conflict.

Rowling employs many techniques to lay her clues and red herrings. Specific details on how to craft clues for mystery plotting will be discussed in the next lesson. However, there are two that relate to establishing patterns and reader expectations: "spotting" a clue and villain teasers.

One technique Rowling used in the early books to note when a character was in disguise, was less than truthful, where she'd hidden a clue, or information was being withheld was to mark it with a "spot." The chart on the next two pages gives a few examples.

A few notes about the chart: not all "spotted" mentions are represented here. This is just a sampling. Also, Rowling tends to use versions of the word "spot" in her writing frequently. Not all of them point to clues or someone in disguise, but clearly some of them do. I bet she had great fun playing with the reader as to whether they could "spot" a few of her clues and disguises. Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Book	Page #	Quote	Camouflaged Item or Clue Spotted
Stone	5	As he pulled into the driveway of number four, the first thing he saw—and it didn't improve his mood—was the tabby cat he'd <b>spotted</b> that morning.	Professor McGonagall in <i>Animagus</i> form
	55	"You was just a year old. He came ter yer house an'—an'"  Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, <b>spotted</b> handkerchief and blew his nose ...	Hagrid is withholding info regarding what happened at Godric's Hollow and intimate knowledge of Tom Riddle.
Secrets	50	Harry looked quickly around and <b>spotted</b> a large black cabinet to his left...	The vanishing cabinet. Doesn't come to fruition until Half-Blood.
	155	Under a large, cracked, and <b>spotted</b> mirror were a row of chipped sinks.	The bathroom entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.
	156	Moaning Myrtle was floating above the tank of the toilet, picking a <b>spot</b> on her chin.	Moaning Myrtle was the girl killed 50 years before by the basilisk.
Azkaban	303	He peered out at the grounds again and, after a minute's frantic searching, <b>spotted</b> it. It was skirting the edge of the forest now...It wasn't the Grim at al...it was a cat.... Harry clutched the window ledge in relief as he recognized the bottlebrush tail. It was only Crookshanks...	Red herring—trying to throw suspicion on Crookshanks when it is really Scabbers, aka Wormtail. Also, the Grim is not who he appears to be.
Goblet	472	"Course Dumbledore trusts you," growled Moody. "He's a trusting man, isn't he? Believes in second chances. But me—I say there are <b>spots</b> that don't come off, Snape. <b>Spots</b> that never come off, d'you know what I mean?"	Refers to Snape's Dark Mark, but also Barty Crouch's own Dark Mark, concealed by his cover as Mad-Eye.

Another cute little trick Rowling plays is to give each book's villain a cameo appearance in chapter 13 (unlucky number). While Voldemort is the series' villain, each book has its own antagonist in disguise. To help the reader along in unmasking this book's villain, she established a pattern that provided her observant readers with a clue, once they latched onto it.

Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Book	Chapter 13 Title	“Villain” in Disguise	Their Cameo Role
Stone	Nicolas Flamel	Quirrell	Quirrell and Snape’s confrontation in the Forest. Snape appears to be the traitor, but that’s through Harry’s biased POV.
Secrets	The Very Secret Diary	Ginny Weasley	As a result of her Valentine, Ginny sees that Harry has Riddle’s diary and is terrified.
Azkaban	Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw	Sirius Black and Wormtail	Sirius breaks into the Gryffindor boys’ dormitory, trying to find Wormtail. But Pettigrew has pretended death and fled the scene.
Goblet	Mad-Eye Moody	Barty Crouch/Mad-Eye Moody	Moody transfigures Malfoy into a ferret. He appears to be Harry’s protector, but in reality, reveals the Dark side of Barty Crouch.
Phoenix	Detention with Delores	Umbridge	Through sentences carved in blood, Umbridge’s self-righteous mask is blasted away to reveal her sadistic, power hungry core.
Half-Blood	The Secret Riddle	Tom Riddle	Riddle appears to be a poor, defenseless orphan, but Dumbledore and Mrs. Cole see through him.
Hallows	The Muggle-born Registration Commission	Umbridge	She’s back! You can’t sink much lower than nailing Mad-Eye’s eye to your door.

I’m guessing this was just something fun Rowling played with. She’s definitely got a bit of Fred and George about her when it comes to laying her clues. She likes to see if you’ve got your wits about you.

Obsessed fans took tremendous pleasure in discovering one of Rowling’s patterns and then hunting out clues which related to it. This play with patterns is a powerful tool for those writing in genres where the concealing of secrets and reader involvement in unmasking them is

appealing. Mysteries are an obvious choice, but this technique could work on a subtextual level with almost any genre that employs a hint of mystery, suspense, or concealed secrets.

Although all the above analyses and tables are my own, I should gratefully acknowledge that I learned about the spots and chapter 13 cameos from Galadriel Waters at Wizarding World Press. Her *Ultimate Unofficial Guides to the Mysteries of Harry Potter* are the books that first started me searching out the clues within Rowling's world.

## When to Break Your Patterns

Rowling established her patterns, and then she broke them. Breaking a well-established pattern jars your reader. Used properly, this can be a powerful tool.

The POV breaks that readers experienced in latter books helped them comprehend the expanding borders of Harry's world. It was a great way to have the reader fully experience a world of increasing complexity and danger.

One of the most anticipated changes in *Deathly Hallows* was the removal of the year at Hogwarts structure. Harry stated at the end of *Half-Blood* that he would not be returning to Hogwarts for his seventh year. This jarred fans tremendously, but it demonstrated clearly how serious the war had become and how determined Harry was to accept his responsibility and fate. Harry's world had changed completely, and the maturing Harry was forced to change with it and accept his new responsibility.

Also, while Harry started out *Deathly Hallows* at the home of the Dursleys, we knew from the start that he would not return there at the end. His journey was complete. He finished the series a man on his own. The conflicts of his youth had passed away, as a result of his own actions. The mysteries had all been revealed, the Dark Lord conquered, and Harry's alchemical Philosopher's Stone attained.

The invisible wall separating the worlds of Muggles and Magic, which had been crumbling in the last few books, was restored by series end. Thankfully, Harry was firmly ensconced on the Magical side, though there will always be diagonal points of contact throughout his life...even with Dudley. The faithful readers were left to determine on which side of the great divide they'd choose to live—among the unobservant, unimaginative Muggles, or where their passions and imagination could truly take flight.

## **Take Away**

Patterns serve many purposes in crafting your story and presenting it to your reader. By setting reader expectations, they also provide powerful surprises when broken. By contributing to the molding of character and conflict, alterations demonstrate personal development and heightened tension. They are a great tool for framing plot structure and greatly accelerate pace when discarded. When well done, patterns hide and reveal tantalizing clues of what is yet to come, keeping your reader involved...and even obsessed.

Whether writing a series or crafting a single story, you can use patterns in your writing to great effect. Determine what structure and form you wish to give your story, your conflict, your character. Plot how your ideas can be revealed through pattern, then later propelled forward through the breaking of them. Leave your reader with a firm foundation under his feet by securing the promised patterns of your genre's boundaries, but then let loose your imagination to break free these structured walls and jolt your reader to new discoveries.

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# **Lesson Five**

## **The Dark Lord is in the Detail**

### **(Worldbuilding)**

Worldbuilding. It's a concept that drives terror into the heart of many a writer. Others seem to thrive on it, but maybe to the extreme. Many writers associate worldbuilding exclusively with the Science Fiction or Fantasy genre. In reality, we all must do it to one degree or another.

Creating the world for our characters to inhabit in a realistic, enchanting manner is a major force to draw the reader into our stories. Use it poorly, and the reader will throw your book against the wall as unbelievable. Use it well, and she'll revisit time and time again to live and play inside the delightful, engrossing world you've created.

As I noted in the first lesson—although there are many technical reasons for the HP phenomenon, there are three that top the list:

- 1) engaging, quirky characters,
- 2) the trail-of-clues mystery, and
- 3) a fabulous world to play in.

Most readers cite the worldbuilding as the lure that drew them into the series to begin with. Rowling constructed her world as solidly as the Shrieking Shack to hold the magic together. She riddled the text with such delightful detail that readers fully believed that they were living among wizards and witches, goblins and house-elves, giants and ghosts, and basilisks and hippogriffs.

Rowling uses many layers to create her world. The details are rich, well-developed, and usually quite fun. They also have deeper layers of meaning. Many of the details are taken from mythology and/or hide clues to the series' ongoing mysteries. Most are used more than once, in different ways. The chocolate frogs are not just a kid's sweet treat that binds Harry and Ron, but also reveal an important clue about Nicolas Flamel. Likewise, the gillywater is not just a drink McGonagall favors in *Azkaban*, but produced from a weed Harry needs in *Goblet* to breathe under water. Fans went crazy over Drooble's Best Blowing Gum trying to find anagrams and meaning in the wrapper Neville's mom repeatedly gives him (until Rowling zapped that theory on her website).

Through this lesson we'll look at the techniques Rowling successfully employs for worldbuilding and how to apply it to our own work:

### **Overview:**

- 1) Use a wide-angle lens—the broad characteristics that create a sense of a complete, bustling world.
- 2) Zoom in on the detail—adding depth, layers, and hiding places for clues.
- 3) Give that extra zing in detail and interaction.
- 4) Worldbuild the interaction among your characters.
- 5) Rule-build your world—how to ensure it all make sense together.
- 6) The laws of magic—constructing a coherent system.
- 7) Introduce your reader to your world.

### **Viewing Through a Wide-Angle Lens**

When you look at the Magical World Rowling has created through a wide-angle lens, you'll see a setting bursting at its seams. Although until *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry spends the bulk of his time in one location, the reader knows through references, Pensieve scenes, and “field trips” that Hogwarts is centered in a world as full and complex as the one we Muggles call home.

I find it highly significant that Harry's introduction to the Wizarding World was not at Hogwarts but at Diagon Alley. Think about it—Rowling could have had Harry's books and supplies provided by the school once he arrived. However, she wanted the reader to experience from the start that the Special World Harry was entering was full and complete and only diagonally set apart from our own.

At Diagon Alley, in that first visit with Hagrid, Harry encounters the Leaky Cauldron, Tom the barman, all the customers who are thrilled to finally meet him, Doris Crockford several times, and hears about vampires from the stuttering Professor Quirrell. He passes shops and pedestrians on his way to the wizarding bank, Gringotts, where he meets goblins and hurtles hundreds of miles below London on a wild amusement park ride, past an underground lake and dragons, to his own vault of gold. He notices several boys his age with their noses pressed up against a shop window, all gazing longingly at the Nimbus 2000, and he meets a snotty rich kid trying on robes at Madam Malkin's who asks if his parents were “our kind.” He visits Flourish and Blotts, the Apothecary, and Eeylops Owl Emporium as

he acquires his books, quills, parchment, a cauldron, potion supplies, and a birthday gift from Hagrid—Hedwig. Finally, at Ollivanders, his wand chooses him, and he learns the special connection he has through his wand's phoenix core to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

All of that in one chapter.

As the book and the series progress, Harry's Special World, like Perkins' tent or the trunk of the Ford Anglia, magically enlarges even more. He hears about, experiences as visions through the Pensieve or dreams, or visits places that all play a major role in not only fleshing out his world, but properly casting and telling the story. There are vital clues and information that need to be conveyed to the reader in each of these settings, shown on the chart on the next page.

The chart is by no means an exhaustive list. I just hit the biggies. All these added dimensions gave a wide scope to Harry's world. Even the minor settings, however, contributed to the whole.

Azkaban is fully realized in most readers' minds, even though Harry never actually visited there. The witches from Salem Massachusetts are mentioned in the Quidditch World Cup scene as a nod to her American audience. And who would have loved to see Stubby Boardman get hit in the ear with a turnip at his concert in the Little Norton Church Hall, as mentioned by The Quibbler?

Through inexhaustible details supplied by the magical witch or wizard cards, history of magic classes, articles in the *Daily Prophet*, mentions in the schoolbooks *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*, and notes and updates to Rowling's website, various other locations are mentioned. As well as hiding clues, these secondary settings contribute to the build-up of a world that feels as if it's been around for a long time. Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Setting/Element	Muggle Parallel	Important Element(s)
Hogsmeade	An entirely magical village	Aberforth, Madam Rosmerta, secret passageways into Hogwarts, as well as places for dates, candies, and pranks for students.
St. Mungo's	Hospital	The condition of Neville's parents.
Ministry of Magic	Government	Fudge, the Department of Mysteries, the nature of power and corruption.
Department of Mysteries	Research facility	A prophecy, some brains, a veiled arch, and lots of mysteries.
Beauxbatons and Durmstrang	Foreign schools	Fleur, idea of international cooperation.
Azkaban	Prison	Sirius and Bellatrix, and political abuse/torture through the Dementors.
The Burrow	The Weasley home	The Weasleys, Harry's adopted family.
Grimmauld Place	Sirius Black's home and Order headquarters	Familial connections in the wizarding world. Oh, and a Horcrux.
Godric's Hollow	Lily and James' home village	Where it all started, Harry's parents' grave, and one very important symbol.
Quidditch World Cup	The World Soccer Cup	Krum and both Barty Crouches.
The Daily Prophet	Newspaper	Lots of propaganda and misinformation, and a few nuggets of truth.
The Quibbler	A tabloid	An alternative view of the world as well as a few nuggets of truth.
Little Hangleton	Riddle and Gaunt hometown	Tom Riddle's first murder and a Horcrux.
Tom Riddle's orphanage	Riddle's "home"	The nature of the orphaned Tom.
Tom Riddle's cave	Riddle's hiding place	A fake Horcrux and the transition from Dumbledore leading Harry to Harry supporting his mentor.
Slughorn's home	Muggle dwelling	A good Slytherin with a crucial memory.
Malfoy Manor	Rich "gated" mansion	The Malfoy's; Voldemort's "Council" meeting.

Special mention should be given about the schoolbook set *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Quidditch Through the Ages*. Rowling produced these two extra volumes as a charity project for Comic Relief, UK. However, she didn't just thoughtlessly cobble something together and throw it out there. These two imitation schoolbooks serve a very real purpose in both her worldbuilding and mystery plotting. They provide the

insatiable HP fanatic with loads of worldbuilding detail that just could not fit within the already mammoth volumes, but also hide clues pointing to the series' mysteries. For example, nifflers played a fun role in terrorizing Umbridge in *Phoenix* (published in 2003), but they were mentioned in *Fantastic Beasts* (published in 2001) as loving anything glittery...with a warning as they are destructive to belongings (p. 30). Fred and George must have read *Fantastic Beasts* before passing the nifflers on to Lee Jordan.

The other tremendous benefit Rowling enjoyed from having developed this level of worldbuilding also relates to *Fantastic Beasts*. When after the series was finished and she decided she wasn't quite done with the Wizarding World, she was able to pick up what had originally been a slim, fun companion book, and turn it into a three-film franchise. She has been able to transition to both screen and stage (through *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*) with new stories by drawing on a world so fully realized and loved that she already has a built-in audience.

Rowling sets her series through a very wide lens. The reader experiences a vibrant world thriving and interacting on a daily basis. A world full of people who are going to be affected by Harry's choices. Some of these people would live or die as a direct result of Harry's actions.

Harry is an epic hero. His actions and choices have wide-ranging consequences. In a story such as this, the world must be set extra-large in order for the reader to truly accept that Harry's fate affects so many.

Of course, Rowling had a seven-book series to work in these various scenes and elements, and oftentimes we're constricted to one book, and a restricted word-count at that. Or our story may be of a quieter nature. Our hero or heroine may not determine the fate of the world. Their actions will still affect others, however, and those others must be determined and portrayed before the end of the book. The reader must believe that your world is just as real, just as appealing (even if in a dark manner, as in suspense or horror), as this fantasy one Rowling created.

To me, worldbuilding starts with three key questions:

- 1) Who will be affected by my protagonist's choices?
- 2) Who are the necessary support characters to aid my protagonist on his or her journey?
- 3) Where do these people live, work, socialize, shop, and otherwise interact with others?

You build your world based on those who will affect your heroine and those who will be affected by her. Then you spread out from there as needed. An epic quest will require a broader world than a cozy mystery. Each requires an interesting world, a full world, a world the reader believes in and wishes to spend some time in.

So look at your settings through a wide-angle lens. Have you developed the necessary components to suit your genre and your story? Does it need more fleshing out? Make sure as you flesh it, however, you do so with a purpose, not merely hiring extras to puff up your budget. All settings, all worldbuilding elements must contribute to the story meaningfully, whether through adding mystery elements, aiding your heroine on her journey, or showing the results of your heroine's choices and actions.

## Focusing in Through a Zoom Lens

Before we get into this section, I'd like for you to read chapter five, "Diagon Alley," in *Philosopher's/ Sorcerer's Stone*. Pay attention to the extreme detail with which Rowling created this introduction to the magical world. Notice not only the meticulous listing of uniforms, books, and equipment Harry will need to purchase, but the "windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon." (p. 72) Remember the smell of the Apothecary, "a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs, and snarled claws hung from the ceiling." (p. 80-81)

Go on, read. I've only noted a couple of items and you really need to read this chapter, focused on her minute worldbuilding, to truly appreciate the imagination she put into creating Harry's world.

Now that you've returned—Rowling filled her world with such exquisite details, and loads of them, that her critics claimed it was overdone. But consider her primary market—kids eat this stuff up, quite literally:

- Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans
- Drooble's Best Blowing Gum
- Chocolate Frogs
- Cauldron Cakes
- Licorice Wands

- Pepper Imps
- Sugar Quills
- Blood Flavored Lollipops
- Cockroach Clusters
- Fudge Flies
- Butterbeer
- Gillywater
- Ogden's Old Firewhiskey
- Pumpkin Pasties
- Jelly Slugs
- Fizzing Whizbees
- Ice Mice
- Peppermint Toads
- Acid Pops
- Hagrid's Treacle Fudge
- Mulled Mead
- Elderflower Wine
- Maggoty Haggis (served at the Deathday Party)

This is a short list, to give you the idea. Notice that Rowling doesn't pad her world with just any kind of food, but interesting, fun treats and drinks that will tempt the hungry imagination of her audience.

And Rowling doesn't limit her creativity to foods. Here's a sampling of the school books mentioned:

- *Advanced Potion-Making* by Libatius Borage

(lists instructions for making the Draught of Living Death)

- *The Beaters' Bible* by Brutus Scrimgeour

(wonder if he's related to Rufus Scrimgeour?)

- *Blood Brothers: My Life Amongst the Vampires* by Eldred Worple
- *Broken Balls: When Fortunes Turn Foul*
- *Charm Your Own Cheese* by Gerda Catchlove
- *Dragon Breeding for Pleasure and Profit*
- *The Dream Oracle* by Inigo Imago
- ***Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*** by Newt Scamander
- *Gadding with Ghouls* by Gilderoy Lockhart

- *Guide to Advanced Transfiguration*
- ***Hairy Snout, Human Heart***
- *Handbook of Do-It-Yourself Broom Care*
- *Handbook of Hippogriff Psychology*
- ***A History of Magic*** by Bathilda Bagshot
- ***Hogwarts: A History***

(a treasure trove of information)

- *Invisible Book of Invisibility*

(Flourish and Blotts could never find them)

- *Magical Me* by Gilderoy Lockhart
- ***Magical Water Plants of the Mediterranean***
- ***Magick Most Evile***

(mentions the Horcrux)

- *Men Who Love Dragons Too Much*
- ***Moste Potente Potions***

(contains instructions for brewing the Polyjuice Potion)

- ***Nature's Nobility: A Wizarding Genealogy***
- *One Minute Feasts—It's Magic!*
- *Quidditch Through the Ages* by Kennilworthy Whisp
- ***Quintessence: A Quest***
- *Unfogging the Future* by Cassandra Vablatsky

Again, though it may not seem like it, this is a brief sample. I compiled it from a complete one, with notes, at the *Harry Potter Lexicon* ([www.hp-lexicon.org/wizworld/books.html](http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizworld/books.html)). Check out the link if you want to obsess over probable clues within certain texts.

Although almost every book Rowling created contributed to her worldbuilding in more than one way, those that I bolded played a particularly important role. These books either highlighted an important theme, conveyed useful information, or hinted at an ongoing mystery or upcoming plot twist.

While most of the foods listed earlier are thrown in to add flavor, some of them also contain clues or play a role in the story (Chocolate Frog Cards provided a clue to Flamel, Acid Pops were a password to Dumbledore's

office). Most of Rowling's details add something extra, whether hiding or highlighting a clue, or providing information on the history or backstory of the characters and setting. Few of these details are thrown in just as fluff. In other words, if she mentions a flower that Harry passes en route to Hagrid's, she's going to specify the color and variety, and both are probably going to hint at a theme or mystery.

Let's look at two last charts of the detailed worldbuilding Rowling excels at. Here are the floors and descriptions for both the Ministry of Magic and St. Mungo's. Download a PDF version at <http://depriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

#### Ministry of Magic Level Guide:

Level/Floor	Department
Level One	Unknown
Level Two	Department of Magical Law Enforcement: Improper Use of Magic Office, <del>Auror</del> Headquarters, Wizengamot Administration Services
Level Three	Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes: Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, <del>Obliviator</del> Headquarters, Muggle-Worthy Excuse Committee
Level Four	Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures: Beast, Being and Spirit Divisions, Goblin Liaison Office, Pest Advisory Bureau
Level Five	Department of International Magical Cooperation: International Magical Trading Standards Body, the International Magical Office of Law, the International Confederation of Wizards, British Seats
Level Six	Department of Magical Transport: Floo Network Authority, Broom Regulatory Control Portkey Office, <del>Apparition</del> Test Centre
Level Seven	Department of Magical Games and Sports: British and Irish Quidditch League Headquarters, Official <del>Gobstones</del> Club, Ludicrous Patents Office
Level Eight	The Atrium, fireplaces for arrivals and departures, lifts to other floors, Visitor Check-in, Fountain of Magical Brethren
Level Nine	Department of Mysteries: Circular Room with 12 Doors, Brain Room, Death Chamber, Hall of Prophecy, Locked Room, Planet Room, Time Room. Offices
Level Ten	Courtroom Ten, probably other courtrooms not specified

**Note:** Level Ten is the lowest, Level One the highest.  
(p. 129-136, *Phoenix*)

St. Mungo's Floor Guide:

Floor	Division
Ground	ARTIFACT ACCIDENTS Cauldron explosion, wand backfiring, broom crashes, etc.
First	CREATURE-INDUCED INJURIES Bites, stings, burns, embedded spines, etc.
Second	MAGICAL BUGS Contagious maladies, e.g. dragon pox, vanishing sickness, <u>scrofungulus</u> , etc.
Third	POTION AND PLANT POISONING Rashes, regurgitation, uncontrollable giggling, etc.
Fourth	SPELL DAMAGE <u>Unliftable</u> jinxes, hexes, and incorrectly applied charms, etc.
Fifth	VISITORS' TEAROOM AND HOSPITAL SHOP

(p. 485-486, *Phoenix*)

From the Department of International Magical Cooperation in *Goblet* to the Department of Mysteries in *Phoenix*, every single floor of the Ministry played a role in the series. With all of the hexes, Hagrid's creatures, and threatened poisonings passing through the halls of Hogwarts, Rowling could probably have filled every one of St. Mungo's floors as well.

She puts an incredible amount of thought behind each element she creates to not only make it meet the story's needs, but to contribute beyond mere window dressing. Whether emphasizing a theme, provide information, or hide clues, the details pack a powerful whomp.

The purpose of creating the zoom-lens detail is similar to that for creating the wide-lens view: fleshing out a full world and providing plaster and paint to the themes and feel of the novel. In Rowling's world, this all fleshes out a world of fun and magic. Later, the details contribute to the increasing dark tone, to the mysteries, and the sense of impending doom.

The worldbuilding you construct for your story will vary greatly by genre and target audience. A mystery should be filled with details as clues or red herrings. A romance will be packed with hints of the developing love between characters, with their backstory adding emotional luggage which

must be dealt with before true union can be reached. A thriller or suspense should have details that hike the tension and darken the feel.

How full you fill your world will also vary by target market length. If you're writing a short, category romance, where the focus is tight on the developing romantic relationship, you probably will not spend as many words fleshing out a complete world as someone writing an historical fantasy. However, you still need to do what is necessary.

Determine the parts of the world that greatly affect your story and flesh them out. Choose your descriptions judiciously, opting for those that set the item out of the ordinary. In other words, you wouldn't describe a closet as dark and cramped; the reader will assume that. Describe instead what sets it apart, what distinguishes it from other closets. That's where you spend your words.

As with the wide-lens, you don't want to throw details in willy-nilly to plump up your word count. We discussed in a prior lesson the analogy of pregnancy to book writing, the need to make every word count. That analogy is never more true than when discussing worldbuilding. Make each word earn its place in your story. In order to feel as if they're living in your world, your reader needs the fullness, but in order to earn their space on the printed page, each word must work double duty—provide description and provide meaning.

For me, while the wide-angle level of detail usually is preliminary work, either while I'm plotting the story or in an early draft, the zoom lens is one I best employ in the multiple revisions and final draft stages. It seems to me that I can more accurately pinpoint that description of an ancient relic, a garden the heroine works in, the foods at a romantic dinner, once I know and understand my characters, their conflicts, and my plot the best. This usually happens later. I might nail some details early on, but mostly they have to be refined and revised as I plow through endless edits.

Endless edits are one of the acts that separate would-be writers from published authors, and it's nailing these worldbuilding details that's one of the primary reasons (as well as details of character, details of plot, details of conflict). If in an initial round you cannot picture exactly how that threatening death mask sent from your villain to your heroine will look, don't sweat it. Mark your place, keep the flow of words going, and go back to it in a later revision. When you have plumbed the depths and the

mysteries of your characters and your story, then the features of the death mask will come to you as if you knew it all along.

## Giving that Extra Zing

Remember how we talked in prior lessons about giving your reader more? More depth of character, more layers of themes and analogies, more subtext, more clues? In building your world, not only do you want to give more in wideness and detail, but you want some of those details to sizzle with an **extra zing** to really thrill your reader.

Let me give a few examples, first in a scene where the trio are trying to find their way to Divinations and Harry notices a painting of a fat, dapple-gray pony:

A moment later, a **short, squat** knight in a suit of armor clanked into the picture after his pony. By the **look of the grass stains on his metal knees, he had just fallen off**.

“Aha!” he yelled, seeing Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “What villains are these, that trespass upon my private lands! Come to scorn at my fall, perchance? Draw, **you knaves, you dogs!**”

They watched in astonishment as the little knight tugged his sword out of its scabbard and **began brandishing it violently, hopping up and down in rage**. But the sword was too long for him; a particularly **wild swing made him overbalance, and he landed facedown in the grass**.

“Are you all right?” said Harry, moving closer to the picture.

“Get back, you scurvy braggart! Back, you rogue!”

The knight seized his sword again and used it to **push himself back up, but the blade sank deeply into the grass** and, though he pulled with all his might, he couldn’t get it out again. Finally, he had to flop back down onto the grass and **push up his visor to mop his sweating face**.

At this point, Harry asks the knight the way to the North Tower.

“A quest!” The knight’s rage seemed to vanish instantly. He **clanked to his feet** and shouted, “Come follow me, **dear friends**, and we shall find our goal, or else shall perish bravely in the charge!”

He **gave the sword another fruitless tug, tried and failed to mount the fat pony, gave up**, and cried, “On foot then, good sirs and gentle lady! On! On!”

And he ran, clanking loudly, into the left side of the frame and out of sight.

They hurried after him along the corridor, following the sound of his armor. Every now and then they **spotted** him running through a picture ahead.

“**Be of stout heart, the worst is yet to come!**” yelled the knight...

“Farewell!” cried the knight, **popping his head into a painting of some sinister-looking monks.** “Farewell, my **comrades-in-arms!**....”

(p. 99-101, *Azkaban*)

This is a long example, but it's a good one for many reasons. Most of the phrases I highlighted are because I find them a delightful bit of detailed imagination which bring this pseudo-man within a fantasy world completely to life. Notice how the descriptions pass quickly because they are interwoven with action and dialogue, not dropped in one boring lump. This is detail that moves and sings and gives the reader more than just the minimum needed—a knight in a picture pointing the trio's way.

Rowling's imagination is pure delight. How many of you ever had to find your way to class by following behind a deranged knight on a quest through other paintings? Notice the sweat on his face, the sinister-looking monks (how can monks be sinister looking?). It's this type of imaginative imagery that really thrills the readers and makes them obsess over Harry Potter.

“Spot,” too, how Harry, Ron, and Hermione go from being “knives” and “**dogs**” to “good friends” to “comrades-in-arms.” With these details in a book that centers on Sirius (Padfoot) going from being viewed as a murdering betrayer or the deathly Grim, to loyal friend at the end of *Azkaban*, and comrade-in-arms by *Phoenix*—I hardly think this **dog** reference, or this set-up, is accidental. After all, the reader must **be of stout heart, for the worst is yet to come!** Thus, this bit of worldbuilding packs a powerful clue-filled punch.

Here's a slightly different example from *Goblet*:

The Hogwarts staff, demonstrating a continued desire to impress the visitors from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, seemed determined to show the castle at its best this Christmas...**Everlasting icicles** had been attached to the banisters of the marble staircase; the usual twelve Christmas trees in the Great Hall were bedecked with everything from **luminous holly berries** to **real, hooting, golden owls**, and the **suits of armor** had all been bewitched to sing carols whenever anyone passed them. It was quite something to hear "O Come, All Ye Faithful" sung

by an empty helmet that only knew half the words. Several times, Filch the caretaker had to extract Peeves from inside the armor, where he had taken to hiding, filling in the gaps in the songs with lyrics of his own invention, all of which were very rude.

(p. 395, *Goblet*)

Even though this is a lump of description, it's kept from being boring by the imaginative, unusual imagery, and the action within. That last bit, about Peeves filling in rude lyrics, is the zest. Rowling could easily have stopped with the everlasting icicles, the hooting, gold owls, and the singing suits of armor. That would have provided the whimsical Christmas feel she was after. In taking it that extra level—the Peeves factor—she adds an elusive zing to really make the whole description come alive...and loads of fun.

One of my favorite descriptions on steroids, which has already been presented in lesson two, was the Christmas tree gnome topping the Weasley tree in *Half-Blood*.

Stupefied, painted gold, stuffed into a miniature tutu and with small wings glued to its back, it glowered down at them all, the ugliest angel Harry had ever seen, with a large bald head like a potato and rather hairy feet.

(p. 309, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

Those hairy feet add the zing to an already delightful description. I would love to be able to come up with something so clever, amusing, and imaginative.

What nuance can you add to your perfectly good description to give it that extra sparkle?

Creating with such descriptive flair may come to you naturally, out of the blue, when your mind is at rest, or when you're focused and tapping away at your creation. Or, like many of us, you may have to work at it. Talk your story aloud, brainstorm with a friend, keep a notebook beside you when you're driving or walking or your mind is at rest. Notice the world around you in all its amazing detail. Pick up a good book, one you go back to read again and again, notice the details within its pages, study the author's techniques. Then revise, revise, revise.

This level of detail comes through many layers of polishing. With practice, you'll learn how to add a special layer to your story, in an

appropriate way, to really tie-up your Christmas tree gnomes and make Peeves sing from your suit of armor.

As with everything we analyze with Rowling, you have to modify the technique to fit your story and your genre. Spice up your world, your description, in your way, to give your reader that extra nuance that deepens the feel of your story. Engross them further in your world. Demand that they sit and turn pages without losing their attention until the very last one.

Keep in mind that these details are to be woven in. **A little zing goes a long way.** You don't want paragraph upon paragraph of description without dialogue and action keeping the pace afloat. No matter how interesting the imagery, narrative exposition still slows the pace.

What you're looking for here is compact punch. Hit your description, hit it hard, twist it out of the ordinary, make it sparkle. Dazzle your reader and bring your world live.

## Worldbuild Your Character Interactions

Another way to take your detail to an extra level is to worldbuild how your characters interact with one another, not just your setting. For what I mean by this, take a look at the scene in *Secrets* where Draco calls Hermione a Mudblood, and Ron's spell-o-taped wand backfires his curse:

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead he gave **an almighty belch and several slugs dribbled out of his mouth onto his lap.**

The Slytherin team were paralyzed with laughter...

"We'd better get him to Hagrid's, it's nearest," said Harry to Hermione...

"What happened, Harry? What happened? Is he ill? But you can cure him, can't you?" **Colin had run down from his seat and was now dancing alongside them as they left the field.** Ron gave a huge heave and more slugs dribbled down his front.

"Oooh," said **Colin, fascinated and raising his camera. "Can you hold him still, Harry?"**...

They were within twenty feet of Hagrid's house when the front door opened, but it wasn't Hagrid who emerged. **Gilderoy Lockhart, wearing robes of palest mauve today, came striding out...**

"**It's a simple matter if you know what you're doing!**" Lockhart was saying loudly to Hagrid. "**If you need help, you know where I am! I'll let you have a copy of my book. I'm surprised you haven't already got**

one—I'll sign one tonight and send it over. Well, good-bye!" And he strode away toward the castle...

Hagrid appeared at once, looking very grumpy, but his expression brightened when he saw who it was.

"Bin wonderin' when you'd come ter see me—come in, come in—  
thought you mighta bin Professor Lockhart back again—"

(p. 113-114, *Secrets*)

Another long example, but this is a good, simple one for showing how Rowling makes her characters and plot work together to create a fully interacting world.

Strictly speaking, neither Colin Creevey nor Lockhart are necessary to the point of this scene. We don't need to see Colin yet again clicking his camera nor Lockhart aggravating Hagrid with unasked for advice to get the point that Draco was quite nasty in calling Hermione a mudblood and Ron defended her. Neither Colin nor Lockhart add to the primary conflict of this scene, and most writers would not have included them.

However, Colin and Lockhart are central to this book's plot and mysteries. Their appearance here prepares the reader for their later close-ups. Also, we see Lockhart interacting primarily with Hagrid, and Colin for once not trying to get Harry's autograph, his camera focused on Ron. **In showing actions between secondary characters that don't solely center on their interaction with Harry, Rowling creates a more robust, believable world.**

In other words, your secondary characters should not only be seen as they interact with your protagonist. They should also mingle with each other. They should have relationships, conflicts, and baggage with people other than your hero. You won't give much space to this, but if you want to reflect a full, busy fully-interconnected world, you can definitely hint at it.

Here's another example with a different focus in *Half-Blood Prince*, after Harry has been given the Half-Blood potions book and tells Ron and Hermione about it:

"I s'pose you think I cheated?" he finished, aggravated by her expression.

"Well, it wasn't exactly your own work, was it?" she said stiffly.

"He only followed different instructions to ours," said Ron...

"Hang on," said a voice close by Harry's left ear and he caught a sudden waft of that flowery smell he had picked up in Slughorn's

dungeon. He looked around and saw that Ginny had joined them. “Did I hear right? You’ve been taking orders from something someone wrote in a book, Harry?”

She looked alarmed and angry. Harry knew what was on her mind at once.

“It’s nothing,” he said reassuringly, lowering his voice. “It’s not like, you know, Riddle’s diary. It’s just an old textbook someone’s scribbled on.”

“But you’re doing what it says?”

“I just tried a few of the tips written in the margins, honestly, Ginny, there’s nothing funny—”

(p. 182-183, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

With Ginny’s simple interruption and question, Rowling accomplishes quite a bit:

1. There’s a hint of the romantic relationship to come as Ginny’s smell reminds Harry of Amortentia, the most powerful love potion in the world that smells differently to each person according to what attracts them.
2. Ginny has quite definitely been paying more attention to Harry than she’s let on, if not outright eavesdropping.
3. The reader is reminded of Riddle’s diary and how a book can be used against a person or for Dark magic.
4. Suspicion is thus cast on Harry’s new potion book and a link made from the Half-Blood Prince to Voldemort.

Once again, strictly speaking, Ginny is not needed in this scene. Rowling has already used Hermione to throw suspicion on the diary without Ginny’s appearance. However, Ginny’s interruption intensifies the possible danger of Harry’s new book while throwing multiple hints about the romance to come. Thus, her short appearance and simple questions aid the plot and mysteries in multiple ways. This is interaction with depth and layers that contribute greatly to building a realistic, fully interconnected world.

Take that extra step to create a depth of interactions among your characters. Add interactions that stray outside a narrow focus, but flesh out the world more realistically. Take the extra time, once an initial draft of a scene is complete, to think—what more could I do here? **Who else in my**

**world could interact in this scene in a meaningful way?** Which other of my characters will this new conflict affect, and how? How can my characters mix with each other aside from my hero? Just be sure you add depth with meaning and not just empty padding.

## **Rule-Building: Appoint Yourself Minister for Magic**

So, you've blocked-in the background on the canvas of your world and filled it in with paintbrush-fulls of interesting detail, giving many of those an extra touch, a delightful zing. As you stand back and gaze upon your completed landscape, one major worldbuilding task remains. You must make sure that it all looks good together.

In order for your fabulous creation to appear as equally awe-inspiring to your reader as it does to you, it must make sense as a whole. If your reader just sees it as a hodgepodge of attention-grabbing but incongruent elements, she's not likely to buy into your story long enough to keep on reading.

If you're writing a space opera, have you sufficiently studied the laws of physics and the principles of aerodynamics, not to mention the nature of a laser beam, to create your world realistically? Or, if you've worldbuilt an amusement park where ancient dinosaurs come to life, do you know enough about cloning and dinosaur behavior to have your world make sense? If you've created a matriarchal world of cave-dwellers, do you then have a council of men making the important decisions?

There is real danger among beginning science fiction and fantasy writers to think that just because they are dealing with speculative fiction anything goes. This is one reason for a vast amount of rejections from agents and editors. You can't simply throw a world on the page because it sounds cool and suits your storytelling purposes. It has to make sense on some level of the laws of the known universe. Your world has to seem to the reader as if it truly does exist, that it all belongs together and has been in existence for whatever timeline your story calls for. Plus, within the story, you must have an internal guide to what can and cannot happen in your particular world according to the type of story you are telling.

In order to achieve this level of authenticity, you must appoint yourself chief legislature of your world and design and implement all the necessary legalese which will keep your minions running true to form. As your own Minister for Magic, after you sign your bills into law, any item in your

worldbuilding which you find does not fit, must be either cast aside or adapted to the new order.

This rule building may also be done at the beginning of your worldbuilding. I'm putting it near the end because I think with newer authors it's usually more fruitful to just dive into your creation. Get your hands all gooey and squishy with the lump of clay you're trying to shape. Only once your creativity is burning at high flame, then fire the shape you've finally created, be that a vase, a serving bowl, or a face-jug. Old-timers to this process, those who have created worldbuilds before, will be familiar enough with how to give shape to their clay and what final form they desire that they may prefer to set their regulations in place from the start as to avoid less waste at the end. Whatever works best for you.

When we look at Harry Potter, the votes were in place early on from a massive amount of readers that the world Rowling had created made complete, exciting, sense. Fans voted with their wallets. Later, they voted with their involvement, playing in her world with their theories and fan fiction. It was quite evident through the books, and as confirmed with interviews, that Rowling had spent massive amounts of time beforehand planning the elements of her world and how each would relate to another. She knew what belonged in her world and what didn't. In her head, she had guidelines to follow for her creation.

The five years I spent on HP and the Philosopher's Stone were spent constructing The Rules. I had to lay down all my parameters. The most important thing to decide when you're creating a fantasy world is what the characters CAN'T do...

