

Story Structure: Exploring the Famous Five  
A Nano Course Handbook



# Introduction

This handbook is part of a **Scribble Online nano course**, but it also works well on its own. The links, resources and templates are great tools for developing your story structure. Inside you'll find...

1. Excerpts from John Yorke's, 'Into The Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them'. You'll need to plough through it if you're taking the Scribble Online quiz, but if you've downloaded this handbook separately, the insightful and inspirational text is still worth getting stuck into!
2. Key terms
3. Story Structure templates
4. Useful links
5. Information about other Scribble Ink writing programmes and discount codes for other Scribble Online nano courses.

Thanks for downloading. Enjoy!

Best,

Nadia.



# Excerpts from John Yorke's, 'Into the Woods'



John Yorke: Into the Woods | Google Talks -  
[click here to be redirected](#)

"As we've seen, successful three-act works mimic the shape of the larger structure; indeed, the shape of the protagonist's journey in the former is more clearly marked out by the demands of the five-act form. Writers who struggle with the Hollywood paradigm often find the five-act shape gives them the control over their middle section they otherwise find hard to deliver. Used wisely, it imposes a much stronger structure, creates regular gripping turning points that increase narrative tension and in turn eliminates one of the most common problems new screenwriters are heir to: the 'sagging,' disjointed, confused and often hard-to-follow second act."

"Storytelling has a shape. It dominates the way all stories are told and can be traced back not just to the Renaissance, but to the very beginnings of the recorded word. It's a structure that we absorb avidly whether in art-house or airport form and it's a shape that may be— though we must be careful— a universal archetype."

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"The protagonist is the person around whom the story revolves."

"If a character doesn't want something, they're passive. And if they're passive, they're effectively dead. Without a desire to animate the protagonist, the writer has no hope of bringing the character alive, no hope of telling a story and the work will almost always be boring."

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