[www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/0700-swns-alfie.htm](http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/0700-swns-alfie.htm)

Some of her specific rules include:

- The happiest people don't become ghosts.
- No magic power can resurrect a truly dead person.
- Something that you conjure out of thin air will not last.
- The animal one turns into as an Animagus reflects your personality.
- You can do unfocused and uncontrolled magic without a wand, but to do really good magic you need a wand.

[www.accio-quote.org/themes/therules.htm](http://www.accio-quote.org/themes/therules.htm)

If you'd like to read more of her rules, check out the Accio-Quote's page listed above.

Even though Rowling brought together a vast array of elements to her world—ghosts and poltergeists, trolls and giants, and dragons and merpeople—she gathered them in such a way that worked. Her world of mythic elements had once lived and breathed among Muggles, which is how these magical beings became known to us and passed down in folklore, until the Muggles became too much of a problem to deal with—all those witch burnings. So, the International Confederation of Wizards implemented an International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy. Ever since, the goblins and centaurs and house-elves have been protected underground with the witches and wizards who serve both as their protectors and their paternalistic overlords.

To get into the nitty-gritty of how to create and enforce your own rule-building, it would be helpful to look at a specific subset of Rowling's world and how she did it—her laws of magic.

## The Laws of Magic

Rowling draws from traditional motifs in weaving her magic, such as Latin words for the casting of spells, curses, and potions. She weaves in elements traditionally associated with witches in her potion ingredients, animal familiars, and mythical names. Because she uses traditional elements comfortable to the reader (and obviously does quite a bit of research), her magic feels old, mystical, and recognizable.

She creates magic so real that it seems to flow from her characters, an integral part of their personalities and their world. Indeed, that's the key to how she makes magic seem vital, by tying it inherently to the people who use it, varying it by personalities and intent.

The wand chooses the wizard and no other wand will work as well for that wizard. Before entering Hogwarts, magic seeps from the magical child's pores, exhibited at times of emotional stress or delight. It works within the natural world—things conjured out of nothing are indefinite, remaining in existence for only a limited time. You can't just pick up any wand and say the words. You must understand the charm, feel the power, focus the mind. More powerful charms require more powerful intent and emotions. According to Pseudo Mad-Eye, the whole class of fourth years could utter an Unforgivable Curse, and he wouldn't get more than a nosebleed.

As Rowling said in the interview mentioned above, she constructed rules, theories, and limits to engineer her magical works. Here are some that

come through in her writing:

**1) Magic is intrinsic to the individual.** It's as much a part of the witch as her heart or lungs and is not constrained by bloodlines or birth. It can pop up naturally anywhere, among any type of person, though it does tend to run in families. Quite often a Muggle-born child will not even realize the magical abilities they possess (though they will know they are somehow different) until they receive their invitation to Hogwarts. In this way it seems to be like a genetic predisposition, similar to natural hair or eye color, height or eyesight. Something that is beyond the witch or wizard's control.

**2) Magic must be nurtured and taught.** While the trait occurs naturally, the ability doesn't develop without guidance and training. In this way it's similar to an athletic or musical ability. A person may be born with the physical body or the neuro-programming to make a great athlete or musician, but nothing will come of it if they don't study and train, with discipline. So while the power of a witch or wizard may reflect to some extent on their birthright, its fruition reflects more fully on the work and discipline they put into developing it themselves.

**3) Magic varies by the person using it.** It is modified or adapted based on the personality of the user or bearer. You see this clearly in the use of the Unforgivable Curses. Bellatrix uses them effortlessly, and it's not just because she's an older, more developed witch. It's also because her dark personality empowers the dark curses. There is also the example of the Amortentia potion, which smelled differently to each person based on what attracted them. Lily was gifted at charms, while James favored transfiguration. Different people possess varying abilities and interests.

**4) Related to the above but slightly different, magic reflects the person using it.** Whereas the rule above shows changes in the effectiveness of the curse or impression of the potion, this rule shows how what certain magic produces varies by individuals, reflecting the personality conjuring it. This is clearly demonstrated in the Animagi, the Patronus, and the Boggarts. All of these magical elements change from individual to individual, no two being exactly alike, demonstrating the power of the personality in projecting the magic. Magic varying by personality is similar to a fingerprint, except the Patronus, Animagi, and Boggart are a lot more interesting.

**5) Magic reflects the natural order of the world** (or at least our study of it). There is the magic of potions, most like cooking (bet Snape would love that comparison). There is the magic of herbology—gardening or pharmacology. Transfiguration seems an awful lot like engineering. Arithmancy—math. Muggle Studies—Social Studies. The obvious History (of Magic), which really isn't magic itself but the study of those who have used it. Then there are the sciences, which include Astronomy and Care of Magical Creatures—zoology. Charms—involves the discipline of learning any new skill.

**6) Anything conjured solely by magic cannot last for long.** The leprechaun's gold disappeared, much to Ron's dismay. Magical folk must work for a living, unless they inherit great wealth, just like us Muggles. While a love potion may conjure temporary feelings of love, it will not last once the potion is no longer given—as we saw with Merope Gaunt and Tom Riddle, Sr.

**7) Like everything else in the world, magic has a dark and light side, and many shades of gray.** It can be used for good, evil, or something not quite either. Magic can save an innocent man from death, or worse, the loss of his soul. It can also rip a soul into seven pieces by taking the lives of others. Magic can bring schools and nations together, as in the Triwizard Tournament and the Quidditch World Cup. It can also tear families and communities apart, as when the Dark Mark appears over a loved one's home or the fallout between Gryffindor and Slytherin. How a person is raised and taught greatly influences how they will use their natural abilities—just as in the real world.

**8) Magic has constraints, limitations, and counterbalances—there are boundaries.** Magic will not solve your personal issues or the world's ills. It's merely a tool. It cannot give you a Nimbus 2000 if you don't have the money, change a person's emotions indefinitely, or bring a loved one back from the dead to real life. **For each action taken by magic there is usually a counter-effect or balance.**

This last point is one of the most difficult to imagine and use, but one of the most important. As the Muggle Minister asked, why hadn't the wizarding world caught and stopped Voldemort if they could do magic? The true answer is not only because Voldemort can do magic as well, but because magic has its limits. Be careful of creating your magic in such a way that it is all powerful—then where is your conflict, where is your

growth and development, where is your story? Even Superman must have his kryptonite.

In using magic, you must think of the repercussions for other parts of your script. Take Apparition for example—a legitimate question from readers is why didn't Lily take Harry and just Apparate out of Godric's Hollow away from Voldemort?<sup>[8]</sup> Why would any witch or wizard not Apparate out of a dangerous situation? That's why there must be limitations placed upon the magic and you must think through clearly to all the plot holes each magical element will introduce.

This is pretty hard to do. In writing straight contemporaries, it's easier to remember that you have to deal with a heroine-in-jeopardy's ability to make a cell phone call, because most of us use a cell phone every day. But how many of us can Apparate? Thus, that little nuance isn't going to pop into your head naturally as you write out a situation in which Apparition might be a possibility. You must think, you must plan, you must set the limits, and you must reflect on all aspects of the story where this bit of magic may occur. Magic has to be carefully constructed and its limits fully fleshed out both in magical theory and in construction of your plot.

With each piece of magic you create and use, reflect on what its boundary and opposition is. How can it be counterbalanced? How can it be stopped? What other actions can it possibly effect?

Magic must be figured into the overall theme and conflict of the story as well. One of the themes Rowling hits hard is that with great power comes great responsibility. It is our choices which determine who we are, not our birthright. Magic will only get you so far, the rest is determined by the choices you make. While magic might make peeling potatoes easier, it does nothing to ease the pain of a beloved son's loss.

When using magic in your story, whether you follow Rowling's guidelines or some of your own, I think it's important to be a plotter rather than a pantser (flying by the seat of your pants). Take the time in plotting out your story to plan out the full ramifications of magic in all your scenes. Otherwise you'll probably end up doing a load of revising.

You'll need to construct your own rules of magic, not copy someone else's. Be quite ruthless in charting your laws of what magic is in your world, how it is used, and how it is counterbalanced. Create a list of the magical elements you will employ; write your own spellbook. Make sure you understand your magic fully so that you will convey it effectively and

not confuse your reader. As much as possible, personalize it to your own characters, plots, and themes.

## Encountering a New World: How to Introduce Your Reader

When Harry crosses the threshold of the Leaky Cauldron and enters the Magical World, everyone he meets takes magic for granted. Except for a few Muggle-borns, like Hermione, they've lived with magic their whole lives and it's just part of their natural world. (Hermione makes up for her loss by deliberate over-studying.) Harry's introduction to magic is thus the reader's introduction as well.

Many beginning fantasy writers make it obvious they're using *magic*, something special and out of the ordinary, and intentionally draw the reader's attention to it. Rowling's use is far more casual. She lets us encounter the world as Harry does, since, like us, he's seeing it for the first time. The scene in which Harry meets Draco draws clearly the distinction between those in-the-know and Harry:

"My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice. "Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first years can't have their own..."

Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley.

"Have you got your own broom?" the boy went on.

"No," said Harry.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"No," Harry said again, wondering what on earth Quidditch could be.

"I do—Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say, I agree. Know what house you'll be in yet?"

"No," said Harry, feeling more stupid by the minute.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our family have been—imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?"

"Mmm," said Harry, wishing he could say something a bit more interesting.

(p. 77-78, *Stone*)

Notice, all the highlighted words regarding magical elements are casually thrown into the conversation. Harry is a fish-out-of-water, feeling

insecure at his lack of knowledge, and grappling with how much he has to learn. His uninitiated POV reflects the reader's. This new world is wonderful and exciting to us, but to those who've lived there all their lives, it's as natural as ours. There's no grand introductory "Everything You Need to Know about Magic 101" nor do the magical characters treat their skills as anything out of the ordinary. Harry learns slowly, gradually, as the need arises, as he encounters new situations. This type of introduction *shows* the reader the new world rather than *telling*.

If you're using a contemporary, familiar setting, where your character is not a fish-out-of-water, there will be less need to introduce your reader to a Special World. You'll still have some level of introduction, as most writers strive to create something unique and interesting in their primary settings.

However, if you're writing in science fiction, fantasy, paranormal romance, historicals, or a foreign locale, you truly need to consider how you will introduce your reader to the world you have painstakingly created. Will you make the introduction obvious or subtle? How many of your characters will be in-the-know versus the uninitiated? If all your characters are familiar with the setting, but the reader is not, how will you ease the reader into your Special World without whomping them over the head with a lot of explanation disguised as dialogue, or even worse, boring narration?

Rowling's model is to use the fish-out-of-water motif and let the reader discover the Special World through Harry's eyes, learning as he does. Don't draw excess attention to the special powers, or use exposition to explain the world to your reader, just let them discover it for themselves as needed, through action and dialogue, as new situations arise within the plot. In other words, show rather than tell.

In this manner, there is always the feel that a new discovery is just around the Knockturn Alley corner, that surprises lurk behind every Dirigible plum bush, and that the exciting world of Hogsmeade and Hogwarts has not yet been fully explored.

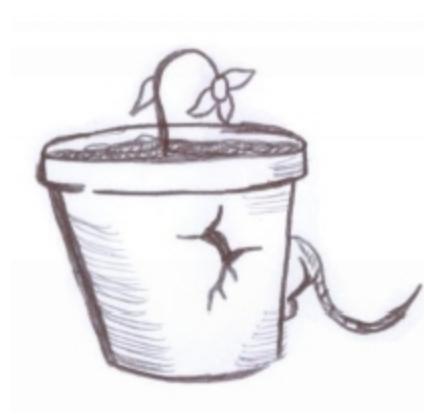
## Take Away

In worldbuilding, the Dark Lord's in the detail. Add the extra elements, the extra layers that turns your descriptions from interesting to zesty. Worldbuild your character interactions as well as your setting because it's those fully fleshed actions that can make your writing soar above the crowded market.

The final product should view like a movie on the wide screen. Big and full, colorful and sensory packed, detailed and active. Employ all your senses in crafting your details; show them to your reader in action. Then add the extra zings that let the reader sit back and thoroughly enjoy your book as they would a great movie, viewing fully in their mind's eye all its wonderfully imaginative elements.

And to make sure they're not thrown out of the story, develop rules that help it all fit together. Then introduce them to it naturally. To a world that they will wish to spend time in, yearn to explore every dark alley and secret passage, and eagerly recommend to all their friends.

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# **Lesson Six**

## **Revealing Wormtail**

### **(Dropping Clues, Hiding Secrets)**

In this lesson we'll examine the Harry Potter series as a complex mystery. JK Rowling expected a lot from her readers, and she got it. She expected an active participant to pick up on her clues and to follow their trail. What she got was a world full of Harry Potter sleuths who not only jumped in enthusiastically to ferret out the evidence, but also delighted in stringing it together to plaster the Internet with theories of what was yet to come.

The frenzy to share discovered clues and wild theories was born not only of the desire to keep the excitement going between books and to share and connect with other HP fans, but also the eagerness to spot a clue before anyone else did. Every fan secretly hoped to have one of her treasured theories confirmed with the next release and to be able to say, "I told you so!" The frenzy at the very end, before *Deathly Hallows* hit the shelves, to post those last minute theories, was both wildly crazy and astounding.

As mentioned in lesson one, there are three aspects to JK Rowling's writing which were the primary elements that propelled her series from simple bestsellerdom to publishing phenomenon: memorable quirky characters, fabulously detailed worldbuilding, and a well-plotted, engrossing, trail-of-clues mystery. While the characters and the worldbuilding sucked fans into Rowling's magical world, it was when they discovered the trail of clues that they turned from mere fans to truly obsessed fanatics.

In my observation, the readers who question what the hoopla is all about and denounce Rowling as a poor writer are the casual readers who have not yet discovered the world of analogies, myths, clues, and red herrings which live and seethe below the surface.

If you're one of those casual readers and have no idea what I'm talking about when I speak of Rowling's masterful use of dropping clues and withholding secrets, then let me encourage you to first take a dip into the mass hysteria. There are a few archived forums which will give you a thorough indoctrination to the mania with which HP fans searched out and dissected every little nuance of her story (including her interviews). Here are three I recommend:

- The Chamber of Secrets – [www.cosforums.com/index.php](http://www.cosforums.com/index.php)
- The Leaky Cauldron – [www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/features/essays](http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/features/essays) (I used to point to the Leaky Lounge, but unfortunately it is no longer online.)
- Mugglenet – [www.mugglenet.com/the-quibbler/the-quibbler-old](http://www.mugglenet.com/the-quibbler/the-quibbler-old)

Besides the passionate world of fan fiction (which we'll cover in a later chapter) these forums are where fans congregated to feed the frenzy for the next book. The first one listed, Chamber of Secrets, is the official forum of *Mugglenet*, the largest Harry Potter fansite online (by traffic count). The threads you would most want to look at for watching the fascinating spectacle of HP fans analyzing every word of Rowling's to death would be "The Stone," located in the "Harry Potter" forum, and "Divination Studies," which is now located under "Harry Potter Archives."

For equal obsession, but a bit more of an adult audience, try the essays on *The Leaky Cauldron*. Both sites have been recognized by Rowling personally with her Fan Site Award. What's even better was that the webmasters were invited after the release of *Half-Blood Prince* to Rowling's home for a personal interview. Melissa Anelli from *The Leaky Cauldron* later obtained more personal interviews with Rowling, which she included in her book detailing the HP phenomenon, *Harry, A History*.

To truly understand Rowling's success, you must experience the obsession for yourself. So, off you go. Take a few minutes, or if you're like me several hours, and immerse yourself in the world of Harry Potter sleuthing. See for yourself what so enthralled the fans that they turned a release party into an event fit for a rock star, what made an eight year old

read an 870-page tome (while praying that *Deathly Hallows* would be even longer). Experience the phenomenon that still has fans writing fan fiction of their own because they can't stand the agonizing separation from Rowling's characters since the series ended. They have to know *more* backstory, even if they must create it themselves.

Here is the most secret inner chamber of Harry Potter's success. The world of fan involvement. Fan involvement that was greatly aided by the emerging power of the Internet. See for yourself. I'll just sit here and work on my potions homework until you return.

## Becoming a Harry Potter Sleuth

Now that you've observed the world of Harry Potter sleuthing, we're going to conduct our own investigation. There are three central questions to the HP mania which drove the search for clues throughout the series:

- What exactly happened in Godric's Hollow?
- Where did Snape's loyalty lay? and
- How would Harry defeat Voldemort?

Although the three questions are simple, the answers are quite complex. Rowling built an elaborate and richly detailed world that is full and complete. What is amazing about her construction is that every aspect of her creation, each character, has something to contribute to these three simple mysteries. Clues are hidden everywhere.

When you broaden these central questions to cover all the necessary subheadings, the various characters and subplots which readers had to consider *before Hallows* to answer the above three completely and accurately, you end up with a list of questions that looks something like this:

1. Why did Dumbledore have James' Invisibility Cloak the night he was killed?
2. What was the deal with the connection between Lily and Harry's eyes?
3. What did that "gleam" in Dumbledore's eyes mean? (Mentioned near the end of *Goblet* after Harry told him about Voldemort using Harry's blood).
4. How would Wormtail repay his life debt to Harry?
5. What were the remaining Horcruxes?
6. *Where* were the remaining Horcruxes?
7. Why exactly did Dumbledore trust Snape so completely?

8. What was studied behind the locked door in the Department of Mysteries?
9. What were Lily and James' occupations?
10. If *Avada Kedavra* doesn't leave a mark, then how did the Potter home get destroyed and how did Harry get a scar?
11. What more did Petunia know?
12. Who was RAB and did he/she destroy the locket?
13. Was Slytherin's locket the one at Grimmauld Place?
14. What were all 12 uses for dragon's blood?
15. Who was the character who would perform magic late in life?
16. Would Harry be able to use Sirius' mirror to communicate with him beyond the Veil?
17. What was Snape's Boggart and Patronus (Rowling wouldn't answer)?
18. Why was Neville so forgetful?
19. Did Voldemort really tell Snape not to kill Harry if given the chance (as hinted at the end of *Half-Blood*)?, and
20. Who would live and who would die by series end?

If you've looked over the forums like I asked, you know by now that this list could go on for several more inches of parchment. Please note that I composed it before the release of *Hallows*. I've kept a couple of questions in that turned out not to be important to show an accurate reflection of what all fans were considering. Also, this list only includes mysteries remaining at the end of *Half-Blood*, not all those that had kept fans enthusiastically busy for months and years beforehand, but had since been answered in subsequent books.

It will be most helpful to look at a completed trail of clues before tearing apart and analyzing exactly how Rowling created her mysteries. Many initially skeptical readers point to the revelation of Scabbers as Wormtail as the betrayer of James and Lily as their initiation into fandom. It was with *Azkaban*, in the revelation of a three-book trail of clues, that many fans first got the hint of what lurked below the surface in an HP book. They were hooked.

## Baiting the Rattrap

The Wormtail thread is also a fairly easy one to analyze, so let's look at how it played out across the three books.

“Hagrid,” said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. “At last. And where did you get that motorcycle?”

“Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir,” said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorcycle as he spoke. “Young **Sirius Black** lent it to me. I’ve got him, sir.”

(p. 14, *Stone*)

Here, from the first chapter of the first book, is a key clue to the series and especially to *Azkaban*. Yet the name Sirius Black is thrown in so casually and never mentioned again, that the reader innocently enough would not pick up Sirius Black being at Godric’s Hollow as anything important.

We also see from this first chapter Professor McGonagall in her Animagus form, sitting on a wall all day. So we know from the outset that witches and wizards can transform themselves into animals for long periods of time.

Near the beginning of *Azkaban*, Ron is worrying about his pet rat Scabbers, who has been acting unusual since his family’s return trip from Egypt (note the reference to Egypt, more later).

“Hm,” said the witch, picking up Scabbers. “How old is this rat?”

“Dunno,” said Ron. “**Quite old. He used to belong to my brother.**”

“What powers does he have?” said the witch, examining Scabbers closely.

“Er—” The truth was that Scabbers had never shown the faintest trace of interesting powers. The witch’s eyes moved from Scabbers’s tattered left ear to **his front paw, which had a toe missing**, and tutted loudly.

“He’s been through the mill, this one,” she said.

“He was like that when Percy gave him to me,” said Ron defensively.

“**An ordinary common or garden rat like this can’t be expected to live longer than three years or so,**” said the witch. “Now, if you were looking for something a bit more hard-wearing, you might like one of these—”

She indicated the black rats, who promptly started skipping again. Ron muttered, “Show-offs.”

(p. 59, *Azkaban*)

Rowling flashes three hints here: Scabbers belonged to Percy, he's missing a toe, and he's lived far longer than he should have, but then she immediately distracts us with the entertaining spectacle of skipping black rats. It's also in the very next paragraph when Crookshanks leaps onto Ron's head and chases Scabbers. Now, who would suspect anything out of a cat chasing a rat? So, the reader is immediately thrown into new action, which nicely distracts her from mulling over any clues.

Perhaps the reason Rowling named Percy as Scabbers' former owner, besides showing how Ron always has hand-me-downs, is to hide how old Scabbers really is while at the same time hinting that he's older than he should be. Former ownership also camouflages why Scabbers is missing a toe. Ron doesn't know how Scabbers lost the toe, but that lack of knowledge is not suspect as the pet's not originally his.

A few pages later, Harry overhears Mr. Weasley discussing with his wife the recent escape from Azkaban of Sirius Black and his threat to Harry:

“The guards told Fudge that Black’s been talking in his sleep for a while now. Always the same words: ‘He’s at Hogwarts...he’s at Hogwarts.’”

(p. 66, *Azkaban*)

Something changed recently in Black to make him lose sleep. He's looking for someone at Hogwarts, a male. Of course, we're led to believe that *he* is Harry.

Then there's a crucial scene about mid-way through the book that reveals a ton of clues about Pettigrew, while on the surface condemning Sirius Black. I'm of course talking about the scene in the Three Broomsticks with Madam Rosmerta:

“Never saw one without the other, did you? The number of times I had them in here—ooh they used to make me laugh. Quite the double act, Sirius Black and James Potter.”...

[from McGonagall] “Black and Potter. Ringleaders of their little gang. Both were bright, of course—exceptionally bright, in fact—but I don’t think we’ve ever had such a pair of troublemakers—”

“I dunno,” chuckled Hagrid. “Fred and George Weasley could give ‘em a run fer their money.”

(p. 204, *Azkaban*)

Okay, think. “Never saw one without the other,” “double act,” “pair of troublemakers,” and then the direct connection to the current twin troublemakers. Fred and George just so happened, earlier in this very chapter, to have given Harry the Marauder’s Map for him to sneak into Hogsmeade. Coincidence? Not when your name is JK Rowling!

Obviously we’re supposed to connect James and Sirius to Fred and George. James and Sirius were “ringleaders of their little gang,” “exceptionally bright,” and “a pair of troublemakers.” Could they have been bright enough to create a map that is turned on by “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,” (p. 192, *Azkaban*) and turned off by “mischief managed?” Could their gang’s map have paved the way for their twin troublemaking descendants of the future? By juxtaposing the red-haired twins of today to the troublemakers of the past, Rowling gives the reader a hint to the identities of two of the map’s original owners. (Note that this type of clue is completely directed to the reader, not the characters within the story).

The Three Broomsticks scene continues as Flitwick talks about what a Fidelius Charm is and how it works, McGonagall reveals that Dumbledore suspected a traitor close to the Potters, and Madam Rosmerta mentions that Peter Pettigrew tagged along after James and Sirius, though not in their league talent-wise. Also, there is some detailed information from Fudge about what appeared to happen between Sirius and Pettigrew:

“I was Junior Minister in the Department of Magical Catastrophes at the time, and I was one of the first on the scene **after Black murdered** all those people. I-I will never forget it. I still dream about it sometimes. A crater in the middle of the street, so deep it had **cracked** **the sewer below**. Bodies everywhere. Muggles screaming. And Black **standing there laughing**, with what was left of Pettigrew in front of him...a heap of bloodstained robes and a few—a few fragments—”

(p. 208, *Azkaban*)

Who would match a rat’s missing toe to “a few fragments” left from a long-dead, blown-up wizard? Now, if Rowling had written at this point that the biggest fragment was a finger, then the reader might have had a stronger chance to figure out early on the connection between Scabbers and Pettigrew. Many, many writers would have written just such a detail here and had their readers guess their secret long before the climax. **However,**

**by not pinpointing the fragment as a finger, Rowling still leaves a clue, just not an easy one.**

Another clue here is that although Fudge was one of the first on the crime scene, he arrived after the murders—and to a gaping hole in the sewer, one a rat could slip through. The only eyewitnesses were Muggles who have since had their memories wiped, and Black was “clearly” out of his mind. If he was such a cold-blooded murderer, why had Black not fled the scene, and why was he standing there laughing? A reader with wits is supposed to pick up on these subtle hints and start stringing the clues together that all was not as it appeared to be, especially to someone as unobservant as Fudge.

Thus, the clues are all there, when you know where to look. As the master magician she is, however, Rowling increases the emotional tension of this scene by having Fudge condemn Sirius as a murdering betrayer. She uses Hagrid’s rage to point our attention where she wants it to go, toward Black as the betrayer of Harry’s parents, and not toward the clues she’s just revealed. That’s **sleight of hand**, a technique we’ll discuss more in the analysis portion.

The reader is thus left with a story of murder and betrayal, severed body parts, and a double pair of expert troublemakers joined by a map. All this emotional luggage is weighing on Harry when that missing body part is clarified later. Winter break has commenced and Ron and Hermione are trying their hardest to convince Harry not to go after his parents’ betrayer himself. Harry shoots back that they don’t understand, they don’t hear his mum “screaming and pleading with Voldemort” (p. 214).

“You’re going to take Malfoy’s advice instead of ours?” said Ron furiously. “Listen...you know what Pettigrew’s mother got back after Black had finished with him? Dad told me—the Order of Merlin, First Class, and Pettigrew’s finger in a box. That was the biggest bit of him they could find. Black’s a madman, Harry, and he’s dangerous—”

“Malfoy’s dad must have told him,” said Harry, ignoring Ron. “He was right in Voldemort’s inner circle—”

(p. 215)

*There it is!* There’s the finger, which is our biggest clue yet linking Pettigrew to Scabbers. But look at the distraction around it. Harry is ignoring Ron, who is furious. Harry is completely focused on his anger, on his desire for revenge, on his mother’s voice being murdered. And the

reader along with him. All this heightened emotion nicely distracts from the prime clue being laid at the reader's...fingertip.

Shortly after, Harry receives the unexpected gift of the Firebolt, and when Hermione drops in on the boys' dorm room with Crookshanks in hand, the following ensues:

"GET—HIM—OUT—OF—HERE!" Ron bellowed as Crookshanks's claws ripped his pajamas and Scabbers attempted a wild escape over his shoulder. Ron seized Scabbers by the tail and aimed a misjudged kick at Crookshanks that hit the trunk at the end of Harry's bed, knocking it over and causing Ron to hoop up and down, howling with pain.

Crookshanks's fur suddenly stood on end. A shrill, tinny, whistling was filling the room. The Pocket Sneakoscope had become dislodged from Uncle Vernon's old socks and was whirling and gleaming on the floor.

"I forgot about that!" Harry said, bending down and picking up the Sneakoscope. "I never wear those socks if I can help it...."

The Sneakoscope whirled and whistled in his palm. Crookshanks was hissing and spitting at it.

"You'd better take that cat out of here, Hermione," said Ron furiously, sitting on Harry's bed nursing his toe.

(p. 225-226, *Azkaban*)

The Sneakoscope sounds an alarm when anyone nearby is untrustworthy. In this scene, the Sneakoscope goes off as a result of Crookshanks' nefarious plans for Scabbers, correct? At least, that's what Rowling leads the reader to believe by juxtaposing the Sneakoscope's alarm with Crookshanks' attack and his hissing and spitting. It was Wormtail's disguise as Scabbers and his attempt to escape from Crookshanks who recognized his falseness that set the Sneakoscope off.

One other little note: notice Ron nursing that stubbed toe. That's a deliberate wink toward Scabbers' missing digit. The reader was just notified that a severed finger fits into the mystery of this story, and now we're given a sly reminder that Scabbers is missing a toe. The reader should be putting two and two together and deciphering that this missing finger resembles a rat's toe. In fact, as Ron seizes his pet by the tail, Rowling is giving us a nudge to think of what a rat tail looks like...a bit like a worm, maybe. Wormtail was one of those tricksters named on the Marauder's Map.

However, suspicion is firmly cast onto Crookshanks as causing all the trouble with Scabbers, so the casual reader allows the distraction of her attention without realizing that this particular cat smells an awful lot like red herring.

Later, when Lupin is giving Harry Patronus lessons, Harry discovers that Lupin was friends with his father:

“Why—you didn’t know my dad, did you?”

“I-I did, as a matter of fact,” said Lupin. “**We were friends at Hogwarts.**”

(p. 241, *Azkaban*)

Then a page later:

“If you knew my dad, then **you must’ve known Sirius Black as well.**” ...

“Yes, I knew him,” he [Lupin] said shortly. “Or I thought I did.”

(p. 242-243)

By putting the friend connections together, we can now connect James and Sirius and Lupin and Pettigrew. Four friends at Hogwarts. There were four troublemakers named as creators of the Marauder’s Map, one of them called Wormtail. We have a rat who’s been acting awfully strange, who has a tail that could be described like a worm.

This masterful trail of clues leads the reader to an emotional revelation in the Shrieking Shack. It starts with Lupin revealing to the Trio that he saw Peter Pettigrew with Ron on the Marauder’s Map:

“They didn’t see what they thought they saw!” said Black savagely, still watching Scabbers struggling in Ron’s hands.

“Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter,” said Lupin, nodding. “I believed it myself—until I saw the map tonight. **Because the Marauder’s map never lies. Peter’s alive. Ron’s holding him,** Harry.” ...

(p. 351)

Point to note here: Only the movie shows Harry seeing Peter Pettigrew on the map; it doesn’t happen in the book. In the book, the only time Peter is seen on the map is by Lupin revealed in this scene above.

Lupin then gives the backstory on the Marauders and Snape makes his dramatic appearance. Finally, we get to the bit where all the clues come together:

“Fudge,” said Black. “When he came to inspect Azkaban last year, he gave me his paper. And there was Peter, on the front page on this boy’s shoulder...I knew him at once...how many times had I seen him transform? And the caption said the boy would be going back to Hogwarts...to where Harry was...”

“My God,” said Lupin softly, staring from Scabbers to the picture in the paper and back again. “His front paw...”

“What about it?” said Ron defiantly.

“He’s got a toe missing,” said Black.

“Of course,” Lupin breathed. “So simple...so brilliant...he cut it off himself?”

“Just before he transformed,” said Black. ...

“Didn’t you ever hear, Ron?” said Lupin. “The biggest bit of Peter they found was his finger.”

“... He’s been in my family for ages, right—”

“Twelve years, in fact,” said Lupin. “Didn’t you ever wonder why he was living so long?” ...

“Not looking too good at the moment, though, is he?” said Lupin. “I’d guess he’s been losing weight ever since he heard Sirius was on the loose again....”

“He’s been scared of that mad cat!” said Ron, nodding toward Crookshanks, who was still purring on the bed.

But that wasn’t right, Harry thought suddenly...Scabbers had been looking ill before he met Crookshanks...ever since Ron’s return from Egypt...since the time when Black had escaped....

(p. 362-364)

Below I’ve given a summary of all the clues that were laid in advance to prepare the reader for the revelation of Scabbers as Wormtail as Peter Pettigrew:

## List of Clues Planted

- 1) Wizards can be Animagi.
- 2) A Fidelius Charm was placed on the Potters’ location, which required a Secret Keeper.
- 3) Dumbledore suspected a traitor close to the Potters.
- 4) Sirius was first at Godric’s Hollow, then shortly after at a Muggle street with Peter Pettigrew.

- 5) Sirius was imprisoned for the murders of Pettigrew and the Muggles, as well as the betrayer of James and Lily.
- 6) Sirius made no attempt to escape, appearing to be mad.
- 7) All that appeared to be left of Pettigrew were a few fragments (a finger) and a bloodstained robe.
- 8) Scabbers has been in the Weasley family for a very long time, longer than normal for a common rat.
- 9) Scabbers is missing a toe.
- 10) Scabbers has been ill since Ron's return from Egypt.
- 11) Black escaped after the Weasley family returned from Egypt.
- 12) Black escaped to go after someone, a male, at Hogwarts.
- 13) The Marauder's Map revealed the pranks and jokes of four friends named Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs.
- 14) James, Sirius, Lupin, and Pettigrew were all friends at Hogwarts.
- 15) James and Sirius sound an awful lot like Fred and George, who happened to give Harry the Marauder's Map (juxtaposition, to be discussed later).
- 16) Peter Pettigrew was considered the weakest of James' friends.
- 17) The Sneakoscope went off around Crookshanks and Scabbers.

In retrospect, it's easy to see that a significant amount of clues were planted to give the reader a chance at figuring out the mystery. However, clues were kept subtle and their solution was not obvious. Wherever a clue was laid, **distraction was provided**. So, many readers were left with that delightful sense of surprise.

Plotting a mystery is a fine balancing act. If the author leaves insufficient clues to give the reader a shot at solving the puzzle, the reader feels cheated. However, if the author makes the clues too obvious, the reader also feels cheated out of the pleasant surprised *gotcha* at the end. The evidence is overwhelming that Rowling walked that tightrope gracefully and masterfully and never cheated her readers.

## Overview:

### Thirteen Traps for Tricking Your Reader

Let's analyze how Rowling strings along her reader by breaking down her techniques. These are a few I have spotted which we'll spend some time with:

- 1) Focus attention elsewhere: the magical art of sleight of hand.

- 2) Divert with a joke.
- 3) Divert with action.
- 4) Distract with high emotions.
- 5) Give meaningful names.
- 6) Camouflage by use of myths and folklore.
- 7) Hide in a list.
- 8) Discredit the witness.
- 9) Drop in dreams.
- 10) Mark with repeated clues.
- 11) Mirror parallels.
- 12) Reverse expectations.
- 13) Juxtapose the villain with the scene of the crime.

Rowling lays some clues close to the surface which she intends for the reader to find easily. Then there are others where she uses sleight of hand to misdirect her fans, while still playing fair by having laid it.

## **1) Sleight of Hand: The Art of Distraction**

In weaving the mystery through her world of magic and myth, Rowling is the master magician. Her technique focuses heavily on that old reliable magician's trick: sleight of hand.

Misdirection is perhaps the most important component of the art of sleight of hand. Using misdirection, the skillful magician choreographs every movement in a routine so even the most critical and observant spectators are **compelled to look where the magician wants them to.**

[\(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleight\\_of\\_hand\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleight_of_hand)

While laying her most important clues, Rowling diverts the readers' attention elsewhere. There are various methods she employs to force the reader to look in the direction she wishes for them to and away from her clue. We'll look at three in the next sections, but sleight of hand can be used in any way you create to distract your reader from what you don't want them to notice.

## **2) Divert with Jokes or Ridiculous Statements**

One of the simplest methods of diversion is to place the clue in a line of dialogue that seems unimportant or a joke, which focuses the reader on the humor rather than the clue. Ron and the twins are especially good for the joking bit.

[Harry] “I wouldn’t mind knowing how Riddle got an award for special services to Hogwarts either.”

“Could’ve been anything,” said Ron. “Maybe he got thirty O.W.L.s or saved a teacher from the giant squid. **Maybe he murdered Myrtle;** that would’ve done everyone a favor...”

(p. 232, *Secrets*)

Ron is joking, but hits the truth dead-on. However, there are two sly Rowling tricks sidetracking the reader from taking note of the clue—not only is it an obvious joke, but it’s also third in a list of increasingly absurd ones and therefore the most ridiculous in Ron’s point of view.

Dumbledore gave us a clue at the end of *Prisoner of Azkaban* of a similar dialogue misdirection in a non-joke format—stating the obvious but making it seem ridiculous. In the face of Snape’s rage over the escape of Sirius Black, Dumbledore calmly and without lying states, “Unless you are suggesting that Harry and Hermione are able to be in two places at once, I’m afraid I don’t see any point in troubling them further” (p. 420).

Dumbledore makes the reality of Harry and Hermione truly having been in two places at the same time seem ridiculous, and even though the reader is “in” on this clue, it’s a blatant sign-post to pay attention to other such well-laid lines where the reader may not be as *in the know*.

Here are a couple of other one-liners from Ron that actually hint at what’s to come, while distracting from current clues. At the end of the Boggart lesson in *Azkaban*, Ron ridicules Hermione, who didn’t face it in class:

“What would it have been for you?” said Ron sniggering. **“A piece of homework that got nine out of ten?”**

(p. 140, *Phoenix*)

His joke is a distraction from noticing that Lupin’s Boggart was the moon. However, it’s also prophetic as at the end of this book during Hermione’s DADA exam her Boggart turns into Professor McGonagall telling her she failed every course.

In *Phoenix*, after the first Quidditch match where Ron plays brilliantly, he says:

...“Did you see the look on Chang’s face when Ginny got the Snitch right out from under her nose?”

(p. 704, *Phoenix*)

Something tells me that Rowling is hinting at Ginny getting more than the Snitch out from under Cho's nose here.

### 3) Divert with Action

Previously as we followed the Wormtail trail, we saw how immediately after giving us the crucial clues of Scabbers being too old for a common garden rat and missing a toe, Rowling tossed Crookshanks onto Ron's head and incited a cat-rat chase. The purpose of the action (besides providing a clue to Crookshanks' distrust of Scabbers) was to misdirect the reader with something more actively interesting.

There's a good reason why authors are encouraged to write in action whenever possible—because movement attracts the readers' attention. In throwing Crookshanks at Ron's head, Rowling distracts the reader away from her clues and toward the action.

There's a jam-packed clue-filled scene that takes place at Grimmauld Place in "The Woes of Mrs. Weasley" chapter in *Phoenix*. A crucial question floating through this chapter is why is Dumbledore acting so strangely about Harry? The chapter before, Dumbledore would not look at or talk to Harry during his hearing. In this chapter, Ron and Hermione receive their Prefect badges, with everyone astonished that Dumbledore didn't pick Harry.

Harry overhears Kingsley muttering to Lupin about this very thing:

'...why Dumbledore didn't make Potter a prefect?' said Kingsley.

'He'll have had his reasons,' replied Lupin.

'But it would've shown confidence in him. It's what I'd've done,' persisted Kingsley, 'specially with the Daily Prophet having a go at him every few days...'

(p. 157, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury)

Harry is bothered by Dumbledore's striking change of attitude, and the reader along with him. Surely, like Lupin says, Dumbledore has a good reason for ignoring Harry. But what is it?

Could it be related to why Moody seems to watch Harry's every move?

Moody took a swig from his hipflask, his electric-blue eye staring sideways at Harry.

'Come here, I've got something that might interest you,' he said.

From an inner pocket of his robes Moody pulled a very tattered old wizarding photograph.

‘Original Order of the Phoenix,’ growled Moody. ‘Found it last night when I was looking for my spare Invisibility Cloak, seeing as Podmore hasn’t had the manners to return my best one...thought people might like to see it.’

(p. 157, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury)

Why include that little tidbit about Podmore having Moody’s best Invisibility Cloak? Because it’s important to the story later when Podmore is caught and imprisoned for spying at the Department of Mysteries. However, the reader is not permitted to dwell too deeply here as a long, detailed, dialogue-driven description of the original Order follows—a description filled with clues and red herrings that had readers speculating until the end of the series.

What to make of Frank and Alice Longbottom, “Better dead than what happened to them,” or the presence of Elphias Doge in the same picture with Dumbledore, or Caradoc Dearborn, “vanished six months after this, we never found his body” (p. 158, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury)?

We’d seen a wizard come back from the dead who had only left “fragments” of himself before. Many fans speculated that someone “not properly dead” would be seen in the last book. Would it be Dearborn? Perhaps the Longbottoms would recover? If so, what memory could they have shared?

However, Harry can’t handle this much pain all in one photo. He flees the scene only to encounter a trauma more real, more personal, and completely devastating—Mrs. Weasley sobbing over Ron’s dead body. Harry feels himself “falling through the floor,” only...that’s not Ron. It’s a Boggart, who at the feeble flick of Mrs. Weasley’s shaking wand, transforms from Ron to Bill to Mr. Weasley to the twins to Percy to...Harry.

The reader starts with a dead Ron and ends with a dead Harry, all the other Weasleys thrown in between, except Ginny and Charlie. Without a doubt, there are clues flying with the crack of the Boggart, but where? Is it the missing Ginny or Charlie? Is Rowling playing with reader expectations that the side-kick (Ron) always bites it in the end? Or is she teasing us once again that Harry just might not survive his final confrontation with the Dark Lord?

By the time Rowling wrote this scene, the mad passion to figure out who would die before series' end had already spurred some to high bets and mad searches for spoilers. With the release of *Half-Blood*, this frenzy to know who died next would culminate with guns and criminal activity! [9]

As we see here with Mrs. Weasley's Boggart, Rowling teased her reader with a lot of red herring soup. What is obvious, though, is that in these few pages she flings clues as quickly as the cracking Boggart—from Dumbledore's change of attitude toward Harry, to Sturgis Podmore using Moody's Invisibility Cloak, to possible hints from the former Order of the Phoenix, to who will live or die by series' end. All in four pages!

The action whips from Harry's eavesdropping, to the former Order moving-picture-show, to Harry fleeing and encountering the popping of the dead-body Boggart. Non-stop action, and interesting action at that, prevents readers from dwelling too long on any one clue, and propels their attention to where Rowling wants it to go—ever forward in a frenzied pace to get to the surprise ending, without stopping to think too hard.

Also, note that two of these clue-filled scenarios were presented in listing form (which we will discuss in point seven)—the description of the former Order, and the progression of the dead bodies. Rowling is quite accomplished at multi-tasking her clue-dropping techniques.

#### 4) Divert with High Emotions

If there is one thing that attracts the reader's attention more than intense action, it's high emotion. Jealousy, betrayal, hatred, and revenge. All emotions were rampaging through the eavesdropping scene in the Three Broomsticks discussed earlier. Harry was so caught up in the immensely powerful betrayal by his father's lifelong best friend that he missed the finer points of the clues being laid. Yet there is another scene, one of the most powerful in all of Potterdom, that packs a Whomping Willow of emotion.

The end of *Half-Blood Prince* has been finely picked over by a rabid Harry Potter CSI team. The emotions burning through this ending surely obscured most of our views for anything less pressing than dealing with the murder of Dumbledore at the hand of his trusted confidant Snape. But clues litter the crime scene, and we must push the emotion aside to uncover them.

Malfoy stepped forwards, glancing around quickly to check that he and Dumbledore were alone. His eyes fell upon the second broom.

'Who else is here?'

[Dumbledore says] ‘A question I might ask you. Or are you acting alone?’

Harry saw Malfoy’s pale eyes shift back to Dumbledore in the greenish glare of the Mark.

(p. 546, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

Note: Draco instantly notices the second broom, the one belonging to the immobilized and hidden Harry, and correctly surmises someone else is present. Dumbledore, a skilled magician himself, expertly distracts Draco’s attention, then keeps him talking for several pages, until three more Death Eaters arrive, including the deadly werewolf Greyback.

Now compare the above lines with the most over-analyzed scene in Potterdom a few pages later:

‘Draco, do it, or stand aside so one of us—’ screeched the woman, but at that precise moment the door to the ramparts burst open once more and there stood Snape, his wand clutched in his hand as his black eyes swept the scene, from Dumbledore slumped against the wall, to the four Death Eaters, including the enraged werewolf, and Malfoy.

‘We’ve got a problem, Snape,’ said the lumpy Amycus, whose eyes and wand were fixed alike upon Dumbledore, ‘the boy doesn’t seem able—’

But somebody else had spoken Snape’s name, quite softly.

‘Severus...’

The sound frightened Harry beyond anything he had experienced all evening. For the first time, Dumbledore was pleading.

Snape said nothing, but walked forwards and pushed Malfoy roughly out of the way. The three Death Eaters fell back without a word. Even the werewolf seemed cowed.

Snape gazed for a moment at Dumbledore, and there was revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines of his face.

‘Severus...please...’

Snape raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore.

‘Avada Kedavra!’

(p. 556, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

Revulsion and hatred, yes. But...for whom?

From the moment of his entrance, Snape’s “black eyes swept the scene, from Dumbledore slumped against the wall, to the four Death Eaters,

**including the enraged werewolf, and Malfoy.**" That all important allusion to the second broom is the most critical clue given. Could any astute reader not believe that Snape would have noticed all that Draco saw, and more?

Many writers would have written a line such as, "Snape's gaze lingered on the second broom." But not the extremely devious JK Rowling. No, for her that would be too revealing a clue, or pardon me, a dead giveaway. Instead she slyly hints at the second broom Snape sees with the deliberate use of the coy word "swept." By paralleling Snape's scanning the area with Draco's own discovery and instant understanding of what the second broom meant, Rowling gives a powerful hint but one the reader has to work for.

So what? Snape saw the second broom?

Couple it with another subtle, but potent clue. Dumbledore's pleading. Albus Dumbledore plead for his life? This from the man who said that "to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure?" (p. 297, *Sorcerer's Stone*)

Dumbledore would, however, plead for Harry's life, even if it meant sacrificing his own. Thus the cunningly planted clues tell the alert reader that Snape acted in response to Dumbledore's open plea (and possible silent Legilimency demand) to get the Death Eaters away before Harry could be discovered and Draco's soul imperiled. To sacrifice Dumbledore's life for his students'. For Dumbledore sacrificed himself not just for Harry, but for Draco as well.

Later, fans went crazy debating the Good Snape/Bad Snape, Murderer/They-Had-a-Plan theories. Yet what reader is going to pick up on these nuances in a first read-through when all their attention is focused on the "revulsion and hatred etched in the harsh lines" of Snape's face? Their attention was drawn bewitchingly to where the author wanted it, on Snape murdering Dumbledore in front of our eyes.

For Harry or the reader, there could be no higher emotional scene in the book thus far. Rowling expertly used intense emotion and shocking action to distract her reader from the finely worded clues.

Using emotions to distract your reader is a powerful, magnetic tool. Use it well. ***Remember, when laying a clue, don't draw attention to it, but rather focus your readers' interest elsewhere.*** Make the obvious look ridiculous "a la Dumbledore" or a Ron-type joke. Don't slow down your action, but rather increase the pace as a distraction. Intensify the emotional

reaction away from the clue. Do whatever it takes to make your reader look in the direction of *your* choice—not theirs.

## 5) A Hagrid by Any Other Name

Years ago, when the HP books were new and fans were first beginning to share their enthusiasm online, the main clues discussed were the meanings behind names. Readers quickly caught on that many came from myths, others from British locales. Some characters were named after flowers or stars. Then there were Rowling's own creations, combinations of words with new meanings (such as Umbridge, a portmanteau from *umbrage* and bridge, as she provided a connection from the school to the Ministry). All types of names were strikingly relevant to the character or object they represented, and most held a clue regarding that character's role in the series.

Minerva McGonagall is named after the Roman goddess of wisdom and war. She resembles a distant, austere goddess (with a warm side she reveals upon occasion), but a very apt second in command, as shown in *Deathly Hallows*. So, from the beginning we have a name that characterizes McGonagall as well as gives an early indication of the role she is to play in the finale.

Here are some other names with their derivation:

- 1) Argus Filch = Argus Panoptes from Greek mythology. Argus of the 100 eyes made a great watchman, just like nasty old Filch.
- 2) Petunia = flower name meaning anger and resentment. Sounds like petulant.
- 3) Lily = flower associated with death and resurrection.
- 4) Bellatrix = the third brightest star in Orion. Means female hunter.
- 5) Draco = from the constellation Draco. *Draco* means dragon, a reminder of his serpentine Slytherin family.
- 6) Grimmauld Place = definitely a grim old place, but it might also be a play on the brothers Grimm and a nod to their fairy tales.

For a more complex naming example, I'd like to look at three characters together: Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore, and Rubeus Hagrid. In Latin, *Albus* means white and *Rubeus* means red. In alchemy, there are three phases of transformation from lead until gold (we earlier discussed seven stages, but these seven stages are divided into three phases). The phases are, in order, black, white, and at last red. The black phase must

“die” for the white to begin, then the white falls away for the red. At last, the red phase produces the gold of the Philosopher’s Stone.

The death of Sirius Black culminates the first phase of Harry’s personal transformation from child to adult. Likewise, the death of Albus Dumbledore (white) propels Harry from his mentored stage into his last and greatest phase where he has to go it alone. Rowling did not kill Hagrid off in *Hallows* as she wanted the Red Man (an alchemy image) present to the end to bring Harry’s “dead” body out of the forest. However, she does symbolically kill him off at the beginning in the “Fallen Warrior” chapter where Hagrid falls to the earth from Sirius’ motorbike during Harry’s escape from Privet Drive. Note that this happens immediately after the Harrified Polyjuice potion had “turned a clear, bright gold” (p. 50, *Hallows*). Gold, the color of the final phase of Harry’s alchemical transformation. Rowling works with tremendous alchemical symbolism throughout the HP series, and you see it reflected even here in the names.

Now, were all these clues apparent by just looking at those names? For most readers, the answer is no. Rowling imbued the names with symbolism and analogies, but the reader had to do some legwork to discover the reference. However, many of the meanings behind the names are much closer to the surface than Rowling’s other clues and thus a good intro to the beginning Harry Potter sleuth.

Putting meaning behind the names of characters is a time-honored technique for many writers. Even authors outside of fantasy or mystery like to give their characters names that indicate their personality or fate. However, be careful in choosing a name that it also fits the character and time period in which the story takes place.

Take time to consider names which will give your reader a slight hint to your character’s background or destiny. It’s especially appealing if their destiny hides a secret and your name provides a clue—just not too obvious.

## 6) Drawing Upon Myth and Folklore

Another technique that Rowling employs is to draw from ancient stories to impart and hide clues. She uses both myth and folklore to hide and reveal Lupin’s “furry little problem.” Take his name for instance—Remus, according to Roman mythology, was one of the twin founders of Rome who was suckled by a she-wolf as a baby. Not only do we have the wolf connection with Remus, but lupine in its adjective form means wolfish and is derived from the Latin *lupus*, meaning wolf.

So, Lupin's mythic name should have given the reader a heads-up to his wolfish connections. Then Rowling uses folklore dispersed throughout *Azkaban* to give further hints that Lupin is a werewolf. Hermione figured it out by picking up clues through Professor Snape's essay:

Lupin stopped dead. Then, with an obvious effort, he turned to Hermione and said, "How long have you known?"

"Ages," Hermione whispered. "Since I did Professor Snape's essay..."

"He'll be delighted," said Lupin coolly. "He assigned that essay hoping someone would realize what my symptoms meant.... Did you check the lunar chart and realize that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realize that the boggart changed into the moon when it saw me?"

"Both," Hermione said quietly.

(p. 345-346, *Azkaban*)

The reader had been given Lupin's wolfish names, seen him sick about monthly, and had his Boggart described as "a silver-white orb" (p. 138, *Azkaban*). Notice it wasn't described as a moon directly; that would have been too obvious a clue. That Snape assigned the werewolf essay when he taught Lupin's class (even though they were on hinky-punks), coupled with Snape's obvious hatred of Lupin, are two proximity or juxtaposition clues. Together, these present strong hints using various techniques.

Rowling is also quite adept at using ancient beliefs to weave in thematic subtext, which hints at multiple clues. Egyptian mythology, in my opinion, provided subtextual support for one series theme—the mysteries surrounding death and eternal life.

For ancient Egyptians, Thoth was the moon god of learning and writing and was often associated with monkeys (or baboons) and, at the Temple of Osiris at Abydos, with two snakes in the form of a caduceus. He was believed to be the writer of the *Book of the Dead*, an ancient Egyptian funerary text that provided the deceased directions on how to cross through the obstacles in the land of the dead to arrive at the Egyptian afterlife, the Field of Reeds. Thoth was also credited with writing many other books, sometimes referred to as the Book(s) of Thoth. One that he was credited for in a later manifestation as Hermes Trismegistus is *The Emerald Tablet*. This Hermetic manuscript was recognized as the most ancient, primary source of alchemical knowledge—and provided a guide for creating the Philosopher's

Stone. Indeed, Thoth/Hermes Trismegistus was considered the father of alchemy.

Now, look closely at the descriptions of the Chamber of Secrets:

[Harry] was standing at the end of a very long, dimly lit chamber. Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place...

He pulled out his wand and moved forward between the serpentine columns. Every careful footstep echoed loudly off the shadowy walls...

Then, as he drew level with the last pair of pillars, a statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall.

Harry had to crane his neck to look up into the giant face above: It was ancient and monkeyish, with a long, thin beard that fell almost to the bottom of the wizard's sweeping stone robes, where two enormous gray feet stood on the smooth Chamber floor. And between the feet, facedown, lay a small, black-robed figure with flaming-red hair.

“Ginny!”

(p. 306-307, *Secrets*)

The description of this chamber just breathes ancient temple, from the towering stone pillars, to the sense of echoing vast, cavernous space, to the colossal god-like statue filling the inner sanctuary. From its serpentine pillars that look just like a giant caduceus to the monkeyish statue reminiscent of Thoth as a baboon, my guess is that the Chamber of Secrets is an allegorical temple of Thoth. Alchemy is the primary metaphorical subtext of the series, and Rowling has provided a strong setting for it here in her underground temple.

These themes started with the Philosopher’s Stone from the first book, which Harry obtained in an underground chamber like this one. Rowling continues to weave in subtle hints to alchemy and Egyptian myths related to death and eternal life as the series progresses. Finally, Harry’s transmutation from base metal to gold culminates in *Deathly Hallows*. From his self-sacrifice in the Dark Forest to his enlightenment at “King’s Cross,” Harry not only achieves victory over Voldemort, but becomes the Master of Death as well.

Rowling’s use of images, stories, and characters that directly reflect myths and folklore is deliberately designed for just such speculation as I’ve

done above. She wants to see if her readers have their wits about them and to put those wits to use to follow her trail of clues.

If this type of game with your reader appeals to you, and it works within your genre, you can hint at mythic stories in your own work as well. Play with the details in a subtle way to alert your reader that more is going on beneath the surface. For example, have certain character names reflect mythic heroes or heroines. Describe your settings similar to places where appropriate mythic stories transpired. Employ the use of folkloric creatures or magical items. Weave in plot points that mirror a classic story. Under it all, hint with mythic subtext that points the way to long-held universal wisdom. All of this will help pave your trail of clues without beating your reader over the head with obvious, easy hints. Challenge the reader!

Use the ancient stories available to you for deepening your mysteries and hiding your secrets. They provide a wealth of universal knowledge and familiarity your reader can connect to in order to draw deeper into your story. Reader involvement is a powerful tool. With myths and folklore, all you have to do is subtly direct your reader's attention toward the story you're drawing upon, give them sufficient clues to alert them to the direction you're going, and let the reader-sleuth figure out the rest. You don't have to weave in every detail of the myth you employ. They will delight in doing the research and discovering your references and analogies, if you've laid your trap well.

## 7) Hide in a List

We've already analyzed a few examples of how a clue can hide in a list, including the listing of the members in the Order photo, Mrs. Weasley's cracking boggart, and Ron's joke about Riddle murdering Myrtle. Here's another list that hides clues from *Phoenix* when Harry and friends are cleaning out Sirius' "black" house:

They found an unpleasant-looking silver instrument, something like a many-legged pair of tweezers, which scuttled up Harry's arm like a spider when he picked it up, and attempted to puncture his skin. Sirius seized it and smashed it with a heavy book entitled *Nature's Nobility: A Wizarding Genealogy*. There was a musical box that emitted a faintly sinister, tinkling tune when wound, and they all found themselves becoming curiously weak and sleepy, until Ginny had the sense to slam the lid shut; a heavy locket that none of them could open; a number of ancient seals; and, in a dusty box, an Order of Merlin, First

Class, that had been awarded to Sirius's grandfather for 'services to the Ministry'.

'It means he gave them a load of gold,' said Sirius contemptuously, throwing the medal into the rubbish sack.

(p. 108, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury)

That heavy locket is a Voldy-Horcrux, which R.A.B, aka Regulus Black, brought back home for safe-keeping and destruction. Slytherin's locket is first mentioned in *Half-Blood*, but notice how it's hidden here in an earlier book among a listing of many interesting items, all with curious descriptions. In fact, it's description is the least intriguing. The locket is not even listed as the first or last item of the list, where the eye tends to naturally fall.

Learn from Rowling—hide clues in a list, but don't make it the only item of interest that stands out. And if you want to be really deceptive, embed the clue in the middle of the list and not the beginning or end.

## 8) Discredit the Witness

One way you can hide a clue is to make the person who reveals it look like a complete idiot. For Rowling, Trelawney and Luna seem to be the biggest target for this deception. They simply spout so much nonsense, each in her own way, that you don't expect them to ever get anything right. Fudge is a similar character. So, once a character has been discredited, he or she becomes a prime candidate for hiding an important clue.

What Trelawney is most famous for are her two "true" prophecies, but she also makes an accurate prediction in Harry's first lesson:

"My dear," Professor Trelawney's huge eyes opened dramatically, "**You have the Grim.**"

"The what?" said Harry.

He could tell that he wasn't the only one who didn't understand...

"The Grim, my dear, the Grim!" cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Harry hadn't understood. "**The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards!** My dear boy, it is an omen—the worst omen—**of death!**"

Harry's stomach lurched. **That dog on the cover of *Death Omens* in *Flourish and Blotts*—the dog in the shadows of Magnolia Crescent...**

(p. 107, *Azkaban*)

Trelawney is presented as a charlatan; McGonagall discredits her entirely and tells Harry she's predicted a death every year. Plus, the reader knows quite well Harry's not going to die in book three of a seven-book series (which Rowling had already announced). So, who would pay attention to the very real clue that death is attached to the Grim? It's not Harry's death that's being foretold, however, it's the dog's death...it's Sirius'. The Grim, Sirius' Animagus alter-ego, finally catches up to him at the end of *Phoenix*.

Taking Trelawney seriously is one thing...but Luna...? Still, Luna was on to something big. With her father, her accusations ranged from "Fudge's dearest ambition is to seize control of the goblin gold supply" (p. 174, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury), to Scrimgeour being a vampire (p. 294, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury), to the Aurors as part of the Roftang Conspiracy to "bring down the Ministry of Magic using a combination of Dark magic and gum disease" (p. 299, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury). She hammered home that something was rotten within the Ministry and a battle for power was imminent. In *Deathly Hallows*, one of the first things to happen was the fall of the Ministry, toppled from within.

So, if you've done the work to create an outlandish character, utilize one of Rowling's techniques and put the character to extra work by giving her an outlandish clue to hide that the reader will never suspect. Make sure she truly does spout nonsense most of the time, or the reader will catch onto you and start taking your character seriously. Remember, it's always sleight of hand, distraction, that you're looking for.

## 9) Drifting off to Dreamland

Dreams play a prominent role in the Harry Potter series, illuminating both Harry's fears and dropping clues for things to come. Many dream scenarios revealed vital information. It was obvious from the start that the dream of Wormtail and Voldemort in "The Riddle House" in *Goblet* was a vision of a scene actually taking place, and thus it was riddled with clues.

Others were not quite as obvious. Harry dreamt about doors upon doors before he and the reader understood that there was a particular door in the bowels of the Department of Mysteries that Voldemort desperately wanted access to—and why.

Because dreams can take on an abstract, disjointed, mixed-up quality, they're an excellent tool for hiding images and hints of what is yet to come.

There are several dream sequences in the series where clues lurk, but here's one from *Sorcerer's/ Philosopher's Stone* that we can analyze fairly easily:

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor Quirrell's turban, which kept talking to him, telling him he must transfer to Slytherin at once, because it was his destiny. Harry told the turban he didn't want to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried to pull it off but it tightened painfully—and there was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it—then Malfoy turned into the hook-nosed teacher, Snape, whose laugh became high and cold—there was a burst of green light and Harry woke, sweating and shaking.

(p. 130, *Sorcerer's Stone*)

This dream provides several connections between people that will play out through the rest of the series. Quirrell's talking turban is an obvious connection to Voldemort, and the series' three chief antagonists are all lumped together: Draco, Snape, and Voldemort. Here, from Harry's first day at Hogwarts, is a dream-like mirrored image of the final confrontation scene of *Stone*, with Voldemort a la turban offering Harry a place by his side and Harry refusing.

After experiencing the climactic scene of *Half-Blood*, Malfoy's transformation into Snape preceding a "burst of green light" in this early dream is especially frightening—when you consider how much detailed fore planning Rowling puts into her series. At the end of *Half-Blood*, the last time Snape and Malfoy are together, there was a murderous burst of green. Could Rowling have dropped a clue about the ending of *Half-Blood* all the way here near the beginning of the series?

Dreams have long been a popular tool of writers for weaving secrets and deeper meaning into stories. Done in a subtle manner, they can foretell action to come without sacrificing your surprise ending. Keep in mind that dreams highlight emotions and patterns, but don't always need to make sense logically. They are best kept short and mysterious and not used to drop heaps of introspection.

## 10) Repeated Clues and Running Bits

Before getting started with this section, let me recommend an excellent, older series of books written for fans to seek out and uncover many of Rowling's hidden clues. I'm referring to Wizarding World Press'

*Ultimate Unofficial Guide to the Mysteries of Harry Potter* series by Galadriel Waters, E.L. Fossa, and Astre Mithrandir. These books were my introduction to HP sleuthing. They approach the hunt totally from a fan perspective, but gave me the idea of studying Rowling's technique from a writer's. These fan guides also helped me see how creatively Rowling colors outside the lines when devising ways to torture...I mean, tease...her reader-sleuth.

One thing the UUG books emphasize is what Wizarding World Press calls "running bits." Like a running gag, a running bit is a small reference that pops up repeatedly throughout the story or series. It's another trick in Rowling's arsenal that she uses to identify certain types of clues by colors, story elements, or other themes. The UUG books cover several; I'll only hit a few.

We've already seen how Rowling uses "spots" to point out a clue or someone acting deceptively. She also used pink in a similar method. There's an essay in Wizarding World Press' *The Plot Thickens...Harry Potter Investigated by Fans for Fans* called "Pink Stinks" by Julie Maffei (age 13). In it she links several pink items from the series and theorizes that pink is considered a color of concealment.

Here's a list of pink items Ms. Maffei mentions that conceal or disguise:

- 1) **Hagrid's pink umbrella**—conceals Hagrid's snapped wand
- 2) **Lockhart's pink robes**—conceals a completely false man
- 3) **Pansy Parkinson's pink Yule Ball robe**—disguises a mean-spirited girl
- 4) **Tonks' pink bubble gum hair**—disguises a Metamorphmagus
- 5) **Umbridge's pink Alice bands and sweaters**—disguises a nasty woman masquerading as a teacher who cares
- 6) **The Fat Lady's pink dress**—conceals the opening into the Gryffindor dormitory
- 7) **Petunia's pink cocktail dress**—she's definitely hiding a secret in her knowledge of the wizarding world.

Just like with spots in an HP novel, once you've been alerted to this running bit, then the next time you see pink, you should be alerted that something is not as it appears to be.

Another running bit Rowling used was the number seven. Seven is a theme within the series that holds magical significance. It's also used as a

marker for major clues.

“Oh that’s my Foe-Glass. See them out there, skulking around? I’m not really in trouble until I see the whites of their eyes. That’s when I open my trunk.”

He let out a short, harsh laugh, and pointed to the large trunk under the window. It had seven keyholes in a row. Harry wondered what was in there, until Moody’s next question brought him sharply back to earth.

(p. 343, *Goblet*)

Here we have a running bit (seven) marking a major clue: the fact that the real Mad-Eye is hidden beneath those seven keyholes. However, Moody distracts Harry and the reader from reflecting too deeply.

Seven marks many other major clues throughout the series:

- The seventh floor of Hogwarts holds the Room of Requirement as well as the entrance to Dumbledore’s office
- The prophecy is on row 97 in the Department of Mysteries
- Harry (and Neville) are born as the seventh month dies
- Voldemort’s soul is in seven pieces
- There were seven books to the series.

Some of Rowling’s most interesting running bits, however, are the frequent use of items that relate to a key mystery in the story. In *Secrets*, we had numerous mentions of roosters, frogs, and running water before entering the Chamber of Secrets. Clocks clicked ominously throughout *Azkaban* as well as finger and toe references. There were eyes staring us in the face all over *Goblet* where Mad-Eye had such an interesting role to play.

This is a playful technique Rowling employs to have fun with her reader. Whereas some clues she tries hard to distract you from, others she wants to draw the reader’s attention to. The clues are still not obvious, until you’ve figured out the running bit, but then you can use your new key to unlock several more.

So, get creative with marking your clues. Plot out clever ways to distinguish between types of secrets and how to mark those. If reader involvement in your story is important to you, do whatever you can to make it more fun for them to get involved. After all, the whole purpose of a mystery is to involve the reader as a sleuth. Giving them the key to hunt

down and unlock a string of clues is an excellent technique for getting them obsessed with your story.

## 11) Mirrored Images

Remember how in the Wormtail trail of clues we analyzed the scene in the Three Broomsticks where Harry first learns about the relationship between Sirius and his father? There was a definite parallel drawn between James/Sirius and Fred/George. The twins mirrored the troublemaking best friends of old in a deliberate ploy to force the reader to reflect on who designed the Marauder's Map. Not only were characteristics mirrored to help us draw the link, but proximity was used as well. Rowling deliberately had Fred and George give Harry that map *immediately* before the revelations in the Three Broomsticks so the mapmakers would be uppermost in our mind when the parallels were noted between the two sets of troublemakers.

You can juxtapose or mirror many aspects to draw parallels and hide clues: symbols, characters, and plots. Patterns from days gone by have been repeatedly mirrored in the contemporary world of Harry. Here are a few that were considered possible clues prior to series end:

- Would the Hogwarts' Houses work together, or would they divide, as reflected in Slytherin's disagreement and departure from the school he helped found?
- Were Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville a modern version of the Marauders, and if so, would Neville betray Harry?
- And perhaps one of the greatest reflections of all—Harry looked a bit like Tom Riddle, including having similar backgrounds, but they acted entirely opposite with their choices. How would Harry defeat his shadow without reflecting him?

Even whole scenes can be mirrored to hint at possible connections or tease your reader:

For one brief moment, the great black dog reared on to its hind legs and placed its front paws on Harry's shoulders, but Mrs. Weasley shoved Harry away towards the train door, hissing, 'For heaven's sake, act more like a dog, Sirius!'

'See you!' Harry called out of the open window as the train began to move, while Ron, Hermione and Ginny waved beside him. The figures of Tonks, Lupin, Moody and Mr and Mrs Weasley shrank rapidly but

the black dog was bounding alongside the window, wagging its tail; blurred people on the platform were laughing to see it chasing the train, then they rounded a bend, and Sirius was gone.

(p. 166, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury)

Keep in mind this image of Sirius chasing after the departing Hogwarts Express train, and remember how Sirius “was gone” by the end of *Phoenix* as we take a look at this scene from *Half-Blood*:

‘Now, dear, you’re coming to us for Christmas, it’s all fixed with Dumbledore, so we’ll see you quite soon,’ said Mrs. Weasley through the window, as Harry slammed the door shut behind him and the train began to move. ‘You make sure you look after yourself and...’

The train was gathering speed.

‘...be good and...’

She was jogging to keep up now.

‘...stay safe!’

Harry waved until the train had turned a corner and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were lost to view...

(p. 130, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

That’s a great example of a mirrored scene, with Molly reflecting Sirius’ actions of the prior year. Molly did not die, and thus this is a bite of red herring, but it seems that Rowling deliberately mirrored Molly’s actions to Sirius’ to put that very thought in her reader’s mind. She wanted us to question whether this beloved mother who worried so for all her children would live or die.

As a writer you can mirror your scenes to not only drop clues and hints of secrets, but to show plot changes and character development as well. It’s a great technique to revisit an earlier scene through someone else’s POV to distinguish between characters, or through the same eyes as before to show how that character’s perspective has changed or developed. Once a scene’s structure has been established, its mirrored reflection can point to distinctions that hint at clues, secrets, and changes and help involve your readers deeper into the story as they analyze the parallels and differences.

## 12) Reversing Expectations

Barty Crouch as Mad-Eye Moody is a prime example of hiding a clue by reversing expectations. Mad-Eye was an Auror, a man reputed to have

spent his life fighting Dark witches and wizards. He's got the scars and missing chunks of his nose to prove it.

He's also a totally cool guy. He taught some of the best Defense Against the Dark Arts classes Harry and friends had experienced and personally worked with Harry until he was able to totally throw off the Imperius Curse. Most importantly, he watched out for Harry throughout his fourth year, acting as his prime supporter from the faculty in the Triwizard Tournament. Who'd ever expect such a cool guy, who'd helped Harry in so many ways, of being in league with the Dark Lord?

And yet, Rowling turns these deep-seated reader expectations on their head. She doesn't just sweep those expectations aside, she uses them as the direct reason for why Moody *is* the book's villain. It's *because* he's Harry's #1 supporter in the tournament that makes him the *most* suspect. We'd been alerted by Snape to the use of Polyjuice, which was deliberately shown to the reader in a prior book. We'd seen Moody constantly drinking from his flask (a running bit). However, even without these hints, the reader should have a clue that something was amiss with Mad-Eye due to reverse expectations.

Another example of how Rowling reverses assumptions is with the surprising relationship between Tonks and Lupin. Some readers guessed their hook-up early in *Half-Blood*, but it came as a complete shock to me. My attention was not focused there, and one of the main reasons is because it went against my expectations.

First, I didn't suspect Tonks of having a love interest. It was obvious something was going on with her, but it was also clear that Rowling was setting her up as a red herring for the book's villain in disguise. I thought it was entirely possible that her changes in Patronus and metamorphmagus was just as presented, because of the trauma she'd recently experienced, and that more was only being hinted at to tease the reader.

One reason why I didn't suspect a love interest with Lupin is because of his age. Lupin is of Harry's parents' generation, and Tonks, though older, we associate with Harry's generation. Their relationship went against my assumptions for pairing, and so I didn't see it coming.

There's also the bit of Lupin being an ostracized werewolf, and so I wasn't anticipating a romantic involvement for him. Though any romance reader should have because he's the perfect tortured hero. Still, that's Harry's role.

So, because the Lupin-Tonks hook-up reversed reader expectations in regard to age and social connections, it was a masterfully laid mystery.

### 13) Returning to the Scene of the Crime

We saw how juxtaposition worked in that mirror analogy with James/Sirius and Fred/George. Because the scene of Fred and George giving Harry the map was juxtaposed with the scene in which Harry hears about the dual troublemakers of Sirius and James, the reader should make that map connection between both sets of troublemakers.

For another simple example of how to juxtapose two supposedly unrelated elements to hint at a relationship, let's look at *Goblet*. Early on, Rowling tells the reader straight-up what to look out for in this book. In Chapter 9 after the Quidditch World Cup, some unseen person near the Trio casts the Dark Mark into the air. Wizards pop in all around, shooting stunning spells at Harry, Hermione, and Ron.

"Do not lie, sir!" shouted Mr. Crouch. His wand was still pointing directly at Ron, and his eyes were popping—he looked slightly mad.  
"You have been discovered at the scene of the crime!"

(p. 130)

*Discovered at the scene of the crime!* Get that? We're supposed to watch out for it.

Then Bagman pops onto the scene:

"Where have you been, Barty?" said Bagman. "Why weren't you at the match? Your elf was saving you a seat too—"

(p. 133)

Take note! Although "Barty" was at the World Cup, he had his elf saving him an empty seat that he never used.

Bagman's comment reminds us of what Winky had told Harry back in the stands. She was a good house-elf, not a shameful one like Dobby. Winky always obeyed her master...even to the point of saving a seat for him in the highest box when she was deathly afraid of heights.

So when Mr. Diggory asks her impatiently, "Elf? Did you see anyone?"

Winky began to tremble worse than ever. Her giant eyes flickered from Mr. Diggory, to Ludo Bagman, and onto Mr. Crouch. Then she gulped and said, "I is seeing no one, sir...no one..."

(p. 137, *Goblet of Fire*)

Ludo Bagman is placed in that sentence for a purpose. He is a reminder that Winky's belief above all is to obey her master, who her eyes flicker to next before she gulps and fudges the truth. The juxtaposition of Bagman to Crouch in this sentence is supposed to remind the reader as to where Winky's loyalties lie...and how committed she is to carrying his orders out.

The criminal returning to (or being present at) the scene of the crime is also a type of clue juxtaposition. Mad-Eye appeared on the scene immediately after the discovery of Barty Crouch, Sr.'s disappearance. A similar thing occurs with Riddle "discovering" Hagrid as the person behind the monster in the school, Quirrell at Diagon Alley the day Gringott's was broken into, or Harry feeling his scar hurt from that first banquet at Hogwarts.

The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes—and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead.

(p. 126, *Sorcerer's Stone*)

Notice how Rowling uses Snape as a distraction from Quirrell. It is Snape with his obvious dislike for Harry who is shown to be the most suspect. Indeed, the whole Quirrell being bullied by Snape set-up not only juxtaposes Quirrell into the necessary scenes, but plays with reader expectation as well. "Who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell" (p. 288, *Sorcerer's Stone*) when Snape is swooping about, angry and showing nothing but hatred toward Harry?

This whole reversal of expectations worked so well with Quirrell, that Rowling was able to reverse the reversal in *Secrets* and still take the reader by surprise. Lockhart, the pompous new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, was a prime candidate for causing the disruption in the school in *Secrets*. Although he was definitely a fraud, he wasn't substantial enough to be even the tool of Slytherin's heir. That role was left to a new student, a young girl, Harry's best friend's sister, someone the reader would never suspect because it went against all expectations...Ginny Weasley.

Know your readers, learn their expectation (which will align with genre expectations) so you can smash them completely. Juxtapose your villain with the necessary scenes without giving him away, or juxtapose a clue next to its meaning without casting a spotlight onto it. After all, the reader loves to be surprised, as long as you've played fair.

## Playing Fair

As a final note to baiting your trail of clues, it should be emphasized that before dropping a major mystery twist that involves a magical element, Rowling first shows the reader how that element works beforehand. For example, we see the trio use Polyjuice in an unsuccessful attempt to find out if Draco is the heir of Slytherin two books before Polyjuice is used as a major plot device to hide a Death Eater as a trusted teacher at Hogwarts. Likewise, we'd been told about the Imperius Curse and even seen it performed on Harry in *Goblet* before it was used to twist Madam Rosmerta two books later in *Half-Blood*.

Play fair with your readers. Give them the necessary clues on one hand, while you distract them by sleight of hand with the other. Plot your mysteries and mark your trail of clues well, and you'll have loyal fans who come back time and time again to experience the thrill of discovery you've buried deep into your story. If you play your game well enough, they may even follow you into new genres and even different formats.

## The Game's Afoot Again: On Cursed Child and Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

To fans who fell in love with the secrets and mysteries of Harry Potter, it came as no surprise that JK Rowling's first series afterward was a mystery. While the Cormoran Strike detective novels are great stories, they fall outside the scope of this guide as they are set in a completely different world.

However, two new works are to be released in 2016 that take place in the wizarding world. As of this writing, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, a play in two parts, has already been performed to preview audiences in London. The first in a trilogy of films, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, releases in November. *Cursed Child* takes places after the epilogue at the end of *Deathly Hallows*. Its cast is made up of the old crew, now older: Harry, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, along with their children and some new faces as well. The plot involves a twist on the storyline we are already familiar with.

While being set in the familiar wizarding world, *Fantastic Beasts* involves a totally new cast of characters (though some may be ancestors to those we've already met, and there may be one surprise thrown in) and

takes place in the United States. So, new faces, new setting, and a new story.

What is most curious to me about both projects is that Rowling has decided to release script books for each. Scholastic (US) and Little Brown (UK) will be offering the print book editions of *Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts*, while Pottermore will be publishing the electronic.

It may seem perfectly natural for this huge franchise to market itself in as many ways as possible, but I have a different take on it. Rowling has said in prior interviews that she prefers the novel form over films. She cut her clue-laying teeth through the Harry Potter novels. Even though she is now also a script writer, I wonder if she has not also hidden some Easter eggs into the upcoming storylines that will be easier to find in her favored print format.

It will be most interesting to see how the new storylines and formats will change Rowling's mystery techniques. Something tells me that for *Fantastic Beasts*, at least, the games are about to begin!

## **Take Away**

In creating your story questions and your character secrets, be the master magician. People love to be surprised. Like opening that beautifully wrapped package at Christmas that we've stared at under the tree for weeks, the moment of ripping off the wrapping and seeing what has been hidden inside is a thrill.

Don't cheat your readers out of this discovery. Learn sleight of hand. Hide your mysteries well and distract from the clues you've planted. The tools for hiding and distracting are as many as there are clues to plant. Just make sure you play fair with the reader. Give them the "aha" moment they crave, and they'll come back for more.



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# Lesson Seven

## Put a Fidelius Charm On Your Godric's Hollow (Holding off Backstory)

I once heard literary agent Donald Maass give a workshop on his *Writing the Breakout Novel*. One thing he said I will always remember—**backstory is called backstory because it belongs in the back of the story.**

This lesson follows on the heels of how to leave a trail of clues because one of the most important trails you should be pushing your reader to discover is the compelling backstory you've withheld. Remember the three central questions I asked at the beginning of the Wormtail chapter, the ones that drive Rowling's trail of clues?

- 1) What exactly happened in Godric's Hollow?
- 2) Where does Snape's loyalty lie? and
- 3) How will Harry defeat Voldemort?

The first two out of three of these are primarily concerned with backstory, and even the third is built upon backstory. The reader is compelled to read more because they do not know the answer to these questions—they don't know the backstory.

### Overview:

In this lesson we'll discover:

- 1) The benefits of holding off the protagonist's backstory.
- 2) How to backstory even your secondaries.
- 3) When to reveal your backstory to pace your plot.
- 4) Why you should leave one Easter Egg hidden.

### Awaiting the Baggage Claim

What happened at Godric's Hollow is obviously all backstory. It's ancient history, but incredibly important to Harry's present because it reveals answers about who Harry is and what he must do in order to survive.

Why does genealogy or history consume so many people? We want to know where we came from to better understand who we are and our place in the world.

Consider, however, do you understand your family history, your own personal backstory completely? Aren't you still trying, to some extent, to

understand yourself, your life, the kin who spawned you, and especially where you are going?

Consider, too, the people you encounter daily. When you meet a client at work or the parent of one of your children's friends, do you know all about them the moment you meet? Yet, does that lack of knowledge keep you from communicating and conducting business? You probably start off most acquaintances with just the basic facts: name, appearance (if meeting face-to-face), occupation, and the goal that brings them into your sphere (i.e., wanting to buy your product, needing to arrange carpools for soccer).

So, too, with the character on the page. The reader does not need to know every little detail of personal trauma about your hero or heroine in the first paragraph, first chapter, or even first half of the book. Just the basic facts will do. Name, a hint of appearance, an identifying characteristic (the hooks discussed in the first lesson), and a gripping current goal. Fundamentally, what the reader needs is a point in common, a compelling, interesting, character—a reason to continue reading.

You'll hear a lot in writing circles about the need to create a *sympathetic* character. The word "sympathetic" just doesn't work for me. It's too easily confused with compassion or pity. If you have no problem understanding sympathy as "with understanding," or having a mutual association, then okay, a sympathetic character is fine. Too often writers carry this sympathy to the page by creating a protagonist bordering on perfect, noble and heroic from the get-go, or even worse, someone who needs our sympathy, as in pity. Sympathetic just does not carry the spellbinding quality which I believe to be the true center needed for character introduction.

What I think is a better word for defining character set-up is **compelling**. You want a protagonist who will draw in your reader's attention. Someone that intrigues, fascinates, and almost addicts your reader to the point that they cannot look away (like the power of high drama on good TV). You want your readers completely under your Imperius charm, bound and determined to read onward to learn more, to see what your protagonist will do, so that eventually the reader will discover what makes him tick...just not at the beginning.

With this understanding of compelling, you'll see more clearly why backstory needs to be cut from the beginning as drastically as possible. Because one element people find completely compelling is mystery. If your

reader knows, understands, and is totally in sympathy with your character from the start, then that's not a compelling character. However, consider presenting the reader with a character who is powerful in his passions, obsessed with a certain goal, completely intriguing in the way he thinks, acts, views the world—and the clincher—has an air of mystery about him. This is a character that your reader will latch onto and must read on to uncover his mysteries and see what he will do.

Look again at the withheld Godric's Hollow backstory. In our introduction to Harry, we learn that a powerful wizard wanted to kill this harmless little baby, was unable to do so, and that somehow the baby survived and the uber-wizard lost his powers. We also know that the baby's parents died and he's off to live with his aunt and uncle.

We know just enough backstory to generate a ton of questions—why did this powerful wizard want to kill an innocent baby? How exactly did the baby survive? What happened to the wizard? How does Dumbledore know all this? How could that scar prove helpful?

So, although some backstory is revealed at the beginning, it is revealed from a limited third source (we never see Godric's Hollow directly), and only enough to inform and orient the reader to what they absolutely must know at that point to begin the story. What little is revealed keeps the reader guessing, thereby creating an air of mystery.

Harry is compelling from the start because he fascinates. Again, how was he, as a baby, able to survive a curse no one else had ever survived before? That's an intriguing, compelling mystery. Also, we meet an eleven-year-old child who has magical powers and is not aware of it. *How interesting.* What other powers might he have? *How mysterious.* He feels put upon, put down, misunderstood, bereft, and alone, but he's able to talk to snakes and even sic one on his bully cousin. *How cool.* Finally, the clincher—he gets an invitation to leave his dreary life behind and go to a school with other witches and wizards to learn magic. *We are so there!*

That's how to create a character with a minimal use of backstory. It was quite deliberate. Rowling said in a TV interview:

Discarded first chapters of book one: I reckon I must've got through fifteen different alternative chapters of book one. The reason for which I discarded each of them were: They all gave too much away. And in fact if you put all those discarded first chapters together, almost the whole plot is explained. This is an old notebook in which I worked out

—and again, I don't want you to come too close on this—[flashes paper] That is the history of the Death Eaters!

(<http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2001/1201-bbc-hpandme.htm>)

Rowling understood clearly that the appeal of her mystery was in the backstory she cut, and she guarded her mysteries well. All obsessed fans knew that she'd written the end to book 7 since nearly the beginning and had it locked away in a vault. Indeed, the withheld backstory is probably the key to what made her the first career author billionaire.

Too many times I've read a first chapter or critiqued a work with too much backstory upfront and the author has defended herself saying, "But I need that to set it up right, for you to understand the complex situation or my troubled character." Hogwash. *Hogwarts*. You don't need it. Truly.

The reader only needs to understand enough to keep on reading. That's it.

We don't need to know that Voldemort came after Harry Potter having determined that he was the child of the prophecy because not only was he born at the end of July to parents who had defied him thrice, but he was also a half-blood, like himself. That he entered Godric's Hollow with his yew wand, having been told by his faithful servant Wormtail, betrayer of Lily and James Potter, the secret to their hideout. We don't need to learn from the start that Pettigrew was the fourth member of the group of Marauders, a little, weak man, feeling left out and unappreciated, and clinging to the new bully about town because he was too scared not to. That Voldemort then entered the Potter home, and that James, Lily's husband, who had tried to date her throughout their school years, but only managed to catch her interest during their seventh year at Hogwarts, then married and had baby Harry a year before, with his best friend Sirius as godfather, tried to hold Voldy off at the door, shouting at his wife to save herself and their child, but put up a brave struggle and was killed. We don't need to know that Lily, a very talented witch who was quite skilled at charms and a favorite of her Potions Master Slughorn, was offered the chance to live by Voldemort, due to the secret lifelong infatuation of double-agent Severus Snape, but refused to abandon her baby and was killed. We don't need to know that her loving, chosen sacrifice thus protected her son in ancient magic, so that when Voldemort tried to kill him, baby Harry survived the curse no one had before, or that the scar Harry was left with connects him psychically to Voldemort and holds a piece of his soul, one of seven. That Voldemort has

killed many times before and with certain deaths has severed a piece of his soul and placed it in a prized receptacle, all of which must be destroyed before he can be finally defeated. And we especially don't need to know that the betrayer, Pettigrew, in his Animagus form scurried through the rubble, retrieved Voldemort's wand and kept it hidden so he could present it to his master years later after having lived for twelve years as a rat in a wizard family whose son will eventually become Harry's best friend.

All we need to know is that Voldemort, the most powerful Dark Lord of 100 years, killed Harry's parents, then tried to kill Harry and failed, losing his powers in the process.

See the difference?

Yes, I know my little example is a bit ridiculous, but trust me, it's out there. If you've judged contests or critiqued widely, you've seen it too. Or, if you take an honest look at your own, my own, work-in-progress, you'll probably see a tendency toward the former rather than the latter.

So much of what we've learned about the success of Rowling's techniques involve giving the reader more—more detail in worldbuilding, more clues to follow, more in-depth characters to enjoy. **But when it comes to backstory, what the reader wants is less.** Rowling masterfully held off backstory until the reader was beyond curious to know, until the readers were begging, screaming in cyberspace, dying to know what happened. Until they felt compelled to hunt out the clues for themselves or write their own fanfic because they just could not tolerate the wait.

Let me put in one word of caution lest you stray too far to the other side. There is a difference between being pleasantly strung along and unpleasantly befuddled and downright lost. Make sure you include just enough backstory, as Rowling did, to orient your reader at the beginning. They should know the important basics: where your character is coming from, why they are here, and what they are hoping to accomplish (for now). Hit your GMC and hit it hard. The rest should be doled out sparingly like cheese along the maze of a mousetrap.

Hook your reader by hiding the bait. Make them come after it. Give your fans more by giving them less—especially when it concerns the backstory of your protagonist.

## **Backstory Even Your Secondaries**

Look now to the second central question of the series—where do Snape's loyalties lie? For many, Snape is the most compelling character of

Potterdom, even more so than Harry. If you visit the HP forums online, you'll note the threads that garnered the highest hits. Or if you attend a fan conference, it's impossible to miss the avid Slytherins dressed in their silver and green, discussing and debating their misunderstood Potions Master. Fans of all types, whether priding themselves on their House of Gryffindor or Slytherin, obsessed over Snape.

And what do we know of him at the beginning (actually half-way into) the first book? That he's the Potions Master, seems to loathe Harry on site, and wants the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. That's it. I think the major key to Snape's success (besides ambiguity, which will be discussed in a later lesson, and which relates to mystery as well) is his complete air of mystery. We know so little about Snape, and yet what we know is totally compelling.

Even though Snape is most definitely an antagonist to Harry, he's exactly the opposite of Voldemort. Whereas Voldy is always described as cold and calculating, Snape is passionate and emotional—hateful, yes, cruel as well, and rather slimy, but volatile in his emotions. He's got a goal we understand—to become Defense Against the Dark Arts professor—but we don't know either why he wants it or why Dumbledore will not let him have it. (Please note the classic goal and conflict).

Again, with Snape, Rowling set up just enough backstory to create more questions in the reader's mind. Why does Snape want the DADA job so bad? Why does he hate Harry? Why did he owe James Potter a life debt? And where do his loyalties lie?

Rowling does not limit herself to intriguing backstory about her hero and main protagonists, she's got detailed, intriguing backstory woven into the story at appropriate times for a large number of her characters...and more was dangled before our noses as the series progressed. Weren't you eager to know the relationship between Albus and Aberforth and why the brothers were never together? What were the horrific visions wakened in Dumbledore's head as he drank that potion in the Inferi cave? What type of tortuous backstory did that hint at?

Were you not on the edge of your seat to find out whether Hagrid, in his fascination with monsters, had accidentally killed a student and that's why he was expelled? Later, weren't you surprised to discover he was indeed a half-giant? Can you imagine how many readers would have lost

interest if everything revealed about Tom Riddle in *Half-Blood* was flung at them at the beginning of *Stone*?

Rowling is famous for keeping notebook upon notebook of detailed backstory for her characters. She's chronicled the histories of most of her secondaries, and even flashed one of her notebooks at the screen during a TV interview[10] that afterward kept many Harry Potter sleuths busy. She kept those notes to herself and remarked that much of that information would never find its way into the book, though it is now creeping out in Pottermore.

It's all details she had to know, however, in order to create a full world. In this way, backstory is very much related to worldbuilding. Backstory is worldbuilding for your character.

Just because you shouldn't whack your reader over the head with a personal history lesson upfront does not mean you shouldn't create it and know it yourself early on. Do your homework. Fill your notebooks. Analyze every detail of your characters and their backstories—not just their GMC, but how they relate to each other and their world. Create detailed, rich, compelling histories for each character that weaves in and out with the other characters.

Then, as an added bonus, make your backstories do double-duty. Not only does Snape's personal history answer why he is fascinated with the Dark Arts, it also explains why he hates Harry, why he became a Death Eater in the first place, why he was eager to turn Black over to the Dementors, why the Dark Lord trusts him, and especially why he's loyal to Dumbledore. Simplistic backstory that only relates to that one character, or only answers one question, does not contribute to a full, rich, well-rounded character or world.

Do your worldbuilding for all your characters. Make each character's backstory intertwine with the others'. Mix them up together in a rich, frothing brew. Then hold onto it and mix in sparingly, like spice, dribbling it through your work to impart the slowly-brewed flavor your reader craves. Never forget that in revealing backstory, as in savoring fine wine, less is more.

## Revealing the Backstory

How would Harry defeat Voldemort? This question was not pure backstory, but definitely involved it. How Harry would defeat Voldemort was a combination of backstory mixed with forward plot that drove the

reader to the climax of the story. The backstory must be added in the correct amounts to fuel the forward motion of the plot at just the right pace.

When is the right time to reveal your backstory? Yes, we've discussed part of the answer to this question—when your reader is beyond dying to know. The full answer, however, goes deeper. Reveal your backstory only when it's necessary to the plot. Don't ever tell the reader more than they need to know right now, in the current situation, to understand what is happening. Finally, don't ever give your protagonist more information than he needs right now to make his choice as to what he will do next.

Think about *The Da Vinci Code*. One reason that book hit such a high note of success was its compelling mystery and the rate at which it was revealed to the reader and to Sophie, the female lead. Sophie represented the reader in the story, having no clue as to the mystery behind Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. With the ending of each chapter, one clue was solved at the same time another was formed. The reader, or Sophie, never went without a driving, intriguing question related to plot or backstory.

Reveal your mysteries, your carefully constructed backstories, at the demand of the plot. When you do, don't reveal them all in one lump. String hints out, with new questions forming, to build up their expectations and tension before you reveal the full answer. Dribble the hints and clues temptingly through your book or series. Parse them out in interesting doses so that the reader never goes without a driving question.

As you reveal these secrets, do so in an exciting manner. Nix the scenes of characters sitting over tea, at dinner, or driving in a car discussing their innermost secrets. Instead, fling your hero's tortured past and mistakes at him from the poisonous words of his most despised enemy as they race through a chase scene (as Snape did to Harry following Dumbledore's death). Give your heroine the information she's craved just *after* she's made a huge mistake due to her lack of knowledge. Create your own version of the Pensieve, your own way to impart backstory in a non-boring method.

The reader, and Harry, were only given the final piece of necessary backstory—the knowledge that the elder wand, which Dumbledore once possessed and now awaits in Voldemort's hand, is completely under Harry's control—immediately before Harry struck. Because once Harry had earned all the information which had been withheld from him, he is finally prepared to rise with the pressure which has been building since the beginning and meet his chosen fate.

## Leave One Easter Egg Hidden

An “Easter Egg” is the popular term used for a fun detail hidden within a book, game, or DVD. With Rowling, an Easter Egg is one of the multitudes of secrets scattered throughout the books (or on her website or interviews) to help the reader decipher her mysteries.

Did the readers find all the HP Easter Eggs and their answers by series end? Or do some, even now, remain faithfully hidden or unanswered? I turn outside Harry’s world to another compelling character for possible insight:

“I’ll think of it all tomorrow, at Tara. I can stand it then. Tomorrow, I’ll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day.”

(p. 719, Scarlett, at the end of *Gone With the Wind*)

This ending left the reader with a powerful question—would Scarlett get Rhett back? How many readers, in the decades since *GWTW*’s release, have fantasized their own versions as to what happened in Scarlet’s “tomorrow?”

JK Rowling and Margaret Mitchell have many things in common. They’re both female authors who captivated their times with stories of trust and betrayal, prejudice and war, passionate loyalties and bitter divides. They also wrote massive tomes.

Rowling, like Mitchell before her, left more than one question unanswered (though Mitchell’s unanswered question is not backstory). Rowling said in numerous interviews that the reader would have all the backstory they needed by the end of the series. *Needed* is the key word here. Yes, the reader had all they needed, just not all they *wanted*. Here are a few dangling carrots, hidden Easter Eggs, left undiscovered by series end:

- What exactly happened in that 24-hour period between Voldemort’s appearance in Godric’s Hollow and Hagrid’s arrival with Harry at Privet Drive?
- How did Dumbledore know what happened at Godric’s Hollow?
- Why was the Potter home destroyed if the Avada Kedavra curse doesn’t even leave a mark?
- What did James and Lily do for a career (even though he had family wealth)?
- What were the twelve uses of Dragon’s Blood?
- Why were the Longbottoms in particular targeted for knowledge regarding the Dark Lord’s disappearance?

- Was Neville there when his parents were tortured? Is that what affected his memory?
- And though not backstory—Why was Bellatrix absent during the crucial scene at the top of the Astronomy Tower when Dumbledore was murdered?

Though Rowling has been releasing new details and revealing more backstory through Pottermore, fans are still debating these unanswered questions. As I finish up edits, spoilers for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* are starting to flood online. Even though it has been nine years since the release of *Deathly Hallows*, fans are able to pick up right where they left off. Because Rowling’s characters and mysteries have lived on in her reader’s mind with their imaginations still engaged.

I know of two fan fiction published books which sought to continue Mitchell’s work and answer her remaining mysteries—*The Wind Done Gone*, and *Scarlett: The Sequel*. The unanswered question at the end of GWTW has engaged readers’ (and movie viewers’) imaginations for 80 years. Do you think the story would have been as equally remembered if Scarlett had ridden off into that sunset on the back of Rhett’s white steed, rather than abandoned and contemplating how to win him back?

Leave your reader with at least one hidden Easter Egg, no matter how small. You never know if you may someday want to write a sequel, and that small unanswered question could be your jumping-off point. At the very least, that nagging question will encourage your readers to keep your story fresh in their minds, rather than discarding it on their bookshelf as a been-there-done-that.

## **Take Away**

- 1) Create detailed, rich, interesting, compelling backstory for all your main characters and most of your secondaries.
- 2) Hold your backstory off until the reader is dying to know it.
- 3) Weave the backstory in by snippets through imaginative means that doesn’t bore your reader and is apace with the forward plot.
- 4) Leave at least one interesting question unanswered, after all, “Tomorrow is another day.”

If you remember nothing else from backstory, remember this—trim, trim, trim. Cut, hack, and chainsaw out any backstory that you absolutely do not need at the front of the book. Revise fifteen times until you start off

with only a compelling character and an intriguing mystery or story question. Then, at the end, leave your reader with one dangling mystery, thus teasing them to remember your story long after they have set down your captivating book.

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# **Lesson Eight**

## **Pulling the Sword Out of the Hat**

### **(Mythic Structure, Archetypes, & Themes)**

With her education in the classics, Rowling is quite adept at making use of myths throughout her series in a variety of ways. We've already seen how she taps into myths to name her characters and to plot her clues, but her use of these ancient stories of human understanding flows much deeper. She employs:

1. Classic mythic structure—the Hero's Journey
2. Mythic archetypes for storytelling and characterization
3. Mythic conflicts and themes, (i.e. the battle of good against evil, the journey through the Underworld, and the antagonist as the protagonist's shadow, the shadow of one's soul).

We'll need to discuss what myths are and why they are powerful as tools in writing, but that particular discussion will be deeper and more meaningful after we've seen myths in action in a contemporary story. After that, we'll explore how myths, their characters, conflicts, and themes, can be used to improve our own contemporary stories.

#### **Overview:**

Each section will cover:

- 1) What exactly is the Hero's Journey?
- 2) What are its twelve steps?
- 3) A chart outlining all twelve steps in all seven Harry Potter books.
- 4) An analysis of each of these steps from the chart in Harry Potter.
- 5) Using your Guiding Theme to hone your story.
- 6) Why use mythic structure?
- 7) What are character archetypes?
- 8) What are storyline archetypes?
- 9) What are personality archetypes?
- 10) How to make sure your archetypes are fully rounded characters.
- 11) Using classic myths to enhance your story.
- 12) Using mythic themes.
- 13) A final note on genres.

First, let's dig in by examining how Rowling utilizes classic mythic structure to plot her Harry Potter series.

## The Monomyth, aka The Hero's Journey

Many of you will already be familiar with the theories of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell. His seminal work, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, presented the idea of the monomyth, also known as the Hero's Journey. Or you might be more familiar with the book *The Writer's Journey* by story consultant and screenwriter Christopher Vogler. Vogler studied Campbell's work and presented the mythologist's complex theories in a condensed and more accessible form for writers.

Campbell's comparative studies of hundreds of myths showed striking commonalities among stories separated by centuries, cultures, and continents. Like Jung, he theorized that these points of congruence thrive due to archetypal knowledge and understanding, which exists in all peoples, and that bridges separation of time and space. Thus the monomyth is a universal pattern of story structure that transcends human boundaries to bubble up in myths from ancient Greece, to medieval courtly romances, to today's commercial fiction. To put it simply—the Hero's Journey is the story plot which has lasted the longest because it strikes a basic, universal human chord of truth.

Thus the Hero's Journey is the archetypal outline for a blockbuster plot. Since the 1940s when its modern face was reinterpreted by Campbell in *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, many books and movies have been based on it, most famously the *Star Wars* series by George Lucas.

The summaries of the steps of the Hero's Journey provided below are based on Vogler's presentation of Campbell's work. I'm going with Vogler because he simplifies the steps, which makes it a bit easier to chart-out and present. Please note that Vogler wrote a whole book on this journey, and we're covering it in one chapter. Thus my presentation will be simplified. I will not be able to discuss all the variations and nuances of style. I highly recommend you read Vogler, or if you love mythology and esoteric studies as I do, try Campbell.

Also, I'm adding a thread at the beginning that is not part of Vogler's twelve-step Hero's Journey, even though he discusses it. **Theme, or the Central Question of the Work**, is to me the hub of the wheel around which all elements of the story revolve, including the plot. Each step of the Hero's Journey will pull from and flow back into the theme or the central question.

You'll see it clearly in my analysis of Rowling's work and could be viewed as the impetus for the beginning of the Hero's Journey and in the culmination at the end, coming full circle.

## Vogler's Twelve Steps to the Hero's Journey

First we'll look at brief summaries of each of the twelve steps of the Hero's Journey, then a table summarizing all seven Harry Potter books according to the Hero's Journey, and finally a break-down analysis of how Rowling implements each of the steps throughout the series.

**Ordinary World**—The home base of the hero, his normal everyday world. The Ordinary World should be in sharp contrast to the world he's getting ready to venture into, the Special World. Usually, the problem the hero will face already exists in his Ordinary World, but lie dormant.

**Call to Adventure**—A discovery or arrival that hints at a new world and calls the heroine within, a challenge or wrong done that must be answered. The Call to Adventure prompts the heroine to leave her Ordinary World for the Special World. It could be something that threatens the peace of the Ordinary World if the heroine does not go off to deal with it.

**Refusal of the Call**—The moment in which the hero hesitates, not sure whether he wants to change. By refusing the Call, the hero shows that he fully understands the serious nature of the Adventure, that his life will be threatened or seriously changed. Does he really want to take that risk, or stay safe with the status quo? Can he really make a difference?

**Meeting with the Mentor and Gift**—The mentor serves as the guide for the Hero's Journey. He's the old wise wizard who trains and tests the hero, and gives gifts to enable the completion of the hero's quest (not do it for him).

**Crossing the First Threshold**—The portal from the Ordinary World to the Special World, usually guarded by a Guardian or Gatekeeper. It is symbolic of the heroine having made a firm commitment by taking that first major step to begin her quest. Gatekeepers serve to test whether the heroine is worthy to pass.

**Tests, Allies, Enemies**—This is where the hero is prepared for the Ordeal to come by developing skills and facing tests, meeting and accepting allies, and learns who his enemies are. A hero cannot simply enter the Special World and triumph. There would be no growth arc. He must be challenged, learn, and grow in order to succeed. This is where you get to truly torture your hero!

**Approach to the Inmost Cave**—As the heroine approaches the Inmost Cave, the place of her greatest challenge, she will face new and more difficult obstacles and guardians to overcome to prove herself worthy for that ultimate battle. The Inmost Cave represents the classic Underworld, and the heroine must be prepared to journey through it, face death, and be reborn. Often, the heroine may pause, tempted to turn back, knowing the horrors she's about to face.

**The Ordeal**—In the Inmost Cave the heroine must face her deepest fears. Using all the skills she's learned up to now, she confronts the antagonist/villain and faces the ultimate test, the culmination of the trials that have prepared her for this final battle. Here she faces either literal or symbolic death. She must face some form of death in order to experience resurrection.

**Reward (Seizing the Sword)**—The reward is something the hero wins or steals from the Ordeal that is a trophy of sorts, marking his triumph over the antagonist. The Reward is something personal and is most powerful as a symbol of the book's theme or central question. It may not always be something material, but could be presented as a celebration or a love scene.

**The Road Back**—The bridge from the Special World to the Ordinary World. Here the hero crosses another threshold that may include a reassessment and rededication of goals. The Hero must decide whether to return to the Ordinary World rather than to remain in the Special World. Oftentimes, the hero may be chased out of the Special World by those he opposed, or may find the defeated Villain rallying for a second round.

**Resurrection**—That moment when either literally or symbolically the heroine is reborn. This may be brought about by a rebounding villain who must be conquered once more. The heroine awakens to a new world and a transformed life. Generally speaking, it happens on the Road Back because a bit of reflection is usually necessary to understand the transformation that occurred as a result of the Ordeal. It conveys the idea of cleansing, of baptism. The stench of the Ordeal, of death, must be washed away for the heroine to reenter the community.

**Return with the Elixir**—The Elixir is like the reward except it benefits someone beyond the hero. Sometimes the two may be combined, but the Elixir is usually a gift that has the power to heal the hero's wounded community. It can also heal or benefit an individual. The important aspect is that it is something the hero has gained from the Special World that benefits

others beyond himself (whereas the Reward after the Ordeal benefited the hero, or was a trophy of the hero's triumph).

## The Hero's Journey in All Seven Harry Potter Books

Across the next several pages is a chart detailing the Hero's Journey for Harry Potter. For easier reading, there is a pdf version available at the publisher's website [www.DeepRiver.press](http://www.DeepRiver.press).

The chart's color-coding is to help your eye follow similar items across the seven columns of the table.

**Note:** These steps do not always happen sequentially. For example, Harry first crosses the threshold of Platform 9¾ into the magical world before he meets the key mentor, Dumbledore (though he has met Hagrid, who serves as a mentor as well). Also, Rowling tends to have the Resurrection before the Road Back. The specific structure of the journey is not fixed in stone. It is also quite open to interpretation. You may analyze certain key aspects differently than I have.

## Analysis of Each Step

**Harry's Ordinary World** changes somewhat from book to book. His story always begins at the Dursley home in the Muggle world. However, through the course of the series, he goes from being locked in his cupboard, to having his own room, to getting presents from friends for his birthday, to having more freedom to move about his Ordinary World, to finally leaving it forever.

Except for the last book, he always starts out dormant and hidden in each book—asleep and locked in his cupboard, pretending he doesn't exist in his room, dreaming in his bed, lying on his back hidden by flowers, sitting in a chair in his bedroom waiting. He does not start off active. He jumps into action after the Call to Adventure. Download a PDF version at <http://deepriver.press/writers-guide-to-harry-potter.html>.

Journey	Stone	Secrets	Azkaban	Goblet	Phoenix	Half-Blood	Halows
Guiding Theme; Central Desire or Question	Power; Desire to know parents	Bravery; Where do I belong?	Identity; Who am I, & where do I come from?	Self-worth; Am I worthy?	Love; Desire to be included	Compassion and trust; How can I trust and understand others?	Resolve and self-sacrifice; How can I do what I am called to do?
Step 1 Ordinary World	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive, locked in cupboard	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive, in bedroom pretending he's not there	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive, doing homework in secret in bed	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive; asleep in bed, dreaming of the Riddle house	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive; lying on back in flowerbed listening to the news	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive; sitting in chair by bedroom window waiting for Dumbledore	Muggle World; #4 Privet Drive; packing, preparing to leave it forever
Step 2 Call to Adventure	Letters from Hogwarts; Hagrid's hand delivery	Dobby's warning; Harry must not go back to Hogwarts	News report on Muggle TV about escaped convict Sirius Black	The dream of Voldemort and Wormtail in the Riddle house; Harry's scar hurting	Dementors in alley between Magnolia Crescent and Wisteria Walk	Dumbledore's arrival at #4 Privet Drive; announced by a letter ahead of time	Arrival of Harry's bodyguards (the Order); all willing to risk their lives for him
Step 3 Refusal of the Call	Vernon Dursley's withholding letters; "I don't think I can be a wizard." (p. 58, Stone)	Denies Dobby and tries to shut him up	Blows up Aunt Marge; denies he's seeing anything important with Sirius	Refuses to write to Dumbledore about his scar; denies its importance	Uses his Patronus on Dementors; denies how the Ministry will look at his actions	Refuses to prepare himself for Dumbledore's arrival so he won't be disappointed	Harry refuses to give hairs for the Polyjuice, does not want to endanger his friends

Journey	Stone	Secrets	Azkaban	Goblet	Phoenix	Half-Blood	Hallows
Step 4 Meeting with the Mentor and Gift	Hogwarts knowledge of Fluffy; Dumbledore: knowledge of Eisted, Invisibility Cloak	Riddle through Diary; diary; Pursetongue; Dumbledore: hat and sword	Lupin: ability to cast Patronus; belief in himself	Mad-Eye ability to throw off Imperius Curse	Sirius: two-way mirror; love, knowledge and connection with his parents	Dumbledore: understanding of Voldemort's faith in Snape; Snape Potions book	Aberforth via fragment of mirror; feeling of Dumbledore watching gifts from his will
Step 5 Crossing the First Threshold; Guardian	Diagon Alley as an initial dip; Tom/The Leaky Cauldron; Platform 9 ¾; the full commitment; the train guard	Ford Anglia; Dobby; Whomping Willow	Knightbus; Stan Shunpike	Dursley's boarded up fireplace via Floo Network; George, Mr. Weasley, Fred, Ron; Portkey to Quidditch World Cup; Amos & Cedric Digory	Grimmauld Place; the Advanced Guard and Dumbledore	Slughorn's home; Slughorn	Tooks' family home; Took's mother and father, the mother a sister to Bellatrix and Narcissa
Step 6 Tests; Allies; Enemies	Troll, Mirror of Eisted, Nicolas Flamel; Ron & Hermione; Quirell & Snape	Polyjuice Potion; Anagok learning Pursetongue; Moaning Myrtle & Dolohov; Lockhart, Garry, Riddle	Dementors; Patronus lessons; Fred & George; Pettigrew; Dementors	Titwizard Tournament; Sams, Pseudo Mad Eye, Cedric; Harry Crouch Jr.	Occlumency lessons; Thestrals; DA especially Neville, Luna, Ginny; Umbridge	Riddle/ Pensive lessons, Felix Felicis; Singing, Crumy; Draco, Rutilus Scraggout; Snape; Voldys; Umbridge; Bellatrix	Wandering through wilderness, Hunt for Horcruxes; Ron, Hermoine
Step 7 Approach to the Innmost Cave	The labyrinth of tests miles under Hogwarts; the final chamber	From the bathroom, down the pipes; Chamber of Secrets	Through the Whomping Willow; Shrieking Shack, the lake	The Maze; Graveyard	Department of Mysteries; Atrium	Tom Riddle's Cave; the island in the underground lake	Back to Hogwarts, Shrieking Shack; the Dark Forest

Journey	Stone	Secrets	Azkaban	Goblet	Phoenix	Half-Blood	Hallows
Step 8 Ordeal: Opponent faced: Jump over opponent: Death experience (may be symbolic)	Quirrell / Voldemort; Denac; Voldemort's Demand; Death experience	Riddle; Basilisk; Prevents Riddle; Icon taking over; Ginny; kills; Basilisk; Death at bite of Basilisk	Matauders; Dementors; Overcomes; Leans person; history and context;	Voldemort; Death Eaters; Overcomes; Imperius curse; and stands proud;	Bellatrix; Lucius, Death Eaters; Voldemort; Prevents them from opening prophecy; "Loves Voldemort out of his body"; Sirius' death; death by Voldemort	Voldemort's Horcrux; Death personalized by blood offerings; Inferi; Dumbledore's weakness; Breaks through Voldemort's defense; and takes Locket; Inferi attack	Death and Voldemort; Sacrifices self; then travels through Death (King's Cross) and chooses life to save others; King's Cross
Step 9 Reward (Seizing the Sword)	Philosopher's Stone	Sword of Gryffindor	Godfather: Sirius Black	Cedric's body; Triwizard Cup	Knowledge of the prophecy	Dumbledore's trust: "I am with you." (p. 540, Bloomsbury)	Claims the Elder Wand through Espalmatus
Step 10 The Road Back	Hospital	McGonagall's and Dumbledore's Offices	Time-turner sequence	Mad-Eye's office / hospital	Dumbledore's locked office	McGonagall taking charge	From King's Cross back to the forest, then to the castle.
Step 11 Resurrection	At Dumbledore's hands; talk with Dumbledore	Fawkes' tears	Harry's Patronus	Fawkes' song	Harry's heart, his ability to love	Fawkes' lament	Narcissa's hands on his chest; Portrait: Dumbledore's tears
Step 12 Return with the Elixir	Feast; earned back points lost for Gryffindor	Dobby's freedom	Pettigrew's life saved (life debt), Sirius' as well	Galleons for Fred and George	Alerting the world to the return of You-Know-Who	Dumbledore's funeral; for a moment, the union of the magical world	The celebration and mourning in the Great Hall; Voldemort's dead body

**Harry's Call to Adventure** directly reflects the primary focus of that book's story.

1. **Stone**—The letters from Hogwarts signify Harry's initiation into Hogwarts and the wizarding world.

2. **Secrets**—Dobby's warning is spurred by the Diary of Tom Riddle, which Dobby's master, Lucius Malfoy, will pawn onto Ginny Weasley.
3. **Azkaban**—The newscast regarding Sirius' escape starts the immediate focus on Sirius and his mystery.
4. **Goblet**—Voldemort and Wormtail at the home of Riddle's father foretells the climactic scene at the graveyard using his father's bone for Voldemort's rebirth.
5. **Phoenix**—The Dementors sent by Umbridge reflect the intensifying discord between Hogwarts under Dumbledore and the Ministry under Fudge as manipulated by Umbridge.
6. **Half-Blood**—Dumbledore's arrival at Privet Drive sets the stage for the private lessons into the Pensieve, which form the core of this book.
7. **Halows**—The sacrifice Harry's friends are willing to make for him by drinking his Polyjuice is directly reflected in the self-sacrifice Harry will make for them all in the end.

**Harry's Refusal of the Call**—Except for the last book, Harry's refusals all seem to revolve around one theme—his own importance. He refuses to believe that he is someone of consequence, therefore he hesitates to make any change. He can't be a wizard, his life can't be seriously in danger, his scar pain isn't important, the Ministry won't use any excuse to come after him, and maybe Dumbledore won't consider him important enough to show up as promised. So Harry is essentially denying the Call by denying himself. This hints at Harry's ultimate quest—to believe in himself. Yes, he does have the power to make a difference, and he must believe in himself in order to accomplish his destiny.

However, in *Azkaban*, the Call to Adventure and Harry's subsequent refusal is a bit more complex because Rowling intertwines Harry's own search for identity with Sirius' mislabeled identity. Harry is forced to play along with Uncle Vernon's lie about attending St. Brutus' Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys, a parallel for Sirius being falsely locked in the Prison of Azkaban for twelve years. When Harry blows up Aunt Marge, not only is he refusing her assessment of his parents, but also silently acknowledging (hence his loss of control) how little he knows about his own Mum and Dad, and himself.

Note, too, the Refusal of the Call can take the form of having the call refused for the hero, as what happens when Vernon Dursley takes Harry's

letters in *Stone* and then imprisons Harry in his room in *Secrets*.

In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry finally believes in himself and his ability to act, but still refuses to accept the help he needs. He's still trying to go it alone.

**Harry's Mentor and Gift**—Dumbledore is the primary mentor throughout the series. But he's not the only one. I believe that each book also has another person who serves as mentor to Harry. Each of these mentors gives a special gift that enables Harry to triumph over that book's particular antagonist.

1) Hagrid serves as a mentor in *Sorcerer's Stone*, giving Harry his first knowledge of the magical world and his parents as well as the information about Fluffy and the flute by which to calm him. Dumbledore gives Harry the knowledge of Flamel (through his Chocolate Frog Card), his Invisibility Cloak, and a preview of how to work the Mirror of Erised. Finally, Hagrid also gives Harry the photo album of his parents (which is more a reward).

2) In *Secrets*, while Dumbledore is still the primary mentor, with his gifts of the Sorting Hat and Gryffindor's Sword, Riddle by way of his diary serves a mentor role as well. It is through the diary that Harry learns about the Chamber of Secrets and what happened to Hagrid years ago. It is also through Riddle/Voldemort's "gift" of Parseltongue that Harry is able to enter the Chamber and save Ginny.

3) In *Azkaban*, Lupin is Harry's role-model, connection to his parents, and teacher of the Patronus. Harry uses the Patronus to save himself and Sirius from the Dementors—Harry's main antagonists through this intensely personal soul-searching book.

4) In *Goblet* his mentor is the pseudo Mad-Eye. Harry is not aware of Mad-Eye/Barty's duplicity until the end of the story, when mentor transforms into antagonist. However, throughout the book, pseudo Mad-Eye encourages Harry, points him in the direction of the skills and tools he'll need to complete his quest, and gives him the main gift he needs to defeat Voldemort in the graveyard scene—the ability to throw off the Imperius Curse and stand his own ground.

5) In *Phoenix*, with Dumbledore conspicuously absent, Sirius serves as Harry's mentor. While Sirius in many ways is a personality Harry does not wish to imitate, he does provide Harry with a strong connection to his parents, new information about himself and his

abilities, and the unshakable love that helps him to once again overcome Voldemort in the end.

6) In ***Half-Blood***, we return to Dumbledore as the primary mentor, giving insight into how Riddle became Voldemort and the unwavering faith in Snape that Harry will need to complete his quest at the end of book 7. Note that this last gift continues into *Hallows* because book 6 and 7 are in many ways one book. Snape, however, has served as an unwitting second mentor throughout *Half-Blood* by way of his potions book.

7) In ***Hallows***, we have a curious device of Dumbledore remaining a mentor to Harry through his brother Aberforth. It's Aberforth's blue eyes, looking remarkably like his brother's, that gives Harry solace and hope through the story. It is also Dumbledore's portrait at the end that guides Harry in his disposal of the elder wand. Finally, Snape gets his full due as mentor, and with his last memories, gives Harry the final knowledge he needs to go into the Dark Forest and completely vanquish Voldemort.

**Harry's Crossing the First Threshold**—There are several symbolic thresholds between Harry's Muggle World and his Special World of magic. He crosses three in the first book alone—The Leaky Cauldron and its brick gate to Diagon Alley, Platform 9¾, and finally, the boat ride over the lake to Hogwarts. However, I think Platform 9¾ is the most significant for the first book because it truly carries Harry away from the Muggle World for his full immersion into the wizarding one. It's significant to note that the Platform's Guardian is called a "guard" (p. 91, *Sorcerer's Stone*).

Even though Harry uses Platform 9¾ in later books, Rowling deliberately chooses other portals between the worlds so that the gateway isn't always the same, and Harry is exposed to larger, newer parts of the wizarding world. In *Secrets*, he arrives by flying car, thus learning more about the role of the Ministry of Magic as well as the Whomping Willow, which will play a huge role in *Azkaban*. Likewise, in *Azkaban*, the Knight Bus gives Harry, a fuller sense of the magical world nationally. The portkey to the Quidditch World Cup enlarges his view internationally; Grimmauld Place deepens his understanding of good people versus bad people (the world is not divided between good people and Death Eaters). The same is true for Slughorn, extending Harry's understanding of the Slytherin nature. Finally, in *Hallows*, through the gate and guardians of Tonks' home and

parents, Harry is made to realize just how many people in the wizarding world are willing to make sacrifices for him, even though he doesn't know them personally.

**Harry's Tests, Allies, and Enemies**—It would take too much space to list every test Harry faces as well as every ally he gains. What I've tried to do in my chart above is to list the biggies. For allies, after *Stone*, I've assumed Ron and Hermione as Harry's greatest allies for the rest of the series, and, until *Hallows*, only listed the new noteworthy ones for that book. Likewise with the enemies—Voldemort is assumed to be the head honcho, but each book has a particular antagonist closer to Harry who provides many of the tests and obstacles Harry must overcome for that book. Also, Snape is assumed on the level of Voldemort, an antagonist present in each book. It was not until near the end of *Hallows* that Snape switched in Harry's eyes from being an antagonist to mentor.

**Harry's Approach to the Inmost Cave**—The Inmost Cave, the part that is highlighted, is the Underworld. Notice that in each book, the Inmost Cave is underground, either literally or symbolically. Even the Shrieking Shack, although itself not underground, must be reached through an underground method via the Whomping Willow, a metaphorical tree of life with its roots in the Underworld. What's more, the Shrieking Shack is symbolically underground as it's believed to be a haunted refuge of the Dead. Likewise, while the graveyard in Goblet is not underground, it is without doubt symbolic of Death, and the Dark Forest of Hallows is where you face your darkest fears.

The Approach to the Inmost Cave, the first part of this table not highlighted, is where Harry and his friends face the final obstacles, tests, and guardians to prepare Harry for his journey through the Underworld. However, Hermione and Ron always leave Harry before the Inmost Cave as Harry must face that final Ordeal on his own.

*Azkaban* is a complex example as there are two major themes going on, search for identity and recognition of personal strength. With the aid of the time turner, there are also two Inmost Caves. Even though Ron and Hermione are with Harry in the Shrieking Shack, it is Harry who alone determines to save Pettigrew's life. Harry is also alone when he conjures his Patronus by the lake.

In *Phoenix*, even though Dumbledore is present in the Atrium when Voldemort possesses Harry's body, it's as if Voldemort and Harry are

isolated with Dumbledore powerless to help. Likewise, Harry is the strongest one standing on the island in Voldemort's Cave at the end of *Half-Blood*. It is Harry's strength that must rescue Dumbledore.

And in *Hallows*, Harry must walk into the Dark Forest completely alone, with only the "ghosts" of his deceased loved ones for comfort, but dropping even them with the final steps.

**Harry's Ordeal**—Harry experienced a death/resurrection within each book. However, the answer to each book's Theme/Desire/Central Question that Harry gains is what carries him through his Ordeal, helping him triumph over his confrontation with Death.

- 1) **Stone**—Harry denies Voldemort's offer to reunite with his parents as he realizes that putting his desires over others' lives is not the right choice.
- 2) **Secrets**—Harry channels incredible bravery in confronting the monstrous Basilisk to save Ginny's life and shows by actions that he's not Riddle's shadow.
- 3) **Azkaban**—Harry learns a lot about his own personal history and identity, gaining understanding deeper than public beliefs and opinions. He uses this knowledge of self and family to save both Pettigrew and Sirius.
- 4) **Goblet**—As the youngest and least experienced Triwizard Champion, Harry conquers his jealousy to prove his worthiness alongside the true Hogwarts Champion. He then proves his worthiness further by bringing Cedric's dead body home to his parents.
- 5) **Phoenix**—It is Harry's growing love and his desire to be loved which drives Voldemort out of his body.
- 6) **Half-Blood**—Harry's new ability to look below the surface with compassion and understanding is what helps him release the locket and then guide Dumbledore back home.
- 7) **Hallows**—With his greatest sacrifice yet, Harry firms his resolve to do what no one else can do, and makes the same loving, knowledgeable sacrifice to save others which his mother made for him.

In fact, this last ordeal not only serves as a step in the Hero's Journey for *Death Hallows*, but also as the final ordeal for the complete series. From *Stone* all the way through to *Hallows*, the books had an overarching Hero's Journey as well. At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, Harry experienced his greatest death and resurrection of all.

Finally, while Voldemort is most definitely the series' overarching Antagonist, each book presents a different face of opposition to Harry. Those are the ones I've noted in the table.

**Harry's Reward**—What is interesting to note is that in each book, Harry's Reward is also a symbol of that book's overarching theme or central question.

**1) Philosopher's Stone**—is very much a symbol of power for Voldemort and the only way Harry is able to lay claim to it is by not choosing power for himself. Because he will not grasp power at the expense of others, he also denies his desire to be with his parents.

**2) Sword of Gryffindor**—a strong example of Harry's courage and where he truly belongs, in the House of the Brave.

**3) A Godfather**—this is a touching, sentimental reward in that the orphan can finally claim a parental figure, one who knew and loved his parents, can provide Harry some personal history, and has risked life and limb to save his godson.

**4) Triwizard Cup**—I had the hardest time deciding on what Harry's reward was in *Goblet* because I see two possibilities, and they're both related to complex themes in this story. Although you wouldn't necessarily consider a dead body a reward, it is Cedric's and Harry's cooperation at the last that symbolizes Harry's worthiness and fair-play (as well as Cedric's). While the Triwizard Cup demonstrates how Harry has mastered advanced skills to be able to stand on his own in front of the Dark Lord and his crew of Death Eaters, it is Harry's risking his life to honor Cedric's last request and return his body to his parents that truly shows the noble merit of Harry's character.

**5) The Prophecy**—Harry's "reward" in *Phoenix* is bittersweet. In many ways, he'd much prefer to return to his ignorant, innocent state. Unfortunately, Harry and his world will never be at peace until he has faced, accepted, and accomplished his mission. He must embrace his ability to love in order to defeat Voldemort, and knowledge of the prophecy is a powerful tool in his quest.

**6) Locket and Dumbledore's Trust**—While serving as a powerful Horcrux in *Deathly Hallows*, by the end of *Half-Blood*, the locket represents the role-reversal between Dumbledore and Harry that is the most appealing and most relevant to the book's theme of compassion and trust. At his weakest, Dumbledore must rely totally on Harry, and

Harry delivers. Harry is rewarded with beautiful words which I'm sure will warm him in the year to come, "I am not worried, Harry...I am with you." (p. 540, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

7) **The Elder Wand**—How can a young, rather innocent wizard defeat the greatest Dark Lord of all time? Through the most powerful wand of all time, one that has been won to Harry's loyalty through his great compassion and desire not to harm or to kill, and which he calls to his service by a simple charm to disarm—*Expelliarmus!* A charm which Voldemort would never use. But, once again, Harry rejects this ultimate power and simply uses the Elder Wand to restore his old and trusted one.

**Harry's Road Back**—In my analysis, Harry's Road Back is not the Hogwarts Express that returns him to the Dursleys and the Muggle World, but rather that intermediary scene between the inmost cave and the feast, often with Dumbledore where understanding is reached. Often set in an office or the hospital wing, this scene more accurately captures the feel of the Road Back than the Hogwarts Express because Harry's true new community is the Wizarding World, not the Muggle, and because it is in this scene that Harry understands his recent quest and his transformation. Likewise, in *Hallows*, it is from the Dark Forest to the Castle, carried in Hagrid's loving arms, where Harry fully understands his resurrection, how he has broken through the bonds of death and his own attached Horcrux, and how he can now defeat Voldemort and save his friends' lives.

**Harry's Resurrection**—Fawkes serves as the tool, or symbol, of resurrection in three of the books (*Secrets*, *Goblet*, *Half-Blood*, and even hinted at in *Hallows*). In *Secrets*, it is Fawkes' tears which quite literally bring Harry back from the verge of death, whereas in *Goblet*, *Half-Blood*, and *Hallows* it is his music which enters Harry's soul giving him strength, warmth, and rebirth symbolically.

At the end of *Stone*, we learn that Dumbledore yanked Harry out of Quirrell's grasp, saving him from death. In *Azkaban* we have the first instance of Harry saving himself by conjuring his most powerful Patronus. Even though this resurrection is from Harry, there is the hint that his father had a part through the identification of Harry's stag Patronus with his father Prongs.

In *Phoenix*, it is Harry's heart that saves him, his ability to love. Whereas in *Hallows*, not only do we get the Phoenix song at the end, in

front of Dumbledore's portrait, but we also, surprisingly, get the gentle hands of a loving mother and long-time enemy on Harry's chest as Narcissa searches for and feels his tell-tale beating heart—and then lies to cover for him.

**Harry's Return with the Elixir**—The ending to *Stone* is a classic example of a return to the community with the elixir. Harry and friends win back all the points they lost for Gryffindor, plus more. They enable their House to triumph, and Harry has delayed Voldemort's return to power, at least for now.

Notice that in my assessment of the return sequence throughout the seven books, I have Harry's community as the Magical World, not the Muggle. I believe that once Harry passed through that barrier at Platform 9¾, the Muggle World ceased to be his true home. Although by saving the Magical World from Voldemort he also saved the Muggles, the immediate communities for Harry are Gryffindor House, Hogwarts, and the Magical World.

Also, though the Leaving Feast occurs in the first four books (and *Phoenix* without Harry attending), after *Stone*, Rowling no longer uses it as the scene for gifting the Elixir. Most of the elixirs become more personal, benefiting an individual...until they come together in the final book to save the whole wizarding community.

At the end of *Secrets*, Dobby, with his release from house-elf slavery, benefits the most powerfully and directly from Harry's return. By series' end, free Dobby saves Harry et. al. from Malfoy Manor, playing a pivotal role in aiding Harry on his quest to defeat Voldemort.

For *Azkaban*—Pettigrew gains his life and owes Harry. When Pettigrew repays this life-debt, although it loses him his life, it aids Harry in the defeat of Voldemort.

For *Goblet*—Fred and George get the gold and thus their shop. At the end, the Weasley's joke shop is a powerful center of rebellion against Voldemort, as well as Fred and George being personal supporters of Harry throughout.

For *Phoenix*—while the magical world didn't want to know Voldemort had returned, ignorance was not power. Finally, that brief moment of unity at Dumbledore's funeral in *Half-Blood* set the waves in motion for that stronger show of unity paralleled at The Battle of Hogwarts.

Thus, Rowling was able to use each elixir and its recipients in her series to build toward the final, greatest elixir of all.

## **Guiding Theme, Central Desire or Question**

As you can see, the central core of each of Rowling's stories acted as a hub of a wheel, around which her plot revolved. The central desire or question drove Harry's forward action, and then, once answered, guided him through his ordeal. That's tight plotting.

In my experience, it seems that many writers may not know when they begin a new project what is the core of that story. As writers, we sometimes have to discover what we're all about by exercising ourselves through the physical act of writing. Or as Rowling said in an interview with Oprah, "Sometimes I know what I believe because of what I've written."

However, if the art of writing is in the revising, once you've got a rough draft, then the fine tuning begins. This is when you roll up your sleeves and start asking the necessary questions to sharpen your plot and hone your guiding theme. Go over each of these Hero's Journey plot points. Where is the theme in your story? Can it be defined or sharpened better? How does each point relate to your overall theme? These are the types of questions which, when answered via writing and polishing, will transform your manuscript into a story that resonates deeply with your reader.

## **Why Use Mythic Structure?**

So, what does this Hero's Journey mean for you as a writer? What does it matter how Rowling constructed each book of her series? You probably already know the answer to this—it's important to learn from the best. Learn from the story mentors who have come before, just as Rowling did. Tap into the power of myths that have guided humanity for thousands of years...because they lasted for a reason.

The best way to learn the Hero's Journey, and how to use it, is by studying the works of others, both contemporary commercial fiction, as we have done here with Rowling, and ancient mythic bestsellers.

Myths are collective, shared dreams, and come to us from virtually all civilizations which have existed for the last 7,000 years. They describe the deeds of the gods, goddesses or other supernatural beings. They explain the "why" of some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon. Or in the words of Joseph Campbell, "Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural

manifestations.” (THWATE, p. 3) Myths are outwardly projected fears, hopes, and dreams of the collective subconscious that point toward universal Truth.

Jung believed that myths are the means to bring us back in touch with our inward forces. They serve as vehicles to the great collective unconscious, with their universal archetypes and themes, which ultimately lead to the transformation of self.

Freud defined myths on the psychological order of dreams. Campbell took Freud’s position further when he said, “The myth is the public dream and the dream is the private myth.”[\[11\]](#)

What Joseph Campbell taught follows in a long line of mystics, prophets, alchemists, and visionaries—people who recognized that myths merely changed their outward clothes when they transferred their inward truths, transforming from century to century, people to people. Underneath it all, human desire remained one and the same—the push for betterment, the quest for redemption.

What the mythic hero has always done and will continue to do is show us the way to fulfillment. The mythic hero accomplishes what the human heart longs for—renovation of self and transformation of our world. As writers we possess a powerful medium to participate in this creative, redemptive process.

Why does myth affect us so profoundly? Why do we want to change our world so badly? Because most humans are dissatisfied with our lot in life and want the world to change. Our hero is the person who can improve the world for us. Our heroine is the person who can teach us to re-invent ourselves.

What the reader wants in a novelist is someone who can reflect our real world back at us and yet provide us hope for a better tomorrow. After all, in the words of mythic heroine Scarlett O’Hara, “Tomorrow is another day.”

Bottom line, myth has power. Deep archetypal power. When you employ mythic structure and themes, you immediately increase the power and universality of your work. When you tap into myth, you dip into a deep well that many before have dipped into as well. With each sip you take from that well to nourish your own story, you immediately draw upon all those who have dipped from the same well before.

The best way to learn how to use the Hero's Journey is to study contemporary stories and diagram their flow, as we have done here. You've got examples of seven books in this lesson, but they're all fantasy. The Hero's Journey is not limited to fantasy by any means. It can apply to any type of story.

Take the time to chart out your favorite movies or books based on the Hero's Journey. Do this with a friend, if possible, because these definitions are open to interpretation and it would help to see someone else's slant of the same story. Read Joseph Campbell's *A Hero With a Thousand Faces* or Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*. Most of all, chart out your story. See how your hero's quest flows with mythic structure, then analyze where it can be strengthened or tightened. The overall theme/central question should be somehow reflected in each step along the way.

Last, and perhaps most important—**don't sweat it!** Seriously. By its very definition of myth, as projections of the collective subconscious, the Hero's Journey is going to come naturally to you. It lives inside your writer's soul. You've absorbed its essence each time you've read a book, watched a movie, or listened to your grandpa's tall tales. It lives in the world around you, and you know it instinctively.

I once edited a young adult fantasy for a debut novelist. After I'd read the story the first time through, I complimented him on his powerful use of the Hero's Journey. He said, "What?" He'd never heard of Joseph Campbell, Christopher Vogler, and didn't know much about myth.

So, I outlined his twelve steps for him, much as I did with Harry Potter above, showing him how he'd hit each step within his story. He was amazed.

That's the power of myth. It lives inside you even if you haven't been formally introduced.

## Character Archetypes

Archetypes—you know them well. You recognize these recurring people instinctively whether you meet them on the page, on the screen, or on the face of your next-door neighbor. There's the loving and nurturing grandmother down the street who always gives your toddler a fresh-baked cookie when he visits. There's the angry and aggressive type-A, who flipped you off when you tried to merge in front of him in heavy traffic. Then there's the know-it-all wise-ass who works in the cubby next to yours and is trying to beat you out for the next promotion.

Myths have their stock archetypes as well. Heroes and mentors, formidable guardians of secret passages and laughing tricksters of chaos, heralds who bring challenges, and shadows who bring death. These types serve as what I call **storyline archetypes**—their form is designed as a function of telling the story.

Another set, which I call **personality archetypes**, are related to those mentioned above but suit a different purpose—to describe the traits of that character rather than the role they play in the story. In myth (and modern stories) we meet the spunky kid, nurturer, bad-boy, wounded hero, best friend, crusader, librarian, scientist, antihero, and many others. Indeed, the field of personality archetypes is almost as limitless as the world is filled with personalities.

In describing these common character types, symbols, and relationships the Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung employed the term **archetypes**, meaning ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race.

(p. 29, The Writer's Journey, Vogler)

Rowling molds her characters with a wide variety of archetypes, both storyline and personality. We'll look at examples of each and which characters represents those archetypes within her series.

## Storyline Archetypes

There are five storyline archetypes I wish to discuss in detail in this section—Threshold Guardian, Herald, Shapeshifter, Trickster, and Shadow. I'm skipping the Hero and the Mentor because I believe we're all familiar with these two.

Each of these archetypes serves a distinct purpose in conveying the story. However, as an archetype is not limited to one character, neither is a character limited to one archetype. Even in a single title book, but especially in a series as long and complex as Rowling's, archetypes can switch between characters and characters can merge and flow between archetypes. It would be impossible for me to cover all archetypes presented at all stages through the entire HP series, so we'll focus on a few of the more interesting and strong.

**A) Threshold Guardians** are placed at portals to new worlds or gateways to new challenges to keep the unworthy out. A Guardian may be a good-hearted ally of the hero, looking out for his best interest, or he may be an accomplice of the villain, seeking to harm or hinder the hero from

completing his quest. Either way, a test of the hero is the ability to overcome or win over the many Threshold Guardians he will encounter along the way.

From the Portrait of the Pink Lady, to Dobby sealing the entry to Platform 9¾ in *Secrets*, to the grindylows guarding the “treasures” in the lake during the Triwizard Tournament, Harry encounters numerous thresholds and their Guardians throughout the series. I’d like to focus on one type of threshold and Guardian to look at closer.

Vogler talks about the Law of the Secret Door (p. 112-113). Many myths include a set-up whereby the heroine is told she must never eat from a certain tree, never open a certain box, or never pass through a certain door, upon pain of death. Of course the myths I’m referring to are Eve in the Garden of Eden, Pandora with her box, and Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. We all know what happens, what is sure to happen anytime this sort of forbidden situation presents itself in a story. If you have children, you probably have this happen numerous times a day.

The power of curiosity is universal. In the words of the immortal Dumbledore, “Curiosity is not a sin.... But we should exercise caution with our curiosity... yes, indeed” (p. 598, *Goblet*). Whereas later in the series Harry develops his own driving need to set the world right by stopping Voldemort, in the first three books, curiosity is one of the prime motivators urging on Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

It seems to me there is a forbidden door in each book, and a guardian to go with it. This forbidden door leads directly to the Inmost Cave where the Ordeal occurs:

**Stone**—right hand side of the third floor corridor that they are forbidden from entering, with Fluffy as the Guardian.

**Secrets**—haunted girls’ restroom (with Percy forbidding Ron to go anywhere near it); Percy and Moaning Myrtle as Guardians.

**Azkaban**—The Shrieking Shack; Whomping Willow as Guardian (and Crookshanks leads the way).

Beyond these first three books, the secret door and its guardian gets a bit murkier, but they’re still there.

**Goblet**—Portal to the Graveyard: Pseudo Mad-Eye as Guardian. This is an interesting one because not only is Pseudo Mad-Eye the portal’s guardian, he’s also a shapeshifter in disguise. Talk about combining your archetypes!

**Phoenix**—Harry’s mind holds the secret door in this book. His dreams show him clearly the secret door to the Department of Mysteries, and his mind holds the “forbidden” and dangerous connection to Voldemort. Snape, through Occlumency lessons, guards the door to Harry’s mind.

**Half-Blood**—Tom Riddle’s cave is symbolic of the secret door which was forbidden him as a youth, and he has explored fully as an adult. Voldemort has set many protections on his cave to protect his Horcrux, but it seems to me that the Inferi serve as the classic Threshold Guardians.

**Hallows**—I would argue that the secret door in this book is one that Harry, in the end, refuses to break into. It is the door into Dumbledore’s tomb that holds the Elder Wand. Voldemort violates this sacred space, stealing the wand, whereas Harry finally gets control over his fears and ambitions and follows Dumbledore’s wishes by focusing on the Horcruxes and leaving the Elder Wand to Voldemort. Dumbledore would thus be the Guardian of the last secret door.

**B) Heralds** bring news about impending change, challenges to overcome, and calls the heroine to adventure. As with most storyline archetypes, the character of the Herald can be presented positively or negatively, an ally of the heroine, or a tool of the antagonist. Or, the Herald role can be fulfilled by an inner call within the heroine and not take on the role of an outside person at all.

Although multiple Heralds can, and do, occur throughout the books, we’ll look at the first Herald in each book who brings the news of the initial challenge for that year.

- 1) *Stone*—**Hagrid** serves in the first role of Herald, breaking down the door to bring Harry his letter from Hogwarts.
- 2) *Secrets*—**Dobby** foretells the doom which awaits Harry if he should return to Hogwarts.
- 3) *Azkaban*—**Aunt Marge**, in a round-about way, serves as a Herald by forcing Harry to consider all he does not know about his parents, his identity—the prime theme of the story, and pushing him out of the house.
- 4) *Goblet*—**Mrs. Weasley**, through her letter inviting Harry to the Quidditch World Cup, invites Harry to explore the Magical World more fully.

5) *Phoenix*—**The Dementors**, then the letters from the Ministry of Magic. The Dementors force Harry into the action which precipitates the flurry of letters and his call to the hearing. We later learn later that the Dementors were envoys of Umbridge.

6) *Half-Blood*—**Dumbledore**, through his advance letter and then in person. Dumbledore arrives to take Harry to Slughorn and starts him on his new quest to delve below the surface of important Slytherins, such as Slughorn, Voldemort, and even Snape.

7) *Hallows*—There are two sets of early heralds in this last book. Both *Daily Prophet* biographies regarding Dumbledore serve to alert (and alarm) Harry to his need to reconsider his pedestaled opinion of Dumbledore. Then the arrival of the Phoenix guard, willing to risk their lives for him, call Harry to his need to accept the help of others in his quest to eliminate Voldemort.

C) **Shapeshifters** are one of the harder archetypes to understand precisely due to their changing shape and function. By their ability to transform, they keep the hero off-guard and always on the alert. Shapeshifting is often played by the love interest, but could also be found as a role of the villain in disguise.

Shapeshifters change appearance or mood, and are difficult for the hero and the audience to pin down. They may mislead the hero or keep her guessing, and their loyalty or sincerity is often in question.

(p. 65, Vogler)

In Harry Potter, the most obvious shapeshifters are all the Animagi running about, each serving a different role depending on which form they're in. As Scabbers, **Wormtail** serves as Ron's pet rat before transforming into the betrayer Pettigrew and back to servant of Voldemort as Wormtail. **McGonagall** appears first as the watchful guardian over Harry's new home before transforming into the strict, but fair, professor Harry is most familiar with. She makes another shift during *Deathly Hallows* as she takes on her divine namesakes' role in leading her troops into battle. Of course, **Sirius** went from being the Death Stalker in his Grim/Padfoot form to loyal best friend as Padfoot/Sirius. Finally, we saw him in *Deathly Hallows* in a new form as a psychopomp (along with James, Lily, and Lupin), guiding Harry on the final leg of his journey through the Underworld.

On the romantic side, **Cho Chang** and **Ginny Weasley** serve as shapeshifters. Cho Chang transforms, in Harry's POV, from a beautiful, out-of-reach star of the Quidditch field, to Cedric's girlfriend, to Harry's girlfriend, to girl whose heart is buried in the past. Ginny morphed from somewhat-annoying-best-friend's-younger-sister, to casual friend, to good friend, to hands-off-unrequited-love-interest, to soul mate.

**Snape**, however, is the series' ultimate shapeshifter. That's why he's so hard to pin down. One minute he seems to be the most despicable, hate-filled man at Hogwarts, and the next it's revealed he spent the whole of Harry's first year saving his life. He flits between loyal Order member to Death Eater in his role as spy. At the end of *Half-Blood*, he transforms from healer of Dumbledore's Horcrux-damaged wound to murderer. The last major shift, actually the pulling away of all the masks, is to the true face underneath—the unrequited lover. Snape is such a complex character, however, that he deserves his own chapter and will get it in “The Ambiguity of Snape.”

**D) Tricksters** are usually the center of fun, mischief, and mayhem in the story. They delight in upsetting the status quo or in “taking the mikey” out of other characters or the hero.

For tricksters we need look no further than Fred and George Weasley. They fit the Trickster description to a Wesley sweater embroidered T. Their spiritual counterpart is Peeves, which is why it was so delightful at the end of *Phoenix*, when they passed their mischievous torch to Peeves, and he seized it wholeheartedly.

Like many fans, I find Peeves and the twins’ antics totally amusing, and I fully understand why Dumbledore keeps Peeves about the place. In holding your reader’s attention, it’s important to have someone kick things up a bit, to foster a constant element of surprise.

Without the Trickster upsetting the status quo, life would not only be duller, but the hero’s path more mundane. Tricksters provide aide for the Hero, even if indirectly. Not only can they poke the hero’s flaw (*oh Potter you Rotter*) quite painfully, but by showing clearly a different mindset, an opposing world view, an alternate way of being, they enable the hero to do the same. As Ginny says:

“The thing about growing up with Fred and George...is that you sort of start thinking anything’s possible if you’ve got enough nerve.”

(p. 655, *Phoenix*)

Rowling magnificently uses her Tricksters to not only upset the status quo, but to propel her hero onward in his quest. Only Fred and George could have snatched the Marauder's Map from Filch, figured out how to operate it (seriously, who else would come up with "I solemnly swear I am up to no good"?), and then bequeathed it to Harry. But where would Harry have been without that map? You think Rowling doesn't know her archetypes? Think again.

**E) The Shadow**, and it's usually singular, represents the dark side of the hero, even though it's frequently projected outward into the villain or antihero. Thus the Shadow reflects the negative qualities of the Hero which must be overcome and defeated for the Hero to attain the ultimate quest of personal transformation. In other words, when the Hero overcomes the Shadow, he is symbolically overcoming his own dark side.

Tom Riddle is most definitely Harry's shadow. This role is never more apparent than during Harry's encounter with the shadowy memory of younger Tom Riddle in the Chamber of Secrets.

"There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only two Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even *look* something alike..."

(p. 317, *Secrets*)

When Harry is most "in touch" with his shadow are the times when Harry is the most angry and revengeful—like, throughout all of *Phoenix!* He's reflecting his Shadow, but his Shadow does not have the ability to reflect the light of Harry.

Having Harry's chief antagonist as the shadow of Harry's soul suits the major theme of the series—who we are is a result of the choices we make, not our birth. Riddle shows one side of choice while Harry shows the other. In the end, Harry must conquer his own dark side, his inability to understand that the world is not divided into Slytherins and Gryffindors, and that, indeed, the Slytherins are not all bad. He's forced to look with some amount of tolerance at people like Draco and Snape and find a way to work together with people he truly does not like in order to harness the full energy of love to conquer Voldemort. In other words, he needed to learn to trust like Dumbledore, something Tom Riddle could never do, before he could fully vanquish his Shadow.

## Personality Archetypes

Personality Archetypes are not quite as fluid as their storyline counterparts. This is because characters tend not to change their personalities as easily as they change their roles. Think about it in real life —you may be a mother, sister, daughter, wife, teacher, co-worker, boss, consumer, and a friend, but you’re probably not a waif, free spirit, seductress, crusader, librarian, and nurturer equally. Once you reach a certain age, your personality is just not as fluid. That does not mean it’s set in cement either.

While we’re rarely a deep mixture of many archetypes, we’re also never a single one. People are usually a complex mixture of at least two, or maybe three. Trauma or drastic changes in our lives can signal a change in our personal archetype as well. This carries through to people on paper and was well represented in *Half-Blood* by Tonks’ change of appearance and Patronus. Once her personality changed, her appearance and Patronus (projected personality) had to change with it.

One excellent guide to character archetypes is *Heroes and Heroines: Sixteen Master Archetypes* by Tami D. Cowden, Caro LaFever, and Sue Viders. They cover sixteen heroic archetypes, eight for male and eight for female, but I’ve seen other analyses where archetypes are charted with different breakdowns and titles. Their list is by no means complete, but is a great starting point. Three of the five archetypes I mention below are described in their book.

While there are many character archetypes represented within Harry Potter, we’ll explore five of the more intriguing:

**1) Snape as Antihero:** the antihero is a hero with a dark side.

The spice of a story, the element that makes it more than simple heroes and villains, lies within the character of the Antihero. The Antihero is someone with some of the qualities of a villain, up to and including brutality, cynicism, and ruthlessness, but with the soul or motivations of a more conventional Hero.

(<http://www.flowerstorm.net/disA/Gallery/anti-explain.html>)

Snape has done terrible things in his past, repented from them, and was redeemed by the series’ end, but throughout the series, at least in Harry’s eyes, he was a hateful, slimy, mean hearted, double-crossing git. One who happened, in the end, to have his loyalties in the right place.

Antiheroes are often cruel, arrogant, and obnoxious or selfish, alienated, and weak. Their story role is to be a foil to the hero and other

characters in the story, to make them deal with the other reality presented by this flawed character. Antiheroes, like a well-drawn villain, will think of themselves as the true hero, living according to their own belief system, even if that system is believed wrong by those they consider beneath them.

In other words, Snape is the perfect description of the antihero.

The antihero best projects the need for balance between the dark and light sides of human nature and the need to restore harmony and peace through repentance or forgiveness. Han Solo is a great example of an antihero, but he was more sexually appealing than book-Snape because he washed his hair.

Snape can most definitely be a nasty piece of work—the way he insults his students, plays favorites, punishes them unfairly—but he stops short of causing serious harm or injury. ***He*** never had them write their lines in their own blood. He uses his tongue as a whip to point out and rub salt in any wound of those he detests—all while risking his life in work for the Order. While he's eager to once more take points from Harry at the end of *Phoenix*, he's also the first to greet the returning injured McGonagall with a sincere note of welcome (p. 751, *Phoenix*, Bloomsbury).

Yes, without a doubt, Snape killed Dumbledore. Consider, though, that it took an antihero to pull off the less-than-heroic agreement between Dumbledore and Snape.

For fun, check out this bit of Snape as antihero humor:

[www.enchantedquill.net/threads/842-I-Am-the-Very-Model-of-an-Anti-Hero-Archetype](http://www.enchantedquill.net/threads/842-I-Am-the-Very-Model-of-an-Anti-Hero-Archetype)

(Alas, the original singing Snape is no longer available, but you can appreciate the lyrics at the above link.)

**2) Sirius as Bad Boy**— “The Bad Boy struts into every room, daring one and all to knock the chip from his shoulder” (p. 10, *Heroes and Heroines*). Because he's been believed to be the black sheep all his life, he's decided to live up to his reputation. He flaunts or ignores societies' rules, while living by his own code of conduct. Women often find him irresistible. Think of Fonzie in *Happy Days*, Sawyer from *Lost*, and who could ever forget Jack Sparrow, *Captain* Jack Sparrow, that is.

Sirius, who's reckless but good-hearted, was framed for a crime he didn't commit. He was believed for twelve long years to have been the betrayer and murderer of his lifelong best friend. Before that he was looked down upon for having come from a dark-magic family, while at the same

time being outcast from the family itself for not being Black enough. The girls in the Pensieve scene definitely found Sirius attractive. And hey, when we first hear of him in the series, he's even lending his motorcycle to Hagrid. Sirius is without a doubt the bad boy with the heart of gold, though later he also morphs into a father-mentor archetype for Harry.

**3) Mrs. Weasley as the Nurturer**—The Nurturer is the loving, caring, usually mother-like figure who takes care of all those around her. She's the one who puts a band-aid on the scabbed knee, always passes a plate of fresh-made cookies around, and lends a sympathetic ear for the one with a hurting heart. Think of Julie Andrews as Mary Poppins.

Mrs. Weasley is a Nurturer with the claws of a tiger when it comes to rearing and protecting her young. She'll send each of her children, including her “adopted” son Harry, a homemade sweater for Christmas, but woe to Ron should he do something stupid, like steal the car. Woe, too, to anyone who would put her children in harm's way, like Mundungus bringing stolen cauldrons into Order headquarters. Bellatrix learns about the claws of this nurturing tiger the hard way!

Mrs. Weasley will always have plenty of food around the house, but Ron and Harry will have to peel the spuds. She has an open ear for Tonks' unrequited love woes, but has her claws out for her own son's fiancée, until she's proved herself worthy. Her worst nightmare is of course the injury and loss of those she loves best, and she shows herself more than strong enough to do whatever it takes to protect her cubs.

**4) Ginny as Spunky Kid**—The Spunky Kid is often a bit of a tomboy, but that doesn't make her less feminine. She's strong, resourceful, and willing to do whatever necessary to help her friends out.

She sometimes hides behind her sarcastic wit, and her lack of confidence may make her play down her best attributes, but she is spirited, cheerful and the most loyal of friends. Quick with a wide grin and a good word, she knows and likes everyone, and the world likes her right back.

(p. 65, *Heroes & Heroines*)

Princess Fiona in *Shrek* made a great Spunky Kid.

With her impressive Bat Bogey Hex, sneaking into the broom closet when her brothers aren't looking, and befriending those outcasts others make fun of, such as Luna and Neville, Ginny's the Spunky Kid. She's incredibly loyal to her friends, even when it means coming down hard on

Harry for “taking orders from something someone wrote in a book” (p. 182, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury).

**5) Lupin as Wounded Hero**—A Wounded Hero is a hero with a serious flaw not entirely of his own fault. He’s been hurt by society, another person, or perhaps a love interest. Because of his wound, he believes himself to be unworthy, or either doesn’t trust the world to not hurt him again. Though living as a loner, the wounded hero is just crying out to be healed, usually through the love of a good woman. *Shrek* is also a good example for this archetype as Shrek himself is a Wounded Hero.

Lupin suffers a secret curse that makes him “unlovable,” or so he thinks. His *furry little problem* keeps him outside of society, while his innate good nature makes him equally unfit for the company of other werewolves. He’s afraid to love and to hurt those who get too close. It takes a lot for Tonks to break down the walls he erected to protect others, and his own heart.

## Rounding Your Archetypes

One important aspect to keep in mind when discussing how to apply archetypes to your work is that **archetypes should not equal stereotypes**. Just because you use an archetype to base your character’s personality and motivation, does not mean that your character should not be well-rounded and complex. For this reason, I often like to work with two archetypes, one dominant and one subordinate.

For an example of how to use archetypes to round out your character, take a look at Hermione. Although Hermione starts off the series as the goody-two-shoes know-it-all, she is tempered with the less aggravating characteristics of the studious, organized, inwardly uncertain Librarian. As she matures she also develops into the passionate Crusader campaigning for elves’ rights.

Work with one predominant archetype, then add in another to complement and contradict, forming a nice round character. Add all the complexities we discussed in the first lesson on characterization. In such a way, you’ll still play to the reader’s need of archetypal characterization while providing well-rounded characters that spring to life off the page.

## On Respect of Cultures

I cannot conclude a segment on myths, archetypes, and stereotypes without discussing the recent controversy surrounding JK Rowling’s release

of some worldbuilding for *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. As of this writing, there is tremendous discussion online about whether Rowling appropriated Native American culture for her own benefit in developing the “History of Magic in North America.” Some Native Americans scholars fault her for the misappropriate use of their living beliefs. As of this writing, Rowling has only superficially responded to these criticisms. Considering her background of activism for the marginalized, I trust that she will eventually address it more fully.

In writing, cultural appropriation is where a writer draws from a culture not their own to establish the identity of their character in a way that is not respectful. Does this mean as writers that we can never write outside our own culture? This is a topic discussed frequently on social media and among writers. What I’m about to write is my own deeply personal opinion.

Note: I am not a member of the group Rowling trespassed against in this particular instance. It is not my right or my desire to comment on how they should or should not feel, nor am I doing so. I am only addressing my views on the general topic of cultural appropriation as a writer coming from an ethnically mixed family myself.

Many writers feel damned if you do and damned if you don’t when tackling a character of a culture not their own. In a world full of people who all have their own distinct opinions, this is unavoidable in almost any debate on any subject, as reading a wide range of reviews on almost any book will show you. However, if you shape your opinion thoughtfully through personal connections and dialogue and then research deeply, you can present yourself confidently while still listening respectfully to opinions not your own.

I firmly believe that, in this day and age, a writer stunts herself and her audience when she chooses not to include diverse cultures in her body of work. We live in a diverse world; why should it not be addressed in all its beautiful complexities and colors in our stories? My husband is from Turkey and we lived there together, raising our young children, until my son was five. Coming from a family of mixed ethnicity, culture, homeland, and religion, I speak to my own views of writing and cultural appropriation from this experience. (You can read a fuller version of this article, including more on my background, at [www.harrypotterforwriters.blogspot.com](http://www.harrypotterforwriters.blogspot.com).)

I wince every time I see a Muslim portrayed in what seems the only faces they can wear in mainstream media—that of a terrorist or Muslim

apologist. Yet do I believe that no one but a Muslim or Middle Easterner should write characters of this culture? Absolutely not. To me, it is imperative that writers of good conscience include alternative and realistic images of people normally portrayed in a limited or stereotypical manner. It helps not only the readers of their stories but the writer themselves.

Stories are the only experience that allow us to get deeply into the head of another human being. This is both a beautiful opportunity and an awesome responsibility. By getting deeply into the POV of the character they're creating, a writer expands their own mind as well as the reader's. However, when mistakes are made, it can do more harm than good.

Therefore, writing of another culture must be done respectfully and in partnership with the culture represented. I feel comfortable portraying characters who are Turkish or Muslim because I have lived in Turkey, have been married into the culture for many years, and my children are part of that heritage as well. I have numerous family members and friends I can turn to whenever I have a question I'm not sure of.

But when I'm writing a character from a culture that I don't have an immediate connection to, I do my best to find someone from that culture who will talk to me as I shape my ideas and then afterward read what I have written and advise me. *Then I take the advice.*

Perhaps it is the sharing of an unpublished manuscript and taking advice that is the most difficult task for a writer as deeply private about her writing as Rowling has always been. She is famous for keeping all of her secrets tightly guarded. Indeed, that is what made the ending of many of her books so surprising, because she had no leaks beforehand.

While that may have worked well when she was writing from her own cultural background, once she jumped the pond and drew upon religious beliefs from another culture, she needed to reach out more. As Rowling has always shown the greatest concern and action for people of diverse and oppressed backgrounds, I am fully confident that she will eventually address this issue directly as she has other issues in the past[\[12\]](#).

What can you do as a writer of good conscience who wants to explore characters of diverse backgrounds?

- 1) **Do it!** Write across cultures. It is imperative for people, but especially children, to see themselves addressed in the stories that they read. It is also imperative for people outside these culture to read

books that reflect the full reality of our world. Our book culture should not be mono.

2) **Do it respectfully!** Two key questions can guide you to a respectful approach: 1) How would I like to see myself, my family, my culture portrayed? And 2) How can I find out what *I don't know I don't know*? Ignorance is what will trip you up the most.

3) **Connect with those you know.** It is harder to disrespect people you have met face to face. Whenever possible, draw upon the cultures you have a personal connection with. We live in such a diverse world that this should not be difficult.

4) **Do your research.** Because it is so easy to connect with people different from yourself, there is no excuse for not doing your research. This kind of research does not come from books, though that may be a good jumping-off point. The best part of writing cross-culturally is the chance and opportunity to meet other people. Take advantage of it. Talk face to face with people from the cultures you're writing about before you begin to help you shape your story. Have a beta reader who will be honest with you, to tell you where there was something you just didn't understand properly or where you were offensive. Then take their advice!

5) **Expect diverse reactions.** We should not be surprised by this as writers. Even when writing monoculturally, a writer still gets diverse reactions to any story made public. Some people are going to love your story, some will hate it. Why should this one aspect be any different? The trick is, as with other reviews, be judicious in your response.

6) **Learn from your mistakes and make amends.** When in the criticism received you discover an error you made, the best response is to acknowledge your trespass, to apologize for it, and to make amends. Defensiveness does not help to improve your perspective, deepen your writing, or repair a connection you just frayed. If you were sincere in wanting to portray unique, underserved voices in your stories, defensiveness does not attain that objective either.

7) **Bottom line:** You can't write respectfully from a culture not your own without the participation in some significant way of that culture.

Let me finish by offering some words of encouragement from Dumbledore. Writers make mistakes. Sometimes this is the reward of taking a valuable risk. Do not let any embarrassment you experience make you

hide in your cabin and never come out, for as Dumbledore said to Hagrid, “If you are holding out for universal popularity, I’m afraid you will be in this cabin for a very long time” (p. 454, *Goblet*).

We may never be able to please all the people all the time, and indeed that should not be our objective. In some situations, the reality may boil down to people simply having different opinions. There is no universal correct answer to every subject. But, if we are not striving to speak strongly through our stories, to connect with diverse audiences and people with point of views other than our own, then what is the point of writing?

## **Base Your Story Conflict on a Classic Myth**

Let me tell you a story.

There once was a god-king named Osiris, who ruled over ancient Egypt. He was powerful and intelligent and brought many blessings to his land and people. He took to wife the most beautiful and magical goddess Isis, who was both compassionate and wise and ruled often in his absence. Together they brought forth their son Horus.

But the evil god Set, Osiris’ brother, fought Osiris for power and control of Egypt. He killed Osiris, then tried to kill Horus. Isis, however, saved the life of her son and hid him on an island where Set could not find him, until he grew old enough to avenge his father.

When Horus became a man, he fought his father’s killer, Set, to regain what was rightfully his and to avenge his father’s murder. He eventually triumphed over Set and ruled Ancient Egypt justly and fairly, whereas Osiris descended to the Underworld and ruled there. Forever after, Osiris was seen as the embodiment of the deceased Pharaoh and Horus as the Pharaoh who lived.

For a fuller rendition of one of the versions of this myth see: [touregypt.net/godsofegypt/legendofosiris.htm](http://touregypt.net/godsofegypt/legendofosiris.htm). The author of the version presented on this website calls the archetypal story of Osiris, Isis, and Horus one of the Great Stories:

The Great Stories are part of the core human experience and never change except in the most superficial ways. They defy any attempts to rewrite them with drastic changes, always returning to their original forms. The setting might be modified depending on who’s telling it, the characters have different names, but fundamentally, it’s still the same story. A version of the Osiris myth exists in every culture: the

just king murdered by his cruel brother, only to be avenged by the prince who follows in his father's footsteps.

You should be very familiar with this archetypal story. It lives on in the Greek myth of Orestes, sworn to avenge his father Agamemnon's murder at the hands of Aegisthus, to Shakespeare's Hamlet, the young prince of Denmark who feels he must act to avenge his father's murder at the hands of his uncle Claudius, to the *Lion King*'s Simba, to Amsterdam Vallon played by Leonardo DiCaprio in the movie *Gangs of New York*.

Each author using myth as a basis for her story will of course mold and tweak that myth to suit her particular beliefs and presentation. Rowling has fashioned the classic "son avenging his father's murder" myth to include not only a murdered father, but the mother as well, and even more importantly to focus the son's action on the liberation of the good world rather than his need for vengeance (even though Harry definitely wants revenge).

The conflicts of the myths we remember to this day speak to human nature as it has been and as it still is. As writers, we can tap into these older stories to give our contemporary ones a level of depth and universality. There are so many myths to choose from, each with its own timeless conflicts, themes, and characters. Here are a few examples with their conflicts:

**The Abduction of Persephone:** In Greek mythology, Persephone is the maiden daughter of Demeter, an earth-mother goddess. In the ancient myth of the abduction of Persephone, the young maiden is picking flowers in a field when Hades, the god of the Underworld, bursts out from underground, grabs her, and carries her off to be his queen in his underworld kingdom. While Demeter searches exhaustively for her daughter, the earth lies dormant, with no flowers or trees growing. When the mother finally finds her daughter, she discovers that Persephone ate seeds from a pomegranate which Hades gave her. Thereafter, Persephone is free to live for several months of the year above ground with her mother (during which time the earth is fertile and green), but must return to her husband in the Underworld for a season (winter).

This ancient story is mostly explained as an origin myth, illuminating why we have the changing season. However, this myth was also part of the Eleusinian Mysteries, an ancient mystery cult concerned with the search for truth, rebirth, enlightenment, and eternal life. As such, this myth also hits on

conflicts of the internal war between our dark and light sides, the need of the higher self to journey into the darkness of the lower self; or the external war between our desires for the loving and familiar, against the dark, dangerous and foreign. All of which are still remarkably relevant today.

**The Love Story of Eros and Psyche:** This myth is another that involves a meddling mother-in-law. Venus, the goddess of love, is jealous of the mortal woman Psyche (Soul) because of her great beauty. She commands her son Eros, or Cupid, to prick Psyche with one of his arrows so that she will fall in love with a loathsome creature. However, gazing on Psyche's beauty, Eros accidentally pricks himself and falls in love with the mortal woman.

After some troublemaking by Venus and quests by Eros, Eros eventually wins his mother's approval to take Psyche away to live in his castle in the sky. Forbidding his bride to look on his face, he only visits her under cover of darkness so that she does not know who her bridegroom is. Psyche's jealous sisters, however, hinting that he is a serpent and will eat her or their babe, persuade Psyche to gaze upon her husband's face. When Psyche does this, Eros, feeling betrayed, leaves her. Psyche must then search high and wide and face many tests set for her by Venus in order to win Eros back.

Classical conflicts that can be picked out of this old story include the human soul's longing for union with the divine, the battle of the sexes and the need for individuation in romantic love, and conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law!

**The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell:** In the legendary days of the Round Table, a fearsome knight known as Gromer Somer Joure confronts King Arthur for usurping some of his lands. He issues a challenge that King Arthur must discover what it is that every woman desires most. If the king fails to do so within a year and a day, Joure will kill him.

Sir Gawain, who was the recipient of the usurped land, vows to find the answer and save Arthur's life. He searches out the answer among all the women of the land, but does not find the true one. However, as Arthur rides into the forest near the end of the allotted time, he encounters a hideous hag who introduces herself as Dame Ragnell, the sister of Gromer Somer Joure, and insists she knows the answer to his question. Her price for the info?—to become the bride of Sir Gawain.

Arthur reluctantly conveys the request to Sir Gawain who instantly agrees. Anything to save the life of his king. The confrontation approaches and Joure is given the correct answer—what every woman desires most is the right of sovereignty over herself, to decide her own fate. Joure howls in rage at his sister, knowing only she could have informed the king.

Gawain is true to his oath and marries the hag—to the great pity of the court that such a handsome man is to be paired with such a hideous beast. However, after the festivities and alone in the bridal chamber, when Gawain gulps down his revulsion to bestow the obligatory kiss, he encounters a maiden most fair. How could this be?

Dame Ragnell informs him that she has been cursed. She can either be lovely during the day in front of his friends and a hag in his bed at night, or the other way around. Which would he prefer?

Showing his true nobility and rare intelligence, Gawain answers, “That is for you to decide, my lady.”

And with those words, her curse was broken and she was lovely all the rest of her days.

I love this medieval story. It demonstrates clearly some modern-day themes and conflicts, such as the conflict between male and female understanding, the dance of desire between the sexes, and the need of women to control their own destinies.

The power play between men and women in a relationship is universal. Even if your story is not a romance, you may have romantic elements that can be deepened by exploring these classical themes of the battle between the sexes. If your story IS focused on the romance, use classical myths to plumb the depths of how two can become one and yet still remain a healthy, independent two.

When you recognize a myth that has a similar conflict to the story you are writing, consider having some fun with it. Engage the myth in your story through creative means. Some writers do this above text, writing contemporary retellings of classical myths and folktales. Others choose to write below the surface, using hints and analogies linking their themes, conflicts, and characters.

Take some time to become familiar with the more popular myths. See how they are still reflected in today’s bestselling novels and blockbuster movies. Then reflect on which conflicts work best with your voice and how to incorporate it into your work.

## **Mythic Themes**

Classic struggles of good against evil, brother pitted against brother, the heroine struggling to conquer her own shadow, the Hero's Journey through the underworld...death and resurrection—all are themes that resonate deeply in the Universal Reader's heart because of their archetypal, mythic conflict.

We understand these stories. We know how they must end. Good must win out over evil. Brothers must reconcile. The heroine must conquer her own dark side. The hero must cross through the valley of death and live again.

From the ancient Egyptian journey through the dangers of the Underworld to their Field of Reeds, to Orpheus' journey through Hades for his dead wife Eurydice, to Lyra and Will's journey through a parallel world of the dead in Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, heroes have faced their ultimate challenge by passing through the Underworld and lived to tell the tale. Variations of the theme will vary slightly, but the end result is the same —heroes must die in order to be reborn to a new life. Death, resurrection, and transformation are inexorably entwined.

This theme is the most powerful for the reader because most of us, like Voldemort, fear our own death and know that our life on earth can be better. We look to our heroes to reassure us that not only is there life after death, that we can follow their path to eternal life, but also that we too can triumph in making our present life much more fulfilling, whole, and new again.

These repeated myths are comforting to us. We know the stories; we know how they must end, but because the world around us does not often show the results we desire, we must seek reassuring success through our entertainment over and over, time and time again.

The long-enduring, oft-repeated mythic themes resonate because they tap into the universal subconscious that flows between peoples of all centuries, all continents, all cultures. If you, as a writer, tap into these themes, you instantly grow your market.

## **Take Away**

Harry Potter fans go crazy seeking out all the mythic references within Rowling's world. They can find connections to almost any myth ever recorded. Did Rowling intend all the mythic references that fans find and thrive on? Of course not! Did she intend many of them? Without a doubt.

The brilliance of using myth is that by using one, you instantly gain links to all the others who have come before you and referenced that myth as well.

By tapping into her own deep well of human subconscious, Rowling dove into the ever-flowing lake of mythic human consciousness with all its rich diversity and interconnectedness. Once you dip your own bucket into the eternal flow of myth, you bring up not only the myth you sought, but all the variations which generations before you have tapped into, pouring from that same story. The wealth of centuries of mythic literary connections are within your grasp for the price of one dip.

Dip your bucket into your well. Connect through your own portal to that ever-flowing river of human subconscious. Study the myths, their Hero's Journey, their archetypes, their themes and conflicts. Then create your own. Chart out your own Hero's Journey. Identify your character and storyline archetypes. Deepen your mythic conflict and themes.

Find your connection, your voice, within their stories. Then play with them. Using Rowling as an example, see how you can creatively weave myth into your contemporary story. You, and your reader, will more deeply connect with the results.

## A Final Note on Genres

One thing I want to make clear before ending this lesson is that even though the Hero's Journey and archetypes seem to be an exclusive fantasy genre motif, they most definitely are not. The monomyth and archetypes can apply across any and all fiction genre borders. It's all in how the author interprets them.

For a fantasy story, the archetypes and monomyth may be taken quite literally—the hero is on a quest to retrieve the Elixir of Life, as in Philosopher's Stone. Along the way he encounters very definite Threshold Guardians, as in Fluffy. You could use the same motif interpreted in a symbolic or psychological way in a romance. The heroine can be on a personal quest to get her life back under her control, when she encounters the hero along the way, and he doesn't really fit into her plan. Once the hero shows he has the heroine's best interest at heart, she can let her own guard down and accept the elixir of his love.

The possibilities for playing and interpreting these mythic structures are only as limited as your imagination.

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# **Lesson Nine**

## **His Royal Snivellus**

### **(Antiheroes and Ambiguity)**

Severus Snape is the most discussed, dissected, disagreed upon, obsessed over character in the Harry Potter universe—even more so than Harry. Check out any online forum or companion book analyzing Harry Potter—they are sure to include a lengthy discussion of the Potions Master. Fan fiction is not complete if Snape doesn’t make an appearance. And fan conferences are run over with Snape look-alikes.

There’s one simple reason for this fascination. Harry, our hero, we know and understand. Snape, however, remained a mystery until the end. Many fans thought they understood Snape and identified with him, but to be honest, they weren’t completely sure. He was a man of many themes, a man of mystery, a character of ambiguity.

So, how do you create a character like Snape that will thrill and obsess your reader audience?

This lesson, in a sense, will sum-up everything we’ve learned thus far in relation to characterization by performing an autopsy on one extremely compelling fictional man. We’ll also push beyond characterization to analyze the themes we use to craft our stories and how to embody them in the people who inhabit our full, complete world.

#### **Overview:**

- 1) Snape’s Progression Through the Series
- 2) An Example of Rowling’s Deft Hand
- 3) A Man of Themes—Snape as a Vitriolic Antagonist
- 4) A Man of Mystery—Snape as a Symbol of Repentance and Redemption, but Whose?
- 5) A Man of Ambiguity—Snape’s Gray Undies
- 6) How to Create Your Very Own Snape.

Please note: Our focus in this lesson is not to follow all the clues dropped about Snape in order to unravel his mystery plot, but rather to dissect how Rowling created his character and why it worked in order for us to generate that same spark in our own creations. Let me acknowledge before we start, however, that this discussion will at times seem to sway

further into fan analysis and even fanfic than a writer's workshop. I hope you will bear with me until the end where I hope to tie it all together, because I believe when it comes to Snape, you must truly experience him as a fan before you can fully fathom how to create his aura as a writer.

## **Snape's Progression Through the Series**

Snape, as the true Shapeshifter he is, changes and morphs from each book to the next, while maintaining his secrets and air of ambiguity:

- **Stone**—Hatred of Harry evident from beginning. Apparently the villain, but turns out to be protecting Harry from Quirrell.
- **Secrets**—Not much of a role one way or another (Rowling said she pulled out the Half-Blood thread from this book), but clearly dedicated to keeping the school open when its closing is threatened, while still bullying Harry and friends.
- **Azkaban**—Emphasis on his hatred for Sirius, Marauders in general. Extremely upset at Sirius' escape and his own denial of the Order of Merlin. No knowledge of Peter's treachery.
- **Fire**—First time we learn he was a Death Eater, and Dumbledore's vouching for him. Also, given secret assignment at the end for the Order of the Phoenix.
- **Phoenix**—He's in the Order, but not really trusted. Sirius doesn't think he's reformed. Tension while teaching Harry Occlumency. Claims to be spying on Death Eaters. Pensieve scene: we see him bullied horribly by James and insulting to Lily. Ministry of Magic scene: he saves Harry and others a second time by alerting the Order and giving Umbridge fake Veritaserum.
- **Half-Blood**—First time viewed outside Harry's POV in "Spinners End"—kind to Narcissa, disparaging of Wormtail and Bellatrix. Swears Unbreakable Vow to protect Draco, and then protects him throughout. Mysterious conversation Hagrid overhears between Snape and Dumbledore. Then at end, he kills Dumbledore and flees with the Death Eaters.
- **Hallows**—Except for his appearance at Malfoy Manor and then cursing the ear off George during Harry's escape from Privet Drive, Snape remains mostly in the background until the end. We are given the occasional reminder of him through news bulletins and Harry's angry thoughts. When during the final battle at Hogwarts Snape's

mask is finally removed, the reader and Harry together see the truth that has hidden below the surface all along.

With his hook nose and greasy hair, from his loathing of Harry to his bullying of Gryffindor students, Snape gives Harry, and the reader, a nasty antihero to hate. But he gives the reader more. As his baggage (and undies) are revealed on page, the reader, along with Harry, develops a twinge of sympathy, a glimmer of compassion and understanding. Snape seems to only want to pursue the Dark Arts as a defense teacher, while supporting the Order as a double spy. Then he transforms again, turning into the coldest, bloodiest killer of the most beloved mentor. Or is he?

All of these contrasts and shifts contribute to what makes Snape a well-rounded character. For what truly makes Snape so obsessively compelling, above all the other endearing, eccentric, enjoyable characters Rowling created, we must delve deeper into the heart of Snape. To see him at his very worst and most complex.

### An Example of Rowling's Deft Hand

Deft—that's a polite word for it. Other words include sly and sneaky. Or when a fan is dead-tired from following all the clues and still uncertain of where that sleight of hand leads, one might say misdirecting and downright misleading.

Let's break apart the fight scene following the killing of Dumbledore. Along with the immobilized Harry, the reader watches horrified as Snape casts the killing spell. We should be convinced of his Death Eater heart and hating him thoroughly. However, if you look deep into the words on the page, you'll see how subtly and yet openly Rowling works her twisting magic.

Harry tore past Hagrid and his opponent, took aim at Snape's back, and yelled, "Stupefy!"

He missed; the jet of red light soared past Snape's head; Snape shouted, "*Run, Draco!*" and turned. Twenty yards apart, he and Harry looked at each other before raising their wands simultaneously.

"*Cruc—*"

But *Snape parried the curse*, knocking Harry backward off his feet before he could complete it...

"*Cruc—*" yelled Harry for the second time, aiming for the figure ahead illuminated in the dancing firelight, but *Snape blocked the spell*

**again.** Harry could see him sneering.

“No Unforgivable Curses from you, Potter!” he shouted over the rushing of the flames, Hagrid’s yells, and the wild yelping of the trapped Fang. “You haven’t got the nerve or the ability—”

“*Incarc—*” Harry roared, but Snape deflected the spell with an almost lazy flick of his arm.

“**Fight back!**” Harry screamed at him. “Fight back, **you cowardly**—”

Study the highlighted sections. Even Harry can tell that Snape is not attacking but merely defending. Rowling deliberately chooses words that paint Snape not as a crazed murderer running for his life, but completely in control.

“**Coward, did you call me, Potter?**” shouted Snape. “Your father would never attack me unless it was four on one, what would you call him, I wonder?”

“*Stupe—*”

“**Blocked again and again and again until you learn to keep your mouth shut and your mind closed, Potter!**” sneered Snape, deflecting the curse once more. “**Now come!**” he shouted at the huge Death Eater behind Harry. “It is time to be gone, before the Ministry turns up—”

“*Impedi—*”

But before he could finish this jinx, excruciating pain hit Harry; he keeled over in the grass. Someone was screaming, he would surely die of this agony, Snape was going to torture him to death or madness—

“**No!**” roared Snape’s voice and the pain stopped as suddenly as it had started; Harry lay curled on the dark grass, clutching his wand and panting; somewhere overhead Snape was shouting, “**Have you forgotten our orders? Potter belongs to the Dark Lord—we are to leave him! Go! Go!**”

(p. 602-603, *Half-Blood*)

It is only when Harry calls Snape “coward” that Rowling has him show a loss of control. However, through this scene, it’s important to note the discrepancies from a man who just committed a grievous murder.

Notice first how Snape is shown as **protecting both Draco and Harry**:

- 1)     “**Run Draco.**”—Snape turns at this point and engages Harry, protecting Draco by giving him time to escape.

2) “Now come!” he shouted at the huge Death Eater behind Harry—He’s protecting, but who is he protecting, the Death Eater...or Harry from the huge Death Eater?

3) “No!” roared Snape’s voice—and—“Potter belongs to the Dark Lord—we are to leave him! Go! Go!”—Snape stops the Death Eater from seriously harming Harry.

4) Snape deflected the spell with an almost lazy flick of his arm—and—“Fight back!”—It’s obvious, even to Harry, that Snape is merely on the defensive, not the offensive. Only when Harry calls him a coward does Snape get angry and lashes out.

The second inconsistency becomes apparent in this line of dialogue—“Blocked again and again and again until you learn to keep your mouth shut and your mind closed, Potter!” He’s teaching! Even as Snape runs for his life, after having murdered right in front of Harry’s eyes, he’s still acting as Harry’s professor, teaching him once again the need to protect his mind from outside influence and to not let emotions rule his logic.

An astute reader must wonder: is this man who just murdered Dumbledore a Death Eater or not?

To keep the reader questioning and guessing, JK Rowling plants both sets of clues. Snape may be acting fully under Voldemort’s orders and his Unbreakable Vow—protecting Draco and killing Dumbledore—sparing Harry because the Dark Lord ordered it. Or, he could be acting completely as a result of Dumbledore’s prearranged plan and final plea—helping Dumbledore to sacrifice himself in order to save three lives (Draco, Harry, and Snape)—while protecting and teaching Harry even as he runs for his life.

The reader truly can find the clues to support either side. Snape remained a mystery. Yet, the baited and leaded line was cast for the discerning reader to bite.

What I guess happens in an example like the above is that Rowling plots out in detail both “Snape as loyal to Dumbledore” and “Snape as true Death Eater.” She analyzes fully what he would say and how he would act in both situations, then she writes details from both into the story. At the end, she goes back and throws in the key clues that weigh the evidence in the direction she intends. Perhaps she also erases any actions that would firmly convince the reader of Snape as loyal Death Eater, anything that

could truly not happen in any way, shape, or form if Snape were loyal to Dumbledore.

Thus, the clues are present for both interpretations, but the evidence is weighted toward one side. She did her job so well, that until the release of *Hallows*, many fans were fiercely divided as to where Snape's loyalties belonged. As always with JK Rowling, she wrote overt actions for Snape that hid subtextual meaning. However, the true interpretation, based on one of Rowling's predominant themes through the series—appearance can often be deceptive, and we must seek truth below the surface.

### **A Man of Themes—Snape as a Vitriolic Antagonist**

Snape embodies many archetypes and plays several crucial roles in the series. Besides being an antihero and shapeshifter as we have already discussed, one of his primary roles is to serve as an immediate antagonist to Harry. If it weren't for Snape's daily pressure within the hallowed halls of Hogwarts, Harry would face almost no adult opposition. Snape is thus the adult counterpoint to Draco's more youthful bullying.

Pressure is necessary for the refinement of any base material. If you want your wood the smoothest, your sculpture the finest, your metal the purest, you must apply the pressure of abrasion or heat. Snape definitely rubs Harry the wrong way and strikes a torch to his anger. Voldemort is just too far away to apply the constant, never ceasing, daily pressure which Snape delights in.

One aspect of Snape which has not yet been explored in his role of antagonist is the analogy with Alchemy. Remember how we discussed the combination of Sirius Black, Albus Dumbledore (white), and Rubeus Hagrid (red) having alchemical symbolism? There's one more component to that formula for transformation which describes Snape perfectly—vitriol.

Vitriol, the most important liquid in alchemy, is distilled from an oily green substance and forms a highly corrosive acid. In the words of Paracelsus in *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, vitriol contained “viscous imperfections...take care above all that the matter [purified vitriol] shall not be exposed to the sun, for this turns its greenness pale.”

Vitriol was often referred to as the Green Lion, and sometimes as the Green Dragon. Green in alchemy signifies possessing life, but not fully mature. The fully mature Philosopher's Stone is red. The Green Lion, or Green Dragon, are both symbols of power, intense and deadly. The Green Lion is sometimes seen as a symbol of corrosive rage and fury.

Snape anyone?

Vitriol's corrosiveness was an absolutely necessary component for the alchemical process of making gold out of lead. The prime matter had to be broken down before it could be reborn into a new, more refined, material. Most writers agree that a protagonist does not grow and develop without significant conflict being applied to his life. Without a doubt, Snape provided significant daily conflict to break Harry down and thus aid in his renewal.

Snape forces Harry to learn skills he otherwise would not, to open his mind to another way of being, to broaden his understanding of people and their outward appearance versus their inner truth. Snape saved Harry's life, even while hating him, forcing Harry to question deeper people's motives and actions. Dumbledore, the man Harry trusts above all others, trusts Snape, forcing Harry to at least partially consider that a man he finds vile has some merit in others' eyes. And Snape, quite painfully, forces Harry to view himself and his parents through a lens not quite as rosy as the one Harry favors.

Snape drives Harry to consider that one does not have to be perfect to be worthy...does not have to be loving to have loved.

### **A Man of Mystery—Snape as a Symbol of Repentance and Redemption, but Whose?**

“I don’t need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!”

Lily blinked. “Fine,” she said coolly. I won’t bother in future...”

(p. 648, *Phoenix*)

In a fit of rage, Snape hurt the person he cared most about in the world and lost her friendship. Then, when he could have acted to save her whole family, he only sought to protect *her* life, and thus lost her forever. He spent the rest of his life in repentance, seeking redemption, while still angry at those he believed had stripped Lily from him.

Now, at the end of *Half-Blood*, consider where we left off with Harry in regards to Snape:

Harry uttered an inarticulate yell of rage: in that instant, he cared not whether he lived or died; pushing himself to his feet again, he staggered blindly towards Snape, the man he now hated as much as he hated Voldemort himself—

(p. 563, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

Harry is on a mission, not only to vanquish Voldemort, but perhaps even more personally, to kill Snape. And he has strong reason. He watched Snape murder Dumbledore and was unable to stop him. Harry is filled with rage and hatred. The hatred Harry feels here is a shadow of Voldemort. But the rage...the rage links him to Snape.

And Snape deserves it, right?

As we delve deeper, consider that one of the primary themes within the series is that appearances do not always reflect the inner truth. What you see with your own eyes can deceive you. We've had numerous examples, from the transfigured Animagi to the Polyjuiced pretenders. Within each book, there has been at least one major deception:

1. **Quirrell**—hiding behind a mask of ineptitude and fear.
2. **Lockhart**—appearing as a famous author while taking credit for other people's success; **Tom Riddle**—vicious killer hiding under his mask of Head Boy while framing innocent Hagrid.
3. **Wormtail**—masquerading twelve long years as Scabbers; **Sirius Black**—believed to be a betraying murderer.
4. **Barty Crouch, Jr.**,—loyal servant to Voldemort, posing as Mad-Eye, famous Auror.
5. **Umbridge**'s insincere mask of concern and righteousness.
6. **Half-Blood**—This one delves the deepest into Rowling's well of pretensions by appearing to unmask the traitor **Snape**.
7. Finally, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, **Snape**'s most intimate inner memories are given to Harry, along with the truth about his loyalties and desires throughout.

Rowling has twisted a character within each book. Without a doubt, Snape was the greatest twist up her wand. She did not introduce a new character for deception in the last book, but rather revealed the *major pretender* all along. By stripping off Snape's murderous mask from the end of *Half-Blood*, she played her trump card on her key themes: that you cannot always believe what you see, that a person's inner truth is not always reflected by their outward appearance, that the world is not divided between good people and Death Eaters, and that, to be redeemed, Harry needed to open his heart to more of Dumbledore's love and trust.

Think of how powerful it was for Harry to recognize that people of the shady gray of Snape also had a place in opposing the forces of pure evil. At

Dumbledore's insistence, Harry had spent a year exploring Tom Riddle's background to the point that he almost felt compassion for a man who truly was the face of evil within the series, a man who killed time and time again to achieve immortality for himself.

Finally, Harry was forced to look deep enough into Snape's past to garner some sympathy for the man who had caused him constant, ceaseless trauma. He discovered the evidence that Snape truly was acting upon Dumbledore's plea and opened his mind to the realization that he had once again misconstrued the testimony of his own eyes.

At the end of *Half-Blood*, as you read of Harry flying after Snape, murderous rage in his heart, could you have imagined him naming his son after him one day? That's a powerful change.

Have your protagonist do what he previously considered impossible, and you've shown enormous character development and transformation.

A shapeshifter such as Snape, a man of such ambiguity, exists for primarily one storyline purpose—to teach the hero and the reader a powerful lesson, a main theme of the story. For Rowling, this theme was that life is not always as we perceive it to be. Harry's final transformation, was to accept the inner reality of Snape and to claim Snape's redemption as his own.

In other words, when Harry could:

1. allow himself to grasp what many readers had already discerned
2. remember that he had been deceived many times before because outward appearances do not always reflect inner truth
3. accept that the wisest man whom he trusted more than anyone else in this world trusted Snape for good reason, and
4. understand the core of what Dumbledore taught him—the terrible, awesome power of love above all other powers.

Then, and only then, was Harry ready to unleash the ultimate power he possessed, the power of love for peoples of all types, of all Houses, and defeat a man who knew not love.

Harry and Snape didn't get a chance to apologize to each other, to offer each other back rubs or hugs, but through Harry acting upon Snape's dying gift of memories, they effectively joined their mighty forces and knowledge, combining the power of brave Gryffindor and cunning

Slytherin, to wipe out the true face of evil, Voldemort. To claim their own personal redemption.

Was the death of vitriol necessary to the perfection of the Philosopher's Stone? With the themes Rowling played with, if you accept that Snape personified repentance and redemption, and if you believe that in Harry's final transformation he must see and understand Snape with new eyes, through the Dumbledore lens of trust, then it was inevitable that Snape act one more time to save Harry's life and died in the process—his ultimate act of repentance.

A man of opposition and antagonism, a man of mystery, a symbol of redemption. Still, Snape's appeal went even deeper, beyond the mystery and themes, to his very ambiguity.

### **A Man of Ambiguity—Snape's Gray Undies**

It was one of JK Rowling's most memorable scenes from *Order of the Phoenix*, one that fans could not wait to see come to life on the big screen, and not just because they were eager to view the four marauders together, alive as teenagers. No, everyone wanted to see Snape and James go at each other. Many were dying to laugh at Snape's graying underpants.

Behind [James], the Impediment Jinx was wearing off. Snape was beginning to inch toward his fallen wand, spitting out soapsuds as he crawled.

"I wouldn't go out with you if it was a choice between you and the giant squid," said Lily.

"Bad luck, Prongs," said Sirius briskly, turning back to Snape. "OY!"

But too late; Snape had directed his wand straight at James; there was a flash of light and a **gash appeared on the side of James's face, spattering his robes with blood**. James whirled about; a second flash of light later, Snape was hanging upside down in the air, his robes falling over his head **to reveal skinny, pallid legs and a pair of graying underpants**.

(p. 647, *Phoenix*)

I don't think those gray undies are thrown in casually for a bit of nasty flavor. Indeed, Rowling *possibly* crafted this whole scene around them.

This view through the Pensieve opens Harry's eyes to the fact that he'd placed his father on a pedestal that was both unhealthy and unrealistic. The

world is not filled with good people and Death Eaters, but ultimately most of us live in various shades of gray. That's where Snape's exposed undies come in. Snape, like his undies, is one of the grayest.

Ambiguity, at its essence, is the lack of being defined in absolute terms. Snape was deliberately constructed by his creator to be a man of uncertain allegiance, trusted by few, doubted by many, living in a world of shadows, existing on both sides of the Dumbledore/Voldemort divide. A man who intentionally concealed secrets and motivations.

It takes a special character to serve this role. It cannot be the Hero, the Mentor, the Shadow—not in this type of commercial fiction, at least not for long. When a mythic world has been created where the ultimate fight between good and evil must battle to the death, it's left to the antihero to possess and embody the vast grayness in-between.

The role of a Snape character would probably not be as discernable or strong in a work where right and wrong are not as clearly polarized as in Harry Potter. In other words, in a work of literary fiction, where most characters exist in their own world of shadows, Snape would hardly stand out. However, in a world where the villain is deeply evil and the Hero must achieve a higher level of heroism than most of us would ever encounter in our lives, then the strong middle ground needs to be actively portrayed by a character who is a bit of both and yet neither one or the other.

Snape's shapeshifting directly relates to his ambiguity. His never-ending morphing keeps the reader off-guard, on the alert, and constantly wondering. Readers latch onto Snape because the uncertainty of his character commands it. His mysterious nature demands the reader's questions and inward exploration. What do *I* think about loyalty, appearances, the power of trust? Do *I* believe a person can be nasty and mean and still serve a higher good? Do *I* agree that a Slytherin and a Gryffindor have anything in common and can work together to defeat true evil? And who am I inside? Would I defend Snape, or bully him upside down?

**Who you are inside will determine how you interpret Snape.** Snape will be understood, in your mind, in direct accordance with your world view. That's why readers were so polarized. Snape draws the reader's involvement because that is his purpose.

Snape exists to keep the reader guessing, probing his mysteries, guessing at his allegiance...exploring our own...until the very end.

One last thing to note regarding Rowling's craft in the scene snippet above. See that other highlighted section, the curse Snape threw at James that caused a gash on his head and made him bleed? What does that remind you of? We see here Snape casting the curse that Harry used on Draco in the next book, earning the wrath of the Prince himself.

Handy little bit of foreshadowing there.

**Personal Note:** This section on Snape has been a part of my workshop since I first developed it in 2006 and was part of the first edition published in 2011. Imagine my delight, then, to see this November 2015 Tweet from Rowling:



## Take Away: How to Create Your Very Own Snape

How does all this analysis apply to your own writing?

There are several ways. First, there is the encouragement to think deeply and broadly about your characters. Utilizing the vast resources of themes and archetypes, flesh them out fully. Explore all questions and possibilities; determine to give your reader more.

How many twists can you provide your reader, especially if you're constructing a series? How much backstory can you withhold until absolutely necessary? How many secrets and mysteries can you weave into the text?

As writers, we can challenge ourselves to make sure the real world in all its texture and complexity is reflected within our story. Once you have constructed your hero and antagonist and defined the themes that differentiate them, have you created a character to embody the vast space of grayness that lies between? Have you got a Snape, complete with gray undies, ambiguous in nature, who could be viewed as friend and foe by both sides? A character, who like most of us is not totally good or evil but somewhere in between, who challenges the subtle nuances of your theme. Can you craft this character with a hint of mystery, to keep both your hero, and your reader, guessing, as they did with Snape, until the very end?

First, though, you must understand the theme you're working with. I was going to say **define** your theme, and for some of you that may work. You may be able to pick and choose between the themes you feel compelled to write. But for many of us, the wand chooses the wizard, the themes choose us, and it may even take some time for you to recognize the theme which has gripped you.

But grapple with it, figure it out, and at last come to terms with your theme. Contemplate how far right and how far left you can explore the full range of meaning and gradation. How nasty will your villain be? Will he be someone completely unredeemable, or a person who will eventually accept change and redemption? Will your heroine start out strong and honorable, or only through growth and transformation drift closer to that side? Can you have a character in-between who helps your reader see the world and its diverse people through a wider lens? A character who helps the reader see herself?

The mystery of Snape lies in his ability to bring readers into the heart of the central questions of the series...where they are forced to explore more fully the power of your theme.

Because ultimately that's what Snape does, and that's why readers find him so entralling. He makes us look at the idea of loyalty and courage in all its vast, multifaceted, diverse representations. He forces us to widen our lens, not narrow it, to question consistently through an open mind. By questioning, we involve ourselves, we deepen our self-awareness as to who we are, Slytherin or Gryffindor, Death Eater or Dumbledore's man through and through. Ultimately the way we see Snape directly reflects on the way we see the world.

If you define an ambiguous character in your work, you pull your reader in deeper. To successfully draw out this character will require a lot of planning, fleshing out, and endless revision. I don't believe it will happen by chance. Here are some tasks you need to consider:

1. Define your central theme and explore its wide range of meaning.
2. Define how a character can embody alternate sides of your theme.
3. Fully plot this character to show this diversity.
4. Decide on which side will that character ultimately live.
5. Then go back and plot how to weigh the character in the direction you want him to go, but without the reader guessing.

6. Make sure you keep your hero guessing and misunderstanding Mr. Ambiguity as well.
7. Consider how your hero's growing misunderstanding and perception of this character reflects both his own and the antihero's growth and development, especially in regard to theme.
8. Last, but not least, never ever let your reader guess until the nitty gritty end.

You are probably working with different themes in your work than Rowling did in hers, but you too can cast a character who invokes reader involvement to this extreme if you will draw him ambiguously, torn between two worlds, embodying both, but committed to neither (at least on the surface) forcing the reader to analyze their own deep-seated positions and beliefs.

And don't forget the gray undies!

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# Lesson Ten

## Of Grindelwald and Hitler

### (Real World Relevance)

Many writers care passionately about the world we live in and are seeking through our writing to make a difference. As the Hero's Journey shows, an ancient, intrinsic part of storytelling is to bring a healing elixir to our community.

If you're writing a story that deals with an alternate reality, such as a fantasy world of your own creation or a historical one which no longer exists, you need to ask yourself—how does my fictional story relate to my real-life world? Indeed, even if you're writing a reality-based contemporary, you may still need to ask yourself this question. In considering real world relevance, do you plan to include any references to any ethical, social, political, or religious issues? And how will you present them?

As Rowling's series began as children's stories, she quite appropriately chose a subtle, subtext approach. You have to read between the lines to find allusions to Hitler and Nazism, ethnic cleansing, and AIDS. As the series matures, references to oppression, governmental fanaticism, and the media's towing of the line worked their way to the surface.

The best known examples of social commentary within *HP* are the allusions to Nazism and World War II. Here's just a hint from the first book:

Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard **Grindelwald in 1945**, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel.

(p. 102-103, Sorcerer's Stone)

Many readers take Grindelwald (and Voldemort) for Hitler, the Death Eaters as an example of the Secret Service, and Mudblood hatred and killing as an allusion for racial cleansing. After all, just like the young Grindelwald and Dumbledore, Hitler and his forces ardently strove for "the greater good" of the true German race. The *HP* novels could thus be interpreted as a warning to not let intolerance lead us into another World War II scenario.

Another example Rowling uses is a bit more personal. Lupin, a tormented man with an illness which drives him out of a society that both

fears and misunderstands him, seems a perfect example, for the time in which Rowling was writing, of the maligned AIDS patient.

And then there's Dolores Umbridge, who with her increasing totalitarian control of the students and administration, all under the righteous guise of doing what's best for their welfare in a world at war, seems a deliberate criticism of some educational systems, or political heads, during the years Rowling was writing. Likewise, the servitude of the house-elves could represent the invisible oppressed of almost any country on earth.

My purpose here is not to analyze or debate Rowling's social references in and of themselves, but to discuss how we as writers can give our work that sense of real-world relevance even if we're writing science fiction that occurs on a planet two-hundred light years away. *If you so choose.*

Weaving social references into your work is an option that will be of interest to many authors, but not to all. You can write and sell well a perfectly good commercial story without social commentary. However, if you wish to sell at a certain level and have a longer-lasting appeal, incorporating this depth of relevance may help. The more layers your story has, the more likely a reader is to revisit time and again, remember your name for future work, and pass recommendations on to friends.

What subjects you wish to portray in your story and how you portray them will depend entirely on your voice (and thus your own personal concerns), your genre, your target audience, and your particular story. Ultimately, however, if you're writing commercial fiction, there is one principal rule that oversees all these variables: **No Preaching!**

Above all, remember the primary need to draw the reader into your world, your characters, your story, and engage them. If, along the way, they notice some analogies that they can take with them once they set your book down, that's great. However, they'll never remember your important message if they can't get into your story because it's too preachy. A deft, clever hand will carry your elixir of messages and themes more clearly, and for better assimilation, than a heavy hammer banging a chisel. And will, perhaps, make a difference in someone's life.

## Overview:

In working in real-world references, you'll need to work according to:

- 1) Your voice

- 2) Your genre
- 3) Your target audience, and
- 4) Your particular story.

## **Your Voice**

We discussed voice back in the second lesson as intrinsic to who you are as a writer, reflecting your personality, your experience, and especially your ideas on life. The impulse that will make a person sit and read an entertaining story for a few hours is very different from the driving need to park butt in chair and work on a computer for several months to several years to create a book. The latter, in order to maintain sanity, will reflect much more deeply who you are as a person. Your voice will imprint your book.

If you've chosen your genre wisely, one that works well with your views on life and writing, then it will be fairly simple to weave in subtle references to issues, topics, happenings, or concerns. Or, on the other hand, if you try to weave in such references, and keep having your knuckles rapped by readers, critique partners, agents, or editors as "not appropriate" or "not marketable," and the ability to include such references is important to you, then maybe you need to consider a different genre more open to your voice.

Fit your references to your voice, but more importantly, fit your genre to your voice.

## **Your Genre**

Some genres will be more open to obvious references than others. This is not totally determined by length, though in general, you will have more space to work with such references in a longer story. However, science fiction and fantasy, while quite often long novels, and while definitely open to real world relevance, will frequently need those references disguised in futuristic or fantasy-type garb. How Rowling worked her WWII references is a perfect example. She never mentions the words WWII, Nazism, Hitler, or ethnic cleansing, but they're all there wearing wizard robes and Mudblood clues.

The same is true for historical novels. Any contemporary commentary would need to wear an historical mask. Instead of discussing steroid use in sports, your Aztec Tlachtli player could get hyped up on cacao before the game.

Most straight-forward contemporaries are open to well-laid commentary. Romance openly weaves in concerns of issues to modern women—divorce and single parenting, care of aging parents, and the health care system. I even read an excellent one several years ago which dealt fabulously with organ donations and cellular memory (*Winning Dixie* by Janis Reams Hudson). The main difference between category and single title, in this instance, is length, and thus depth to which an issue could be covered.

As with all points learned from Rowling—know your genre. Learn what parameters your genre will accept for real-world relevance, and try to fit within, or gently expand the boundaries appropriately—all the while never forgetting your audience and providing them an entertaining read.

## **Your Target Audience**

Your target audience is mostly determined by your genre, so I won't say too much different than above. However, there is one distinction I would like to draw when considering your target audience: taboo subjects.

You may have heard these as "rules" for subjects you cannot write about. Taboo subjects are there because they go too much against the grain of what that particular genre is about. Readers pick their genre because they are drawn to the emotional promise it provides. If you break that promise, you instantly lose a reader (probably for life).

Dealing with a terminal disease with the hero or heroine in a romance would be a perfect example of a taboo subject. Other taboo subjects I've heard mentioned are incest, direct political commentary, terrorist attacks, and death or serious illness of children.

Particular editors and agents will also have certain taboo subjects according to their own personal reasons. When querying, you can use resources like #MSWL (ManuscriptWishList.com) as well as an agent's Twitter stream to learn their particular likes and dislikes. Know your genre, know your target audience, avoid the taboo subjects (if you wish to sell commercial fiction), and query widely.

## **Your Particular Story**

Having determined that you're writing in the right genre for your voice, that any real world topics you wish to include are appropriate to your genre and don't cross into taboo territory, then the last and most important item to consider is whether the references are appropriate to the story

you're writing now. Don't force a square peg into a round hole, or an allusion about right-to-die into a light picture book about penguins.

## **Take Away**

Whether subtly woven in or a direct reference, any issue you weave into your story truly needs to fit the theme and style of that story, without preaching, otherwise it will stick out like Seamus' singed eyebrows.

Always remember your reader. Write to your reader. Craft your story in a manner that is pleasing and entertaining to your audience. Your reader will love real world relevance if it is finely woven-in to the multi-faceted, colorful weft and warp of your story.

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# **Lesson Eleven**

## **Tossing Snowballs at Quirrell**

### **(Writing with Humor)**

Perhaps one of JK Rowling's craft secrets that endeared her to fans the most was her use of humor. From Peeves to Fred and George to Dumbledore, most of Rowling's characters knew how to toss a good one out there at just the right time. As humor is so hard to write, my guess would be that it's one of the most direct reflections of the author herself. So I imagine Rowling is quite the snarky lady.

Considering, however, that successfully conveying humor *is* so hard, plus personally subjective, and many writers may not have a naturally developed funny bone, how can we incorporate it into our own writing? I've searched forums and memes and lists for some of Rowling's best loved funnies and have compiled them here to try to figure out exactly how she used humor in a way that appealed to her reader.

#### **Overview:**

Here are the top eleven tricks for when, where, and how Rowling used humor successfully:

1. To introduce a character
2. To build character
3. When departing from character or showing a changing situation
4. To hint at romance
5. Short-term clues
6. Long-term foresight
7. To show the ridiculous
8. To lighten a serious situation
9. What goes around comes around
10. Style: Witty repartee
11. Style: One liners.

#### **To Introduce a Character**

“Fred you next,” the plump woman said.

“I’m not Fred, I’m George,” said the boy. “Honestly, woman, you call yourself our mother! Can’t you *tell* I’m George?”

“Sorry, George, dear.”

“Only joking, I am Fred,” said the boy, and off he went.  
(p. 92, *Stone*)

Right off the bat, the reader not only knew that Fred was a comic but that Mrs. Weasley was a harried mother. We also got the sense of a lighthearted, loving family who didn’t take themselves too seriously.

## To Build Character

Often, Rowling will use humor to show a different side to an already established character, such as she does in this example with Professor McGonagall:

“You look in excellent health to me, Potter, so you will excuse me if I don’t let you off homework today. **I assure you that if you die, you need not hand it in.”**

(p. 109, *Azkaban*)

She also uses humor to contrast two characters:

“Well, you’d better hurry up, mate, or all the good ones will be gone,” said Fred.

“Who’re you going with, then?” said Ron.

“Angelina,” said Fred promptly, without a trace of embarrassment.

“What?” said Ron, taken aback. “You’ve already asked her?”

“Good point,” said Fred. He turned his head and called across the common room, “Oi, Angelina!”

Angelina, who had been chatting to Alicia Spinnet near the fire, looked over at him.

“What?” she called back.

“Want to come to the ball with me?”

(p. 394, *Goblet*)

We’ve had three books to get to know Fred, but here we are introduced to a slightly new aspect of him...a very cocky, self-assured male, so sure that the girl he wishes to take to the dance will go with him that he hasn’t even asked. Fred serves as a foil to Ron, who can’t bring himself to ask anyone.

## When Departing from Character

A week after Fred and George’s departure, Harry witnessed Professor McGonagall walking right past Peeves, who was determinedly loosening a crystal chandelier, and could have sworn he

heard her tell the poltergeist out of the corner of her mouth, “**It unscrews the other way.**”

(p. 678, *Phoenix*)

While we’ve seen McGonagall make jokes upon occasion, as in the example earlier, we’ve never seen her advocate destruction of school property. Her assistance to Peeves would never have occurred in an earlier book. However, now the situation is dire, and McGonagall is facing a woman who is evil and undermining all Hogwarts stands for.

### To Hint at Romance

But Ron was staring at Hermione as though suddenly seeing her in a whole new light.

“Hermione, Neville’s right—**you are a girl...**”

“Oh well spotted,” she said acidly.

(p. 400, *Fire*)

Although Hermione does not reply jokingly, she’s rather angry, the situation is funny with Ron seemingly to only realize that his friend of four years is female. Ahh...already in *Goblet* the hormones are heating up, and readers are getting a hint at which ships will finally set sail in *Deathly Hallows*.

### Short-Term Clues

As discussed in the Revealing Wormtail chapter, one of Rowling’s simplest techniques for hiding a clue is to place it in a line of dialogue that appears nonsensical or a joke, which focuses the reader on the humor rather than the clue, and to make whatever that character says seem unimportant.

George and Fred are always good for a joke...and thus are prime candidates for hiding a few crucial clues. Through the twins’ clowning, Rowling hit the reader with a clue to pay attention to Quirrell’s turban...especially the back of it:

One morning in mid-December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in several feet of snow. The lake froze solid and the Weasley twins were punished for **bewitching several snowballs so that they followed Quirrell around, bouncing off the back of his turban.**

(p. 194, *Stone*)

She uses the twins again in *Secrets* to point the finger at the hidden villain:

“Oh, get out of the way, Percy,” said Fred. “Harry’s in a hurry.”

“Yeah, he’s off to the Chamber of Secrets for a cup of tea with his fanged servant,” said George, chortling.

Ginny didn’t find it amusing either.

“Oh, don’t,” she wailed every time Fred asked Harry loudly who he was planning to attack next, or when George pretended to ward Harry off with a large clove of garlic when they met.

(p. 210, *Secrets*)

Fred and George jokingly hit the reader with not one, but two clues. Not only does Rowling hint at the Basilisk through them, she also shows Ginny with a stronger than normal emotional reaction—clearly because of her guilty conscience! Finally, notice the juxtaposition of Ginny to the fanged servant.

“Don’t be prat, Neville, that’s illegal,” said George. “They wouldn’t use the Cruciatus Curse on the champions. I thought it sounded a bit like Percy singing...maybe you have to attack him while he’s in the shower, Harry.”

(p. 366, *Goblet*)

Here, too, Rowling inserts a very real clue in one of George’s jokes. After all, Harry needs water to hear the merpeople sing. So, for future reference, whenever Rowling tosses out a joke, look for a hidden clue!

## Long-Term Foresight

Rowling is even good at using the twins’ comic antics to hint at important things to come a whole book (or four) in advance:

“Yeah, Montague tried to do us during break,” said George.

“What do you mean, ‘tried’?” said Ron quickly.

“He never managed to get all the words out,” said Fred, “due to the fact that we forced him headfirst into that Vanishing Cabinet on the first floor.”

Hermione looked very shocked.

“But you’ll get into terrible trouble!”

“Not until Montague reappears, and that could take weeks, I dunno where we sent him,” said Fred coolly.

(p. 627, *Phoenix*)

LOL! Those crazy twins!

But...wait...You mean there’s a Vanishing Cabinet inside Hogwarts? And the twins don’t know where it leads? And...didn’t Harry hide in a

mysterious large, black cabinet in Borgin and Burkes way back in *Chamber of Secrets*? (In case you didn't catch it—those Vanishing Cabinets are the means by which Draco lets the Death Eaters into Hogwarts in *Half-Blood Prince*).

Yes, here, through jokes, Rowling teases her reader to pay attention to these cabinets. They just might be important in a story to come!

“Right, you’ve got a **crooked sort of cross...**” [Harry] consulted *Unfogging the Future*. “That means you’re going to have ‘**trials and suffering**’—sorry about that—but there’s a thing that could be **a sun...** **hang on...that means ‘great happiness’**...so you’re going to suffer but be very happy...”

“You need your Inner Eye tested, if you ask me”...

(p. 105, *Azkaban*)

Ron and Harry are once again wasting time in Divination, but are their jokes totally wasted? Think for a moment...where did we see a cross during great suffering followed by a sun bringing great happiness? The ending of the whole series, the final chapters of *Deathly Hallows*. It is at King’s Cross that Harry’s self-sacrifice is fully realized, where Voldemort’s soul is judged lacking. This is followed by the rising of the sun in the Great Hall at his greatest triumph, when peace is restored to the wizarding world. Perhaps as early as book 3, Rowling had envisioned the series’ ending and planted a clue here...as a joke.

Note, a couple of paragraphs later in this scene above, Ron predicts Harry going to work for the Ministry of Magic (he becomes an Auror) and a windfall of gold (that he got for winning the Triwizard Tournament).

Perhaps Ron should have gotten higher than a *poor* in Divination.

“Ah, think of the possibilities,” said Ron dreamily. “It would’ve been so easy to push Malfoy off a glacier and make it look like an accident... **Shame his mother likes him...**”

(p. 167, *Goblet*)

Ron shows great insight and premonition again as Mrs. Malfoy’s love for her son figures prominently into those final scenes of *Deathly Hallows*.

## To Show the Ridiculous

The twins have the ability to highlight the ridiculous in everything, from Percy’s rather pompous greeting of Harry:

“Harry!” said Fred, elbowing Percy out of the way and bowing deeply. “Simply *splendid* to see you, old boy—”

“Marvelous,” said George, pushing Fred aside and seizing Harry’s hand in turn. “Absolutely spiffing.”

Percy scowled.

“That’s enough, now,” said Mrs. Weasley.

“Mum!” said Fred as though he’d only just spotted her and seizing her hand too. “How really corking to see you—”

(p. 62, *Azkaban*)

To more serious situations where Harry is being ostracized:

Fred and George, however, found all this very funny. They went out of their way to march ahead of Harry down the corridors, shouting, “Make way for the Heir of Slytherin, seriously evil wizard coming through...”

(p. 210, *Secrets*)

Fred and George are the perfect anarchists. They can always find the ridiculous in a situation and make you question the status quo. Rowling very effectively uses jokes to convey serious messages with the twins.

Let us not forget their subversive jingle to combat He Who Should Not Be Named, the most fearsome dark wizard of all time:

Why Are You Worrying about You-Know-Who?

You SHOULD Be Worrying About

U-NO-POO—

the Constipation Sensation That’s Gripping the Nation!

(p. 113, *Half-Blood*, Bloomsbury)

Mrs. Weasley may have feared for her sons’ lives, but they were the living embodiment of the Riddikulus spell.

## To Lighten a Serious Mood

For Rowling, there seems to be no inappropriate time for a joke. She uses them quite effectively to cut through high tension scenes:

...when he straightened up again, there were six Harry Potters gasping and panting in front of him.

Fred and George turned to each other and said together, ‘Wow—we’re identical!’

(p. 48-49, *Hallows*, Bloomsbury)

All of the Harry Potter impersonators and their escorts are about to risk their lives. As we know, Mad-Eye will die. Even in these dark times, Rowling brings out the humor.

Somewhere in the distance they could hear Peeves zooming through the corridors singing a victory song of his own composition:

We did it, we bashed them, wee Potter's the One, And Voldy's gone moldy, so now let's have fun!

“Really gives a feeling for the scope and tragedy of the thing, doesn't it?” said Ron...

(p. 597-598, *Hallows*, Bloomsbury)

Voldemort may be dead, but the Weasleys and the reader are still hurting from Fred's death and many others (Lupin, Tonks, *sob*). Yet Rowling does not hold back in fear of throwing a little humor in, even at this somber moment. Of course, she uses an insensitive Poltergeist to do so. A technique which helps return the reader to equilibrium as the book draws to a close.

## What Goes Around Comes Around

Rowling, like many writers, loves to return to certain aspects of her story and show how the situation has changed...often through the use of humor:

“So light a fire!” Harry choked.

“Yes—of course—but there's no wood!” Hermione cried, wringing her hands.

“HAVE YOU GONE MAD!” Ron bellowed. “**ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?**”

(p. 278, *Stone*)

‘How—how're we going to get in?’ panted Ron. ‘I can—see the place—if only we just had—Crookshanks again—’

‘Crookshanks?’ wheezed Hermione, bent double, clutching her chest. ‘**Are you a wizard, or what?**’

(p. 523, *Hallows*, Bloomsbury)

From the first book to the last, a joke is revisited and the reader is able to reflect on the change of situation, characterization, and relationships that have occurred.

‘How do you feel Georgie?’ whispered Mrs Weasley.  
George's fingers groped for the side of his head.

‘Saint-like,’ he murmured.

‘What’s wrong with him?’ croaked Fred, looking terrified. ‘Is his mind affected?’

‘Saint-like,’ repeated George, opening his eyes and looking up at his brother. ‘You see...I’m holy. *Holey*, Fred, geddit?’

Mrs Weasley sobbed harder than ever. Colour flooded Fred’s pale face.

‘Pathetic,’ he told George. ‘Pathetic! With the whole world of ear-related humor before you, you go for *holey*?’

‘Ah well,’ said George, grinning at his tear-soaked mother. ‘**You’ll be able to tell us apart now, anyway, Mum.**’

(p. 67, *Half-Blood Prince*, Bloomsbury)

Remember the original boarding of the Hogwarts Express in *Stone*? Fred pretended to be George? We’ve circled back around to the beginning with a very different outcome.

### Style: Witty Repartee

I love how Rowling uses the short, punchy, back and forth style of Lupin and Harry talking at cross purposes to great, and funny, effect:

“Excellent.” said Lupin, looking up as Tonks and Harry entered.  
“We’ve got about a minute, I think. We should get out into the garden so we’re ready. Harry, I’ve left a letter telling your aunt and uncle not to worry——”

“They won’t,” said Harry.

“That you’re safe——”

“That’ll just depress them.”

“—and you’ll see them next summer.”

“Do I have to?”

(p. 54, *Phoenix*)

### Style: One Liners

To finish off, here a few one-liners that left us chuckling:

“Do you think we’ve got nothing better to do in Potions than listen to Snape?”

(Ron, p. 159, *Secrets*)

“Lockhart’ll sign anything if it stands still long enough.”

(Ron, p. 174, *Secrets*)

“We tried to shut him in a pyramid, but Mum spotted us.”

(George speaking of Percy, p. 63, *Azkaban*)

“His life’s ambition is to have his head cut off and stuck up on a plaque like his mother,” said Ron. “Is that normal, Hermione?”

(speaking of Kreacher, p. 76, *Phoenix*)

“No, I was merely reading the Muggle magazines,” said Dumbledore. “I do love knitting patterns...”

(Emerging from Slughorn’s bathroom, p. 73, *Half-Blood*)

“There’s no need to call me ‘sir,’ Professor.”

(Harry to Snape, p. 180, *Half-Blood*)

## Take Away

From these few examples we’ve looked at with Rowling, we see how important it is to make ’em laugh. However, there are so many ways humor can be incorporated into a story; it’s as specific as it is personal.

Humor is best when it flows organically from the characters and situations already established. Therefore, the best advice is to put yourself into the mindset of listening to your characters and letting them have a bit of fun. Even a serious novel doesn’t *always* have to be so serious.

Or, as Joss Whedon, another great storyteller, says:

“Make it dark, make it grim, make it tough, but then, for the love of God, tell a joke.”



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# **Lesson Twelve**

## **Catch Your Snitch! (Writing with Pleasure)**

Writing should be fun. If you don't enjoy the story you're creating, how will your reader enjoy reading it?

By fun, I don't mean a limited understanding as laughter or lighthearted amusement. I mean a broader definition which involves total absorption into a world and characters that takes control of your mind until you realize it's two a.m., you have a busy day tomorrow, and you just couldn't stop writing until the very end.

Above all, the readers of Harry Potter have fun. They get fully immersed in Rowling's magical world and don't want to leave. They enjoy the fantasy, the spells, the characters, and even the dark side, the emotional catharsis they experience from the triumph at the climax.

In writing the series, I think Rowling fully enjoyed herself as well. I imagine her chuckling as she hid another clue and then wickedly plotted its distraction, getting so immersed in her research that she didn't realize it was almost dawn, and thoroughly overcome with tears when she'd killed off Sirius and then Dumbledore.

In other words, I imagine her, just like her reader, fully engaged. Fully engaged, whether through curiosity, laughter, tears, or any other emotion (excepting hating the book) is what you want from both your reader and yourself. Fully engaged is what I mean by fun.

### **Overview:**

To explore how to ensure we're having fun with our writing while fully engaging our reader, we'll look at how to:

1. Meet reader emotional expectations.
2. Write like an Olympian.
3. Write what gives you fulfillment.

### **Meet Reader Emotional Expectations**

Jennifer Enderlin, Executive V.P. and Publisher at St. Martin's, calls "fully engaged" the "really, really" factor. If you've ever heard her speak at conference, you'll be familiar with the idea. For a novel to work for her, to spark her interest to buy, it needs to meet the "really, really" criteria. If it's a

thriller, then it needs to be really, really scary. If it's a comedy, then it needs to be really, really funny. Or, if it's a romance, then it needs to be really, really emotional. Because the Harry Potter series is so long and complex, it's able to strike all these chords.

Know your readers' emotional expectations. Again, this comes down to genre. Readers, though they may read across the board, expect a different mood from a different read. While a reader may in one shopping spree buy mysteries, science fiction, literary fiction, as well as romances, they pick what to read that particular afternoon based on the mood they're in and the mood they want to experience. So you must know the dominant (not exclusive) mood you seek to strike in your novel and strike it hard.

When you're first starting out as a novelist, this mood will mostly be determined by genre or subgenre. You'll have to color within the lines, so to speak. Once you've established your style, you'll be catering to reader expectation for your particular brand. This doesn't mean that once you're established you can only suit one dominant mood, but does explain why many authors, when they stray far away from an established mood, use a pseudonym so as not to confuse their reader.

Meeting reader expectations in commercial fiction is a good thing. **Exceeding reader expectations** is even better.

## Write Like an Olympian

*Make it fun* also means make it look effortless. A good analogy for this is ice-skating. When you watch Olympic ice-skating, at least if you're like me, you thrill to the pleasurable merging of the artist and athlete into a seamless dance of emotion and beauty. Then someone falls. I want to turn away.

I hate seeing anyone hurt, dreams dashed—the soul-wrenching pain fractures the effortless illusion. I'm no longer watching a pleasurable fantasy, but am forced to listen to and acknowledge all the hours, days, months, years of sweat, blood, and tears that go into training these world-class athletes. The trials of the stiff competition, the time spent away from home and family, the fact that loss happens much more often than gold. All of which, while a valuable lesson to learn and understand in life, from a pleasure standpoint, is just not as much fun.

**Try not to fall in front of your reader.** Your reader doesn't want a shift in tone, a misused word or image, a piece of poor research to throw them out of your story. At that point, their illusion is broken. Their sense of living

inside your world comes to a screeching halt, at least for a few minutes. If it happens often enough, or badly enough, the book will be set down not to be picked back up.

What you're striving for as a writer is to make your story appear as effortless and beautiful as the gold medal Olympian skater, without the pain of any falls, without the interruption of having to analyze the work that you put into creating that illusion. Make your story glide across the page like a graceful dance. That takes endless hours of not-so-fun revision!

Within the Potter series, Rowling had a couple of technical falls. Because of her stature, she was able to fix one of them for future reprints (the famous wand-order effect in the graveyard scene of *Goblet* where James came out of the wand before Lily when the reverse should have happened). There have been other small glitches as well that fans have caught (and the Mark Evans[13] one caused quite a hoopla). Even with falls, she quickly picked herself up and skated magically to the end, with a passionate, loyal following.

Readers can be very forgiving, as long as you've captured their attention. You don't have to do everything perfectly, but you must do many things very, very right. Revise, revise, revise. Make your work appear effortless so the reader will have the thrill of immersing themselves in a fully envisaged, engaging, experience.

## **Write What Gives You Fulfillment**

One other aspect of fun lives totally inside you, the writer. We've talked about this a bit before in the voice lesson, but it should be emphasized here. Write what gives you pleasure and meaning.

Notice I don't say "write what you enjoy reading" because I don't believe that to be completely true. I've heard this said many times before, but I disagree. Or at least I disagree in part. The time you spend reading a book is a few hours. The time you spend writing a book is a few months to a few years. That's quite a difference. While I may enjoy spending a few hours of my life reading a novel of physical comedy and witty banter, I may not have it within myself to think in a humorous manner day in and day out for months. Or the reverse may be true, I might enjoy a tormented tragedy upon occasion, but do I want to go to that darkness of emotion on a daily basis?

What I want to read for a few hours can reflect various moods, changing emotions, shifting situations in my day. What I choose to write for

months reflects more deeply the meaning I give to my life, that inner person I am, my voice.

So I say, write to your voice. Write to who you are as a person. Spend a few months of your life crafting a story in a manner that gives you meaning and fulfillment, because, especially before you get published, that may be your biggest (or only) reward.

Write well what gives you a strong sense of accomplishment, of enjoyment, of self-expression, and at least the truth of your voice will ring through clear to your reader.

## **Take Away**

In the end, writing is about passion. Your passion. Your characters' passion. Your book's passion. Your agent's, editor's. And finally, your readers'. Pour your passion on the page each and every time you sit to create. Don't revise it out. Revise it higher. Thus, you allow your reader to catch fire with your passion, to become fully engaged in your work.

To have fun!



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# Lesson Thirteen

## Draco Loves Hermione! At Least in Fan Fiction (Fan Fiction and Fan Involvement)

Fan fiction is fiction written by fans for fans, most often without commercial intent. It is an original story crafted from characters and worldbuilding of an established story not the author's own, usually unlicensed. Fanfic covers most genres, age groups, and mediums (book, TV, movies, cartoons, comics, Anime/Manga), but is generally more popular in the science fiction/fantasy realm (though definitely not limited there). Indeed, the modern version of fan fiction got its start with Star Trek the TV show, grew in popularity with Star Wars and the Star Trek movies, and then had an explosion with the onset of the Internet. Today, you'll find active fandoms online not only with Harry Potter, but with such diversity as:

- novels—the Hunger Games series and *Lord of the Rings*
- cartoons—*South Park* and anything anime
- TV—Game of Thrones and Doctor Who
- movies—*Star Wars* and anything from Marvel Comics

One theory of literary criticism sees fanfic as the modern day myth or folk story. If you've ever studied ancient myth from various cultures, you'll see (generally speaking) that most myths exist in more than one form. Depending

on region and time period, the details, settings, characters, and plot of a given myth can vary quite dramatically, and yet still be recognizable as the same story. Who made these alterations? Ancient fanfic writers.

We all want our favorite stories to reflect our personal reality. With most modern-day epic myths being owned, copyrighted, and licensed by major motion picture studios, corporate publishing houses, or big-league authors, modern myth revisionists must rely on fan fiction in its Internet form to put their own imprint on the stories that have claimed meaning for their lives and their cultures.

Not only do fanfic authors put their own personalities into their favorite stories, they also give them a decidedly creative spin. In Harry Potter fan fiction, Harry can go back in time and be trained by Merlin; a married Ron and Hermione can raise Voldemort and Bellatrix's baby[\[14\]](#);

and Snape can have a romantic relationship with Hermione. Anything is possible, and considering the amount of stories written, everything is likely to occur. (Check out <http://www.fanfiction.net/> for hundreds of thousands of fanfic stories).

Fan fiction is so popular today that it has developed its own jargon, subgenres, code of ethics, fansites, and conferences. Most authors self-regulate their stories for age-appropriate content by labeling them with a rating (PG, PG 13, R, etc.), by submitting to appropriate sites, and may even carry explicit warning about the content. Some authors have gained such a following that their fanfic has its own fans. Some have even obtained regular fiction book deals as a result of their fan fiction.

Fandom is a vital, highly communicative, and technology-centered community that can drive traffic to or from your story. One of the underlying reasons for Rowling's success is not only her open-mindedness toward her fan fiction community, but also that the design of her series, by encouraging speculation and fan involvement, tilled a fertile soil for fanfic. Her deep canon gave these new shoots the fertilizer to flourish.

## **Overview:**

So, what does fan fiction mean to you as a writer? How can you tap into this deep resource to promote your own work? We'll discuss the following issues that, as an author, you'll want to familiarize yourself with concerning fanfic:

1. Write fan fiction as a lead-in to your own stories.
2. Encourage fan fiction of your world, but set boundaries.
3. Get involved with your fandom.
4. Continue the engagement even when you move on.

## **Writing Fan Fiction**

Even if you're an established author, writing fan fiction can be a relaxing hobby or an intriguing way to learn and pursue a new genre. For the beginning writer, however, crafting your own fanfic is a proven method for learning the craft, experimenting with various formats and creative possibilities, establishing your author presence, and even garnering a few fans. There are so many resources online that will give unbiased feedback that you'll learn quickly what works and what doesn't. By working with established characters (plus those you introduce), you'll be free to devote your attention to learning writing techniques and strengthening your

plotting skills, as well as experimenting with how creative you can become within an already defined universe.

Because fanfic writers of contemporary fandoms are not pursuing publishing with their stories, it is also incredibly freeing. You can follow your Muse wherever she leads without worrying whether it's marketable.

Writing fan fiction is an excellent alternate route toward creating your own originated fiction. As mentioned previously, there are some authors who have garnered the interest of New York editors through their fanfic, and have been directly invited to submit their own works.

I'm not suggesting that you try your hand at fanfic if you have no such interest. You can learn quite well through the traditional route of crafting your characters from scratch and submitting to critique groups and contests. I'm merely suggesting that if you do like this method of creative writing, that's it's an excellent route to learn the craft and get immediate, fabulous feedback from online sources. With the quick response time available to the fanfic writer, if you work hard at it, you can shorten your learning curve tremendously.

If you have any interest in fan fiction, try it out. Give it a wave. You may be pleasantly surprised by how freeing it is to work within an already defined world.

## **Fan Fiction and Your Copyrighted World**

The rest of this lesson will discuss how fan fiction affects the published author.

Let's say you're cruising online one lazy Sunday afternoon, spending a few mindless moments Googling your latest release, and you come across some of your characters doing something you never intended them to do. You've crossed into the Twilight Zone and stumbled into the world of fan fiction...stories you never wrote about your world.

Welcome! You've truly arrived as an author!

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you've just been complimented to the max. Fans would not want to play with your story if they didn't have a strong and sincere interest in your characters and your world.

So, you enjoy a nice moment of self-congratulations, and then what? What do you do about it? Are these stories copyright infringement? Are they harmful to protecting your story, your characters, your readers?

One answer does not fit all where fanfic is concerned. Some of your response will be necessarily governed by the type of story you're writing. If you're writing children's or middle grade, and you've found slash fiction (a particular form of fan fiction involving the explicit sexual relationship of two characters), you might well have a concern as to what your very young fans will find when they Google you. Some authors frown on fanfic in whatever form, so much that they've threatened and pursued litigation.

However, I find Rowling's model quite sensible, and honestly the smartest plan for supporting her fan base. If you've created a story that encourages reader involvement, it makes no sense to slap your readers' hands when they play with your characters in their own way. Make friends with them instead, support them and encourage them, but do what you can to set reasonable boundaries.

Rowling gave her first ever fansite award to *Immeritus* ([www.immeritus.org](http://www.immeritus.org)), a Sirius Black fansite which promotes and publishes fanfic, but is careful to moderate their submissions and classifies those of more adult content into a restricted section. Authors of adult literature probably would not need such a concern, but Rowling has a hugely loyal young following, and so she favored sites which respected her desire to keep X-rated material apart from her younger fans. As her fansite award was highly coveted during the time she was giving it, the bigger websites online did whatever they could to meet her expectations.

Likewise, Warner Brothers favored certain Harry Potter fansites with inside information, confirmation of rumors, movie pictures and other content. The websites only kept this benefit as long as they played by Warner's rules, so to speak. (These sites favored by Rowling and Warner were not only fanfic sites, but fansites in general).

If you should get to the level of having your own fan fiction community, consider Rowling's model. Communicate with the webmasters of your fansites, let them know your preferences, and reward them for sticking by your guidelines.

## **Get Involved with Your Fans**

Early on, besides her fansite award, Rowling involved herself with her fans in a few other ways. (First let me say that I'm not solely speaking about writers of fan fiction now, but all types of fans). Rowling participated in many special readings where she answered questions from the invitees drawn from her huge fan base. She maintained connections with her larger

fansite webmasters, and even invited the two biggies, Emerson Spartz at *Mugglenet* and Melissa Anelli at *The Leaky Cauldron*, to her home for a private interview following the release of *Half-Blood Prince*.

In recent years, she's become even more proactive in connecting with her readers, especially through Pottermore (discussed in the next section) and Twitter (discussed in the next chapter on social media). She's become known for reaching out to fans struggling with difficulties, often sending personal letters of encouragement, other times donating items to auction for large causes. She even hand wrote the *Expecto Patronum* charm for a fan who had been self-harming as a tattoo for her to place protectively over the area she cut. The fan said that her Patronus was not an animal, but a very special woman.

Yet Rowling, while not a recluse, is known for maintaining a certain amount of privacy. Other authors are even more open and proactive in supporting and meeting their fans. Many will reply to their fanfic writers, offering advice and encouragement, and some attend fan conferences or release parties.

Of course, we are all limited by time and money. We may not be able to spend significant amounts of time seeking out and responding to all our fans. Nor could we afford to go to all the various fan-type conferences where a handful of our fans may gather. Do what you can according to your comfort level. As will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, social media is an efficient and inexpensive tool for connecting with your readers. However you do it, encourage their enthused participation in your world (after all, that's what you wanted, isn't it?), and help them spread the good news about your good books.

Because that's the beauty of these involved fans. They talk. They network. They know technology and how to use it. And they'll be your most vocal disciples for converting the unwashed masses to your work...if you engage them respectfully.

## **Pottermore: Continuing the Engagement Post Potter**

Just because you may have finished writing a novel or series doesn't mean your fans have finished playing with it. At least you hope so. Therefore, it's important to have a plan in place for taking care of your existing fans even as you venture forth into new unexplored territory.

Rowling's brilliant answer to this dilemma was *Pottermore*. She opened this online fan portal in 2011 to serve as both an independent

publisher for her electronic Potter series as well as to continue the connection with her rabid Potter fan base even as she moved on to writing the Cormoran Strike series. By continually supplying them with new insights and backstories not previously mentioned in the books along with enchanting interactive story art, Rowling kept her readers actively engaged in her completed series while enticing the always emerging new readers into her market.

Initially, the website consisted of a guided tour through all seven books, which included games to play, duels to fight, houses to be sorted into, cups to win. In 2014, Rowling switched the site administration from Sony to Apple and changed its focus. The site now not only publishes and sales enhanced, illustrated and animated e-books, but is also a news hub for the ever expanding wizarding world. It will also be the publisher of the upcoming electronic editions of the script books for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

I realize that a website on this scale and complexity will be beyond most authors' budgets. However, we can let it inspire us to challenge our outreach to our fans in a way that works with both our books and our finances. We'll cover a fun, engaging website for your current work during the next chapter, but at this point, let's focus on our backlist.

In a time when publishers' marketing budgets have been enchanted with a Shrinking Charm, and an author's need to sell themselves enlarged with *Engorgia*, we owe it to ourselves to study Rowling's example here as well. Author-driven promotion is critical to your success as a writer, especially if you are also an independent publisher. Keeping your works alive in your readers' imaginations is the key to keeping your past and current books selling.

Gone are the days when the only books that sold were the ones on the shelves in brick and mortar stores. Books that are sold online are always fresh to a new person finding them. This era of publishing can be your best friend, but only if you are proactive in taking advantage of it. That means optimizing your backlist and keeping readers engaged. While you're at it, consider how you can exploit any rights that you've not already signed away. You don't need millions of dollars to do this. What you do need is imagination, determination, and time.

As the author, you know your works the best. Take time to consider the feedback you have received from readers, your characters and other

elements from your story that have garnered the most enthusiastic response. Craft an interactive online experience around these elements that will keep your fans engaged. Occasionally dribble bits of new insight, content, or backstory that did not make it into the original.

That last may not be an option some writers would consider or agree with. It's perfectly natural to firmly close the canon of a book once it is published. However, you never want to close your doors to new readers. So challenge yourself to figure out a way that, even if you don't extend your story as Rowling is doing, you at least extend yourself. After all, you never know if you may want to revisit your world and its fandom in the future.

## Take Away

One interesting question I'd like to pose here—would Harry Potter have met with as much success in the days pre-Internet? It's impossible, of course, to Pensieve an answer to this one. There are too many variable factors to be considered. Without doubt, however, the immediate engagement the Internet allowed accelerated Rowling's success. Which only happened because she'd planted such a fruitful garden.

Her books came out just as the Internet was finally gaining access to most homes in the US and UK where her young fans (and older ones) were able to discuss their passions beyond their neighborhood. Even though Rowling did not, early on, utilize the online world to promote her books, her young fans sure did. Fansites sprang up almost immediately, hosted by webmasters who were sixteen, twelve, and even younger. Ah, the forums! The fanfic! The posted editorials and theories!

Everywhere you looked online, people were discussing, debating, or decrying Harry Potter. Rowling's word-of-mouth was, in reality, word-of e-mouth! She may have been the first phenom author to reach her spectacular heights with a large boost from the Internet.

So, even though Rowling did not participate in forums, blog, or Tweet (especially since it didn't exist), she benefitted from those who did. While Rowling may have initially taken a standoffish attitude toward making herself available on the web (which has recently changed dramatically), today's author cannot. Fans have expectations now. They expect to be able to find their favorite authors online and have some sort of contact with them, even if it's only following their Tumblr or Twitter.

In writing a book that so encouraged reader involvement to dig to the deeper layers and root around for clues, Rowling encouraged all the fan

interaction, whether online or off, that has occurred in the nearly twenty years since the publication of *Philosopher's Stone*. Without that fan involvement, there would not have been the hype, the massive release parties, the hit movies. Or the theme parks...but let's not even go there. Fan involvement is what made the bestseller a phenomenon.

The world of fandom can be a scary place for some authors, especially fanfic in its sexually explicit forms. For mystery authors like Rowling, accurate fan predictions might be even scarier, but consider the most likely alternative—no fan involvement at all.

Even if we never reach the heights Potterdom has enjoyed, we should consider the issue of fan involvement along with our other concerns of craft and business. It may be difficult, but we must challenge ourselves to involve our reader from the outset. Face them and give them a reason to keep coming back.

Engage your fans. Work with your readers. Do whatever you can to support them while encouraging respectful borders. The best way to build a fan community is to focus your own magical powers to write the best book possible. Use the tools and techniques we've discussed within the course of these lessons to prepare a nourishing soil in your story that encourages reader participation and response.

Write well. Write to your voice. Put your heart into your characters every time. Then pat your little story on her head, and let her out into the wide world. With hope, and a bit of luck, she'll pick up tons of playmates and have a grand ol' time!

**Note**—If you'd like to learn more about the fandom side of the Harry Potter phenomenon, I highly recommend from the webmistress of *The Leaky Cauldron*, Melissa Anelli's book, *Harry, A History*.



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# Lesson Fourteen

## Choosing Your Owl

### (Social Media and Public Image)

Up until this point, every technique we've discussed from Rowling has centered on craft techniques or fan engagement. Now we're going to turn our attention to the marketing end of publishing. Rowling has shown strong business savvy in promoting her books and expanding her reach. We'll look at various points from her example that we can modify and implement ourselves to increase our own success.

First, let me state clearly that I fully believe Rowling's success is a direct result of her craft. Her marketing supported the word-of-mouth wildfire that ignited when readers read and loved her books.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the first Bloomsbury print run for *Philosopher's Stone* in 1997 was 500[15]. 500 books! Now, we have to consider that this was a UK print run and not a US, but clearly Rowling did not get her success due to a heavy push and promo effort from her publisher right out of the starting gate. Her success came the old fashioned way—word of mouth.

Word-of-mouth is that elusive, alchemical ingredient all writers pray for, chant voodoo incantations over, or truly work their butts off to obtain. Word-of-mouth is what can take an unknown author, with a debut book and a low print run, and transform her into an overnight sensation. An “overnight” that probably lasted many long, hardworking years.

How to hunt down and capture that elusive snark word-of-mouth is the grand question. Without doubt it starts and rests primarily with the product—which we have spent the better part of this book discussing. Write the best book you possibly can. Put your heart, your soul, your voice into every word, action, and emotion you craft. Always, always think deeper as to how you can involve your readers further and **give them more**. If the reader doesn't latch on to the story, if it doesn't resonate with her enough to tell her friends about it, there's no way you'll catch word-of-mouth.

For this lesson, however, we're assuming you've written such a fantastic beast. You've captured on paper that perfect rendition of the vibrant story that lives and breathes within your head and soul. You've

conveyed it to your potential reader in a way he can take to heart and claim as his own.

What do you do now to promote your work? How do you attract the best agent and editor to send your beloved story out into the world? Or, if published (whether self or traditional), how do you conduct your affairs as a published author to maximize your reader outreach and increase your sales?

What tips can you learn from the woman who has built a vast empire that made her the first billionaire career author on the planet, whose output employs hundreds of people from the cast working on her movies to her support team of agents, editors, translators, website designers, assistants, promoters, and last, but definitely not least—all those workers at her licensed theme parks at Universal? I think we start first by choosing our owls wisely.

## **Overview:**

Like Hedwig, Errol, and Pig, our websites, social media, author bios, and public appearances will create an image of ourselves and our work in the public. To ensure these messengers reflect what you wish to say about yourself:

- 1) Build as professional and interactive a website as you can afford, geared to your audience.
- 2) Make use of social media to build a community to support your work...and you.
- 3) Determine and maintain your author tone through your public presence.
- 4) Tell your own author myth—Rowling's welfare mom makes it big.

### **1) Build Your Website Geared to Your Audience**

It's been said time and again by people who know marketing a whole lot better than I do—a website is your best promotional effort for the money involved. But only if it's done in an engaging manner.

In building your site, the most important thing you'll want to consider is who your audience is and what they'll be looking for when they visit (just like in writing your book). When you're starting out, your first audience, however, may not be a reader. If you're going the traditional route, you'll be targeting agents and/or editors. If you're going the indie route, you'll still want to read the unpublished writer section below as the published author one builds on it.

How do you design a website geared toward agents and editors? Give them the information they'll want to know when, after they've received your fabulous submission, they hop online to Google you. Once your book is sold, and before it comes out, revamp your website with your novel's reader firmly in mind.

What follows is not meant to be an exhaustive how-to of website design and promotion. That's a book in and of itself and is not my specialty. Here, I simply want to highlight a few of the biggies, with ideas for the published author website garnered by examining Rowling's example.

### **For the unpublished writer (mostly):**

As soon as you determine what name you will be published under, whether it's your real name or a pseudonym, buy it as a domain. Once you've bought it, never let it expire unless you want resellers or porn sites to pick it up. Speaking from experience here.

Now, you'll want to develop your web presence. Here is where you can include all that stuff you had to cut out of your query or cover letter because it was either TMI (too much info) or it made your query too long.

Consider including, according to your needs and desires:

1) **A bio** that emphasizes not only everything that makes you qualified to write this particular story, but interesting bits that present you as intriguing, unique...and marketable. Strong, interesting personalities sell books (as well as good writing).

2) **A list of credentials.** This goes along with your bio, but could be on a separate page and presented as a bulleted list. Cite any writing credits you have, any contest finals/wins, any articles or editorials placed in print or online, any workshops given or speaking engagements, professional memberships. For published authors this could include **interviews** as well as **reviews**.

3) **A list of any publications**, with links to the book at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Indiebound, or your preferred retailer.

4) **A list of your works-in-progress** (just not too long). Believe me, this works. If an agent or editor Googles you, and they see what else you have available, they might take note of another work they'd like to request. Especially if you've provided...

5) **Brief excerpts of all your WIPs** (and published works). Many writers post the first chapter. Let me say, though, that some agents

don't like this for their clients. Opinions are divided. Some agents say they make their clients take down excerpts. You should be fine with a back-cover type of blurb or first page excerpt, however.

6) **Contact information.** For people who are more technically savvy than I am, there are ways to put your e-mail address online so that you don't get spammed. Or you can avoid spam by listing your e-mail in this format: "greatauthor AT gmail DOT com." The web crawlers that pick up addresses for spam can't pick that up, and yet most people understand how to replace the AT and DOT. Also, on your contact page, put your PO address. Go ahead and get your post office box if you haven't already. You don't want put your personal street address online (if it's not already there!).

7) **A picture.** Or not. If you have a good one, by all means put it up.

8) **News**—a place to put all your woohos (contest/pitching news, news about upcoming speaking engagements, news about sales or releases). This could be done by way of a blog feed on your home page.

9) **Workshops**—if you give them, list them, as well as where you've presented.

10) **A link to your blog**—if it's professional. In fact, a lot of authors use a blog as their main website, especially now that Wordpress and Blogger include pages. You should still buy your domain and simply have it rerouted to your blog.

11) **Links and snippets from any social media**, i.e. Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, or Facebook. There are apps for most to embed them into your website.

12) **Things not to put up**—anything unprofessional that you wouldn't want an editor or agent seeing: too many personal pictures, a blog with whines about rejections or the publishing industry, or too much personal information.

13) **Anything else** you can think of that would make yourself more marketable in an agent or editor's eyes.

It's not only important to get good information onto your site, but to present it in a professional manner. If you're not comfortable or skilled enough to design your website yourself, as much as you can afford to, hire someone who can. If money is an issue, you might be able to barter for trade. Maybe you have a critique partner or a friend who would do a basic

layout if you'll write up marketing material in return. At the very least, use a blogging tool like Wordpress or Blogger which comes equipped with built-in website design.

I've known of people who've gone to the local community college and asked computer students to help out either for a cheap rate or for a class project. Get creative (you're supposed to be good at that). No matter what, as soon as possible, buy your domain name, and as soon as you have something to shop around, develop your web presence.

Establish your website as early as you can, preferably at least a month before you start submissions. It takes a while (though not as long as it used to) before the search engines will pick you up. You don't have to pay for this service. Simply get a few friends to link to your site from theirs. The crawlers will find those links, and soon your site will be listed on the major search engines.

Keep your site updated. Finished a new book? Post a blurb and an excerpt. Finaled in another contest? Post it in your news section. Got major news? Make sure it's on your front page. Even if, especially if, your target audience is agents and editors, you still want to keep fresh content. They need to know your latest and best if you're asking them to open up their financial coffers.

### **For the published author:**

While you'll need to consider and include all the information presented above for the unpublished author, you'll want to redesign your focus based on your reader and their needs. You'll always be marketing yourself to the publishing industry, but now you also need a fun hangout for fans of your books. A revamp of your site with your new reader firmly in mind will be necessary.

For those who may not have experienced it, I wish I could show you Rowling's first real website for fans. It was incredible. You could use The WayBack Machine ([https://web.archive.org/web/20040515000000\\*/http://jkrowling.com](https://web.archive.org/web/20040515000000*/http://jkrowling.com)) to see screen caps from when it was active, but you'd have to search out each individual page, and it doesn't allow for the interactivity of the original site.

Rowling's first true website beyond a mere placeholder for her agent and publishers contact information was a professionally designed continuation of her Harry Potter world. Even though the setting was not Hogwarts or the Burrow or even Privet Drive—it was meant to represent

her office in her home—her website still flowed with the same energy, the same imagery, the same play of hidden clues as her books. As you moved your cursor around, it would pick up a hot item. Some of these led to straightforward information, but she also scattered clues all around the site that when put together would give the visitor hidden images or documents, revealing crucial information to the continuing series.

It was a site clearly geared to her fans and driven to grab that pervasive element we constantly talk about with her—reader involvement. Fans didn’t just go to Rowling’s site to read her bio and see when her next book was coming out. They went there to hunt for more clues, to find secret Easter eggs that revealed handwritten pages from her notebooks, scenes that got cut out of the novels, or tidbits that were never included.

If you visited on certain days when she opened a special locked door, you joined in the camaraderie of a massive hunt to figure out and pass through a series of puzzles to get to the new revelation. She gave Wombat tests and scores; provided FAQ answers and polls; and had a place to collect and review all the Easter eggs you’d unveiled. Reader involvement ruled this site.

To be honest, her current website at JKRowling.com, as well as the one she maintains under her pseudonym Robert-Galbraith.com are much more standard, and though nicely done, a bit boring. I’m guessing (hoping!) that within the coming months we’ll be treated to a new *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* website that has the visual appeal and interaction of the original JKRowling/Harry Potter site.

Once again, as writers, we come to the question of how we can learn from Rowling’s successful example on a more limited budget. And once again, we must rely on our creativity. How can you design your site not only to reflect the tone of your novel, but to invite reader involvement in exploring your stories? What more can you give them, in a creative way, to make your online home both informative as well as fun? How can you reflect a continuation of your characters and their world? What secrets can you hide for your reader to find? Make sure these are secrets that will not ruin the surprises of your story, but rather supplement or enhance it.

Rowling gifted her website readers with deleted scenes and tidbits that didn’t make it into the published book, drawings she’d made of characters early on, photocopies of some of her early handwritten notes—anything that

would tug her reader more deeply into her world without revealing too much too soon.

Engage your reader fully through your website. Make it an engrossing, fun experience that they'll return to again and again.

And as always, keep it fresh and updated. Don't let your reader down. If you want to keep them on hook for your next release, string along the clues and morsels of information through an engaging, entertaining website during your books' intermission.

## 2) Build a Community through Social Media

In the last chapter, we discussed social media in regard to fan engagement. However, social media can serve multiple purposes. Rowling started slow on Twitter but has recently truly caught on to the power of this tool. When I published the first edition of this guide, she'd Tweeted a total of seven times (and most of them just to say it was the real her, but she was too busy writing to talk). Now her Tweets are approaching the 4500 mark.

Social media is not just a tool for promotion. It's a power tool for connections and opportunities. One that, time commitment aside, is free to all. I'll speak more about Twitter through this section than other forms of social media not only because it's the one where Rowling has a presence, but because it's the one I'm most familiar with and like the best. That is because it seems all of publishing lives on Twitter. If you want to know what agents and editors are looking for right now, which books are getting the current buzz, and make connections with other writers seeking to support each other, then Twitter is a great place to hang out.

When I first started on Twitter in 2009, I approached it as a way to sell my writing. Since then, I've discovered its true power is to connect to people across the world, to listen to voices I don't regularly hear, and to learn from the experience of others. Through Twitter, I've met remarkable people who've become dear friends, participated in pitch parties that have resulted in new requests, and heard of upcoming publications where I've sold work. I've also met people of similar interests who have become critique partners, or who, in simply listening to their voices, have helped shape my characters.

Some writers really don't like the idea of messing with a blog, or Facebook, or any type of social media. They're private people by nature or are afraid it will cut deeply into their prized writing time. But the reality is, when published, you'll have to spend a significant amount of your time

marketing your work. You may as well get used to it now, and if done well, it might indeed help you to become published. You can make contacts early on that could aid you in your publishing goals. Or you can build a base of followers that agents and editors will take note of.

In the end, though, you must have enthusiasm for what you're doing, or you won't do it well. Fortunately, there's a wide variety of social media out there for varying personalities to choose from. Before publication is an excellent time to dip your toe into the swiftly flowing waters of online networking. Try out a Pinterest board. Create a Twitter account and see what all the fuss is about. Make and upload your own informational video to YouTube. Join Facebook and find all those people in high school who thought you were a nerd and wouldn't talk with you. Give them a wave (the varying forms of social media, not the long-forgotten high schoolers), and see which one you feel most comfortable with.

I prefer to focus on one or two. Some amazing people with unending energy seem to juggle multiple medias. But I've found my niche in my blog and Twitter, though I'm also using Pinterest to clip and store images that inspire my stories. That's all I can handle and still feel like I'm paying attention to my followers (including those hungry ones at home expecting to be fed).

During this exploration, you'll also want to create a niche for yourself. You'll quickly discover that every writer out there has a writing blog, is Tweeting about writing, and is developing their Facebook fanpage. How could one more possibly make a ripple in this wavy ocean?

That's where you have to get creative once again. What is *your* story to tell? What makes you unique from every other writer out there? Personally, I recommend that you focus outside your story initially and think about your talents and interests aside from your writing. Do you have a black belt in aikido? Have you worked at a raptor rescue mission? Maybe you volunteer for Habitat for Humanity.

Find a slant that sets you apart *and* meshes with your story. Make sure your slant will also appeal to your readership. Then, build your social media around this aspect of you that will be fresh and appealing, and not the same old thing. You can weave the writing into your unique newfound niche.

Since Rowling has latched onto Twitter, she's been quite vocal on it. A few of her Tweets are the typical announcements or marketing of new releases. More frequently she's engaging with fan comments or voicing her

view on current topics. She has been especially vocal about Scottish and British politics, especially around separation issues.

Some authors avoid any political talk in any form of public media for fear of losing fans or followers. Rowling has definitely lost a few, but then an author of her stature can afford to. Other authors believe that if they have developed a voice, then it is their responsibility to assist causes they believe in. This is a personal decision for each individual author.

You should, however, always be aware that anything you write online, even if you think it's in a private form, can be copied and plastered all over the Internet within hours.

Perhaps the most endearing aspect of Rowling's Twitter presence, though, is her engagement with fans. She answers endless questions, still, regarding the Harry Potter series, provides encouragement and support to her fans that write to her about their troubles, and even engages in the debates they spark in her comment trail. She's also been known to toss out a few well-placed zingers to the trolls in her dungeon. In whatever manner she's responding, it's all good publicity. A surprising amount of her Tweets end up as news items. Above all, her fans feel as if they can connect with her.

The primary secret, I believe, when approaching social media is that karma works. You have to give out to get in. It's all about building a community. The community, the followers, will not come if you don't provide something of value. You must provide informative, entertaining, and unique content if you wish to lure people in. Then to keep them there, you must dialogue, retweet their links, comment on their accounts, share their good news, and console their disappointments. Coming online only to post a link to your newest release and then disappearing will not earn you any friends, or committed followers.

### **3) Maintain Your Author Tone While in Public**

Don't show all your cards in promoting your book. Know when and what to keep to yourself. Learn how to present yourself publicly to support your work.

These tips echo the backstory lesson of keeping your reader guessing. They also flow from the prior tip on building your website and social media, but extends beyond your online presence.

If you're promoting a book that has mystery elements or secrets—and this may seem obvious, but it's surprising how easily you can be tripped up

—don’t blow all your hard work by giving away key clues in your interviews, readings, workshops, or website. Don’t tell plot points in advance, or discuss spoilers for a new release. Keep your secrets consistently.

Rowling is truly the mistress of this. Some of the ways she’s endeavored to keep her secrets will not apply to us lesser mortals, at least as we’re starting out. With her last few books, she did not allow review copies ahead of time. Gag orders were signed with anyone handling the book before it hit store or library shelves. She and her people did everything within their power to prevent leaked spoilers.

Rowling was very careful whenever she was in the public eye to make sure she maintained the tone and mystery of her series. She never loosened her sleight of hand just because she was in a book signing and not at home writing. Many times, in vastly creative ways, fans tried to trip her up. According to her, only one time did a fan succeed. A cute young boy asked her on NBC’s *Today Show* for the title of the next book, and she told him it would be *The Order of the Phoenix*...before she’d planned to release the info.[\[16\]](#)

Rowling also, generally speaking but not always, chose key days to reveal important information. The title of book 7 was released on December 21, 2006—the winter solstice. She quite frequently chose a solstice, equinox, Halloween, or other such date for releasing information, when possible, in keeping with the tones of her books.

Many fans guessed that she was timing *Hallows* for a 7/7/7 release date, which didn’t happen. Though through comments she made on her website, it seems that she was indeed hoping for that date for her seventh book’s release, and was unable to make it happen if the book was to be properly edited.

Before your book is published is an ideal time to take a moment and reflect on how you wish to present yourself to the public in a manner consistent with the tone of your story and its readership. Obviously, you would conduct yourself differently if you are a children’s book author as opposed to erotica. Strive to mesh your public persona not only to your book, but its readership.

Be creative, but don’t be bland. Fifty thousand other authors are out there promoting their books as well. How can you make yours stand out? How can you make *yourself* stand out? One way is by giving your reader

more. Dress up your presentations (interviews, website, book signings) to mirror your books, tease your readers with clues to the withheld secrets, mysteries, or upcoming plot points of the next release. Give them the chance to experience the involvement they crave, particular to your world and your story. Always remember to project in personal appearances the experience they will get from reading your story.

#### **4) Tell Your Own Author Myth**

While this point is related to maintaining your author tone, it's different enough that it needs its own section. Telling your own author myth is specifically directed to developing and discussing your bio.

You can look back to the earliest interviews with Rowling in British papers in 1997 and they almost always had the same slant—*welfare mom makes it big*. Of course, her “big” then wasn’t as big as it is today. However, most of those early newspaper articles were written after she’d accepted the six-figure deal with Scholastic—an unheard of advance for a children’s author.

While I do not believe Rowling deliberately crafted her bio as “welfare mom makes it big,” as she was working as a teacher at the time *Sorcerer’s Stone* sold, she obviously had to have mentioned her prior situation in those early interviews in order for the reporters to sensationalize it. The reporters hit on the item in her bio that they saw as the most marketable, and whether she liked it or not, she had to live with it.

If you prepare yourself in advance, you can guide the media to the parts of your life you want emphasized and away from those you want out of the public eye. Take some time before your first interview, before creating your website, to determine what aspects of your life you don’t mind being put on public display and would make good copy for marketing and promotion. What angle can you play-up to give yourself a hook, a myth that can be easily remembered?

Note my use of “myth” does not connote “lie.” Myths are stories that represent a deeper, inner truth. How can a full life be summed up in a couple of paragraphs? It can’t. A good bio will represent that part of you which is best presented to the public.

So, take a moment and think, what story about yourself best sums up who you are, what you write, and what will appeal to the reader you’re targeting? Determine your myth and present it everywhere that requires a bio, starting with your website and social media.

Also determine what areas you'd like best left out of public scrutiny and communicate that to anyone in your circle of influence who might comment on you publicly as well: your agent, editor, critique partners, spouse, etc. You won't always be able to succeed at this, especially if you make it big, but you can learn to play the politician and stay on message, *your* message, when presenting your bio to the media.

## **Take Away**

Authors today have tools for promotion that were not available to writers of earlier generations. Through online resources and social media, you can reach readers from across the road to the other side of the world. Yet this powerful tool will not be as effective without foresight and planning.

Spend time studying the websites and online presence of the authors you have connected with the most. Analyze what has worked for them and what they've done that you've found ineffective, distracting, or downright annoying. Talk to other writers and compare notes on what's worth the time and effort and what was a waste of time. Research the promotional side of being a writer through workshops, articles, and how-to books.

Then consider your own approach. What aspects of your life would be most interesting to future readers? What form of social media do you enjoy the most and could participate in enthusiastically and consistently? Finally, how can you design your world online to reflect your true self and the work of your creation, while inviting the reader in to connect with you both?



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# **Lesson Fifteen**

## **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them (Hatching Artistic and Marketing Vision)**

As of this writing, theater-goers in London will soon be able to experience *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. A few hours after that, readers from around the world will share virtually in that experience. Then in November, a new era of the wizarding world will be brought to screen through the magic of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. JK Rowling's Pottermore, in association with its print partners, will bring both of these script books to a wider audience.

As Rowling's artistic and marketing vision continues to expand, we are left to wonder—where does such powerful magic come from? Did she perhaps nip back into Dumbledore's tomb and steal the Elder Wand?

I've watched Rowling's career ascend for years. While I've always admired that one writer could combine so strong a sense of business as well as creativity, I admit to having also felt a sense of disconnect. I mean, seriously, just because JK Rowling can do what she does, doesn't mean the more mortal writers among us could do the same. She's got millions to spend, connections across continents, and leaders in industries dying to work with her. She's JK Rowling!

But the thing is, she wasn't when she started. You know the story. We all know the story. The rags to riches inspiration of a single mother on British welfare scribbling away at her story in a cafe while baby Jessica slept. How that

book, which was initially turned down by twelve British publishers, went on to sell to a small house and by way of word of mouth, playground to playground, finally made it big.

Rowling left many Easter eggs within her novels. Throughout this book we've analyzed those she left for her readers. But I see other types hiding as well...eggs hinting at her success as a writer, waiting to be hatched by other writers. These clues tell of the personal tools we'll need if we're to unite artistic and marketing vision to make it in the highly competitive publishing world.

### **Overview:**

So, what would JK Rowling say to writers who, like her younger self, don't have the best resources or connections and are yet determined to get their stories published while staying true to their own artistic vision and reaching as wide an audience as possible?

In my opinion, she's already given some of her best advice, nestled within the lines of her characters:

- 1) "Anything's possible if you've got enough nerve."
- 2) "...mend that broken vanishing cabinet..."
- 3) "You've got strengths if I say you've got them."
- 4) "If you are holding out for universal popularity...you will be in this cabin for a very long time."
- 5) "Maybe you don't have to do this all by yourself..."

## Channel Your Inner Ginny

"The thing about growing up with Fred and George," said Ginny thoughtfully, "is that you sort of start thinking anything's possible if you've got enough nerve."

(p. 655, *Phoenix*)

I am not so naive as to believe that nerve is all you need to succeed at publishing. Resources and connections *do* make a difference. Some writers will have a leg-up on their journey to publication and bestseller lists. Some will have many more obstructions set in their path. However, determination, developing your talent, and hard work matter even more.

With the difficulties you'll face, if you don't have nerve, you'll get left behind. Publishing is brutal, not because of the people in it. They're lovely. But because of the extremely stiff competition. The only way to keep at it is to believe in yourself and keep going no matter how much disappointment you face. Or how many rejections you get.

As we've already discussed, Rowling faced a lot of rejection when she first started out. The difficulties she lived through while writing *Philosopher's Stone* have become part of her author legend. It definitely takes nerve to write a novel while caring for an infant as a single mother.

To be honest, though, the failure she would have faced then, when only family and friends knew her name, would be nothing compared to what she faces now. As she ventures into new territory publishing two script books while transforming herself into both a playwright and script writer, surely she shares in Fred and George's nerves. Half the world is waiting for her to

stumble so they can sneer and say how Harry Potter was just a one-off thing.

There is no harm in analyzing the risks and rewards of publishing and deciding that you are better suited to another field. However, if you are certain that you *must* tell your stories and have them reach readers, then you must dig deep and find your Fred and George-inspired nerve. For navigating the many paths of publishing is like walking over a bed of coals, and nerve is what you must have to strengthen your soles. Nerve, and an ability to see beyond the Vanishing Cabinet.

## Mend Your Vanishing Cabinet

What magical item from Hogwarts would you claim if you could get your hands on it?

While the Marauder's Map would surely come in handy for many writers, especially those in the query trenches trying to stalk that agent or editor on whose desk their manuscripts languish, the reality is we have Twitter and Snapchat for that.

No, the magical item within the series I feel is most appropriate for writers is one used by Death Eaters to breach the walls of Hogwarts. I'm talking of course of the Vanishing Cabinet. That set of magical boxes which Draco spent a year repairing in order to permit the Death Eaters entry into Hogwarts, and the path to killing Dumbledore.

"I had to mend that broken Vanishing Cabinet that no one's used for years."...

"Montague told me that when he was stuck in the Hogwarts one, he was trapped in limbo but sometimes he could hear what was going on at school, and sometimes what was going on in the shop, as if the cabinet was traveling between them, but he couldn't make anyone hear him..."

(p. 586-587, *Half-Blood*)

What fascinates me about the Vanishing Cabinets is both their location and their function. Hearing voices at both ends, while stuck in limbo, traveling between two different worlds. Where no one can hear you scream. Feeling as if you can't communicate with either side and can't do anything about it.

That's just like writers who are stalled in their careers. Whether that's at the beginning—unable to get an agent, unable to sell a book, unable to do

anything really—or authors further along but stalled—unable to get that next contract, unable to make a list, unable to get the big marketing campaign. Yet, thanks to the claustrophobic nature of social media, we hear all that's going on around us from other writers passing us by. And when you're stuck, hearing the good news happening just beyond your cabinet kind of sucks. Even when you're truly happy for your friends.

So how do you get unstuck?

Montague did it by Apparating...into a toilet. Draco experimented for months, killing who knows how many birds in the process, before he was able to perform the proper spell and open the passageway.

Like Draco, we have to learn not to be wishy washy. Make up your mind about what you're going to do and do it. It helps to have Death Eaters breathing down your neck.

Like Montague, sometimes we need to think outside the Vanishing Cabinet. Don't wait around for someone to save you. Take a strong action, even if it lands you in the toilet.

You'll get a lot of advice along the way. Sometimes you'll get standard advice that is perfectly good for most writers most of the time. That does not mean it's good for you at this moment. Rowling was told very early in her career not to quit her day job. Ha!

Publishing is never easy. If you're going to succeed, you must be decisive. Make your own choices as to what's best for you. You'll make mistakes, that's for sure. But it's better to proceed firmly on what you think is the right path now than hesitate and get shoved into a Vanishing Cabinet.

## Play to Your Strengths

“--play to your strengths.”

“I haven’t got any,” said Harry, before he could stop himself.

“Excuse me,” growled Moody, “you’ve got strengths if I say you’ve got them. Think now. What are you best at?”

(p. 344, *Goblet*)

There is a reason why Rowling went from writing fantasy to writing mysteries (with a detour via adult social satire). She kept playing to her strength. While the Harry Potter series may have been set in a fantasy world, it was very much a whodunit, as she has said herself[17]. She sharpened her teeth on the clues she trailed through each book and across

the whole seven-book series. It was only natural that she'd play to her strengths in choosing her next series and go with a detective story.

And now she's back to the fantasy world that she created so vividly. With *Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts* coming out in the same year, surely Rowling is riding high on her talent.

Sometimes as writers, we have to write a lot before we know what we write well. Finding our talent is a bit like finding our author voice...it comes through the practice. Often, we'll only know by seeing how our fans react.

How often have you heard an author say that the book they loved the most tanked with readers, while one they were embarrassed about soared? Sometimes, like Harry, we have a hard time recognizing what we're good at.

Perhaps you need a pseudo-Moody to give you an objective opinion. Take the time to talk with people who've read your work and will give you honest feedback. Get *them* to tell *you* where your strengths lie. Then evaluate your strategies and techniques to ensure you're playing to your strengths. While we always want to be improving in our weak areas, it definitely pays, in these competitive times, to know how to call forth your broomstick.

## **Don't Hide Away, Waiting for Universal Popularity**

“Really Hagrid, if you are holding out for universal popularity, I’m afraid you will be in this cabin for a very long time.”

(p. 454, *Goblet*)

Rita Skeeter has written one of her acidic articles revealing the giant heritage of our favorite gameskeeper. Already owls have started pelting Dumbledore, calling for him to fire Hagrid. But will Dumbledore and Harry, Hermione, and Ron let Hagrid hide his face? No way.

Putting your story out into the world is a scary process. If you've spent any significant time in the industry, you know that the reception may not be what you hoped for. No one achieves universal popularity. Not even Rowling.

*Goblet of Fire* was one of her toughest books to write. She had written about half of it when she realized she had a huge plot hole and had to tear it apart and rewrite. Coupled with the writing difficulties, she faced her first lawsuit for copyright infringement plus increasing scrutiny in the media. I imagine this quote was born of her very real experience.

While most people associate Rowling with world-wide adoration, she's also received more than her fair share of attacks. She has faced lawsuits for plagiarism, attacks on the quality of her work, and, as her online voice has grown stronger, hostility from people whose position she opposes.

The bigger the target you are, the more numerous the trolls. Rowling keeps putting herself out there, because she believes in her stories and her views.

As a writer, there is no chance you will face universal popularity. In reading your reviews keep in mind that the more passionate they are the better. If people either love or hate your story, that's a good thing. What you don't want is indifference.

The business surrounding storytelling is subjective. As artists, we invest heavily in evaluations of our work while being exposed to constant and often opposing opinions from agents, editors, readers, and reviewers. But dealing with this is part of our job.

Trolls aren't just in the dungeon. In publishing, trolls live everywhere. You can't hide out in your cabin waiting for their army to pass. You have to face them and keep on writing.

## **Form Your Own Dumbledore's Army**

“Maybe you don't have to do this all by yourself, mate.”

(Ron to Harry, *Order of the Phoenix* film)

This point may seem to contradict the *be decisive* message of the Vanishing Cabinets above. But being decisive does not mean ignoring good counsel or not partnering with strong people.

While writing may be a solitary sport, publishing is not. You've got to have a team.

One thing I've noticed in the number of writers that I have critiqued or edited over the year—there seems to be a direct correlation between the writers who ask for help to those who succeed. Going it alone in this industry is a potion for disaster.

Find the people who will support you, not tear you down. That doesn't mean seek out yes-men. Pull together a team who will respect you and share their honest opinions in a way that is not destructive. While pursuing a career which many consider a waste of time, that is sometimes hard to find.

When in 2011 Rowling left her first agent, she received flack in the media, labeled as disloyal. An agent/editor relationship is one of business,

not a marriage as it is so often compared to. If you find yourself in a partnership that is not working as a team, you owe it to yourself to form a new one.

It was shortly before this break that Rowling began her new venture, establishing her team at Pottermore and self-publishing her electronic books. Soon after she branched out into the theater production that would eventually become *Cursed Child*. She's built a solid team of support and is obviously accomplishing great things with them.

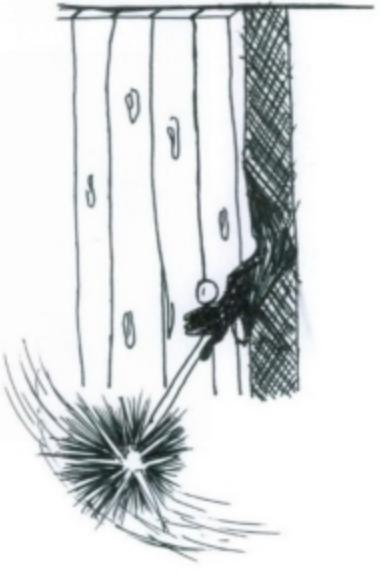
Whether through local writer groups or online social media, today's writers have many resources at hand to find others writing in their genre. Professional writer associations such as Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Romance Writers of America, Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, and Mystery Writers of America provide professional resources to their members and host conferences where networking opportunities abound. Utilize these resources to connect with new friends who may also become your critique partners, agent, or editor or provide you with personal recommendations for working with professionals in your field, especially if you're self-publishing.

In this aspect of your own quest into the publishing world, don't imitate Harry. Don't try to go it alone. You may write in all the solitude you need to, but when it comes time to navigate the trials and tribulations of the writer's career, build up your Dumbledore's Army and always have a good base of support around you.

## **Take Away**

JK Rowling found and freed her own fantastic beast when she successfully united her artistic vision with her marketing prowess. She used this power to build a vast publishing empire that spread her vision into every corner of the world. Today, she continues to challenge both her imagination and the business of publishing as she crosses into new formats and expands her wizarding world. Therefore, let us end on some lessons she taught us within her stories on how to free the fantastic beast hiding within us all:

- Get your nerve,
- Take decisive action,
- According to your strengths,
- Don't hide away when things get tough,
- Find your support team. And never go it completely alone.



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# Final Words Before Snape Comes Through the Door

## (Afterword)

Snape risked everything as a double agent for Dumbledore and in carrying out his final demand: his job, the respect of his colleagues...his life.

Like her creation, Rowling took significant risks along her publishing journey. As a beginning author assessing the market, Rowling did some things with her first book that most new writers are taught to never do. First, her story included a hook that was considered unmarketable in the UK—children going away to boarding school. Second, she had planned out a seven book series before she'd even sold one. And third, at that time, *Philosopher's Stone* was much longer than the market for children's books allowed. Obviously, in this case, her risks paid off.

She has continued to take risks along the way. In insisting that the films carried a British cast, she risked them never being made. She established her own company, Pottermore, to self-publish her electronic books, risking lower sales or the failure of the company. Now she has taken what's perhaps her greatest risk of all: continuing the Harry Potter and Wizarding World saga into new formats and stories with *Cursed Child* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find*

*Them*. What if fans grow tired of overexposure? Or what if she's poised to thrill a whole new generation?

Even though Rowling has acknowledged her anxiety before the previews of *Cursed Child*[\[18\]](#), I have no doubt she will carry on bravely as a true Gryffindor. After all, she is the one who assured Harvard students in her famous 2008 commencement speech:

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default.”

While you should be willing to take chances, such as Rowling did, you should be aware that risks don't always pan out as well as hers. However, when they do, they can win out in a big way because you've accomplished something that's not been overly done.

How do you know what risk is worth taking and what isn't? Well, unfortunately, none of us has a crystal ball, and even Trelawney's is not all that reliable. You take the risk, you take your chances, but sometimes the bigger risk, the greater your winnings...or the worse your loss.

I personally try to always take a risk in everything I write. However, I make sure it's a risk I fully believe in and one I'm willing to take as a loss as well. For if there's one thing certain in publishing, it's that nothing is guaranteed. Publishing itself is a risky business. It's up to the individual author to determine where and how they wish to stack their Goblin gold.

Learning from a mentor is a great way to get started as a writer and to nourish the early storyteller's hunger. Through these lessons we've learned a lot from Rowling, a woman fully deserving of study as she's truly braved into fresh, new territory of reader involvement through the course of her Harry Potter series.

There are hundreds of other successful authors we can learn from as well. As you study the craft, be sure to always research from primary sources—the books that actually live on the bestseller lists. Read these books, enjoy them as a reader, then study them as a writer. Determine what made them catch an agent or editor's interest and then sell well, even if the story didn't particularly appeal to you.

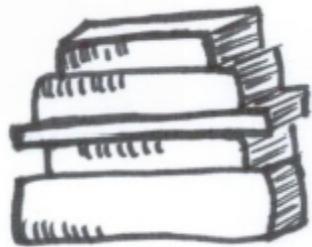
Pay special attention, however, to the stories that you love, because within those pages you'll discover ways to improve your own style that fit with your own vision and voice.

At some point, you'll cut the cord of mentorship and face the final challenges on your own, having developed the skills to be secure in your craft, your voice, your stories...though we never stop learning. You'll be ready, like Harry, to face alone your greatest challenge—continuing a successful career as the beloved author of deeply loved books. Consider then how to become a mentor to others. Give a helping hand, just as you were helped.

I wish you a strong cast of delightful characters, an urgent mystery or story question that needs to be solved—and the discipline to make the reader wait for it, the ability to capture your readers' imaginations and involve them fully, and the desire to always, always ***give your reader more***.

Good luck, and have fun!

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# **Hermione's Bookbag**

## **(S.P. Sipal's Publications)**

### **Soon to be released:**

*A Writer's Guide to Harry Potter Workbook* (middle and upper grade editions)

*A Writer's Guide to Harry Potter Teacher's Guide*

### **Previously Published:**

- *Southern Fried Wiccan*—March 2015
- “Lighting the Sacred Way” in *Journeys of Wonder 2*—October 2012
- “Running Raw” in *Sweeter Than Tea*—June 2012
- *Egyptian Myths in Harry Potter*, an editorial in three parts; Mugglenet.com—July 2007
- “Grandma's Cupboards” in *On Grandma's Porch*—June 2007
- *One Last Memory*; a Featured Editorial on Mugglenet—Feb. 2007
- “From Online to Paperback: The Making of The Plot Thickens” and “Geomancy and Alchemy in Harry Potter” in *Proceedings of Accio UK 2005*—July 2006
- *Ultimate Unofficial Guide to the Mysteries of Harry Potter: Analysis of Book 5*; by Galadriel Waters; Wizarding World Press—June 2005. (editor and contributor.)
- “A Family Treasure” in *More Sweet Tea*—April 2005
- “Chamber of Thoth” and “Geomancy and Alchemy Gems in Harry Potter” in *The Plot Thickens...Harry Potter Investigated by Fans for Fans*; Wizarding World Press—November 2004

Please check out my blog at [HarryPotterforWriters.blogspot.com](http://HarryPotterforWriters.blogspot.com) and Twitter feed @HP4Writers for continued discussion of how we can improve our writing with Harry Potter as our text.



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# **Professor of Scrolls**

## **(About the Author)**

S.P. Sipal is a writer, editor, and international speaker who has presented the material in this guide since the Harry Potter phenomenon gripped the nation. Susan celebrated the release of the last Harry Potter book, *Deathly Hallows*, as a presenter at a fan conference in London. Her writing workshops, school and college lessons, and numerous fan conference presentations have been met with enthusiasm and repeat requests.

Susan lives in North Carolina with her husband and two children. You can find her on Twitter @HP4Writers, her website at SPSipal.com, and her blog at HarryPotterforWriters.blogspot.com.

If you liked the material in this guide, please consider leaving a review at your favorite review site.

To book Susan for speaking engagements, interviews, and other Harry Potter or writing events, please contact [publicity@DeepRiverPressInc.com](mailto:publicity@DeepRiverPressInc.com).

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# Acknowledgements

A work such as this is not completed by one person. Through the years, as I have presented workshops and written blog posts and articles, I've been privileged to assemble my own Dumbledore's Army of support. Because I can never remember where I left my Remembrall, I'm sure I will forget someone. But I must thank the wonderful people who have helped or inspired me.

- First, to all the writers and Harry Potter fans who've attended my workshops throughout the past twelve years. I've learned from you, shared in your enthusiasm, and you've shaped the workshop for the next students. Thank you for joining this journey of discovery with me.
- To Kayla Laine Perkinson for beautifully drawn and fan-inspired illustrations that liven up all these words.
- To Priya Sridhar and Farida Mestek for their wonderful, last-minute critiques that helped me not embarrass myself.
- To Martina Boone for her constant support and sharing of the arcane knowledge that makes up the publishing industry.
- To Pamela Ahearn who alerted me to the secrets buried beneath the pages of a Harry Potter story and presented this workshop with me the first time.
- To Greg Schultz for his exquisite cover.
- To Lisa London for making it happen. If we could bottle your drive and energy, I'm sure Fred and George would make millions of galleons.
- Most of all, to my family for their constant love and support and rolling of eyes when I make yet another Harry Potter reference.

Finally, none of this analysis or fandom would be possible without JK Rowling and her incredible imagination. She has inspired millions in so many ways, not the least of whom are writers like me seeking our own golden storytelling snitch.

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[1] [http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2007-07-24-potter-sales\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/books/news/2007-07-24-potter-sales_N.htm)

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry\\_Potter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Potter)

[3] <http://www.tomfolio.com/PublisherInfo/HarryPotter.asp>

[4] Rowling first had the idea for Harry Potter while on a train from Manchester to London.

[5] Usually the ending is at King's Cross Station on Harry's return trip.

[6] Actually Rowling's third person POV occasionally involves a hint of omniscient, especially in the first couple of books.

[7] For more insight to Rowling's use of alchemy, which goes beyond the scope of this book, the following site provides an excellent starting point:  
<http://harrypotterforseekers.com/alchemy/alchemy.php>

[8] Rowling's answer to this was to show in *Horcruxes* through Voldemort's memory that neither James nor Lily had their wands on them.

[9] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jun/03/pressandpublishing.uknews>

[10] [http://www.hp-lexicon.org/about/sources/source\\_hpm.html](http://www.hp-lexicon.org/about/sources/source_hpm.html)

[11] From *The Power of Myth* with Bill Moyers;  
<http://www.mythsdreamssymbols.com/mythanddreams.html>

[12] As she did when a Palestinian fan publicly called her out regarding her opposition to the Israeli Cultural Boycott:  
[http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13898879.JK\\_Rowling\\_responds\\_to\\_fans\\_using\\_her\\_Harry\\_Potter\\_characters\\_to\\_make\\_points\\_about\\_Israeli\\_cultural\\_boycott/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13898879.JK_Rowling_responds_to_fans_using_her_Harry_Potter_characters_to_make_points_about_Israeli_cultural_boycott/)

[13] She named a boy Dudley beat up Mark Evans and had everyone speculating on his relationship to Lily. He wasn't. ([http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Mark\\_Evans](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Mark_Evans))

[14] Note: this was written in the first edition of this book, pre *Cursed Child*.

[15] <http://www.tomfolio.com/PublisherInfo/HarryPotter.asp>

[16] <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/1000-nbc-couric.htm>

[17] <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2014/07/jk-rowlings-new-crime-series-to-run-longer-than-ha.html>

[18] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/10/jk-rowling-i-didnt-want-to-let-fans-down-over-harry-potter-and-t/>

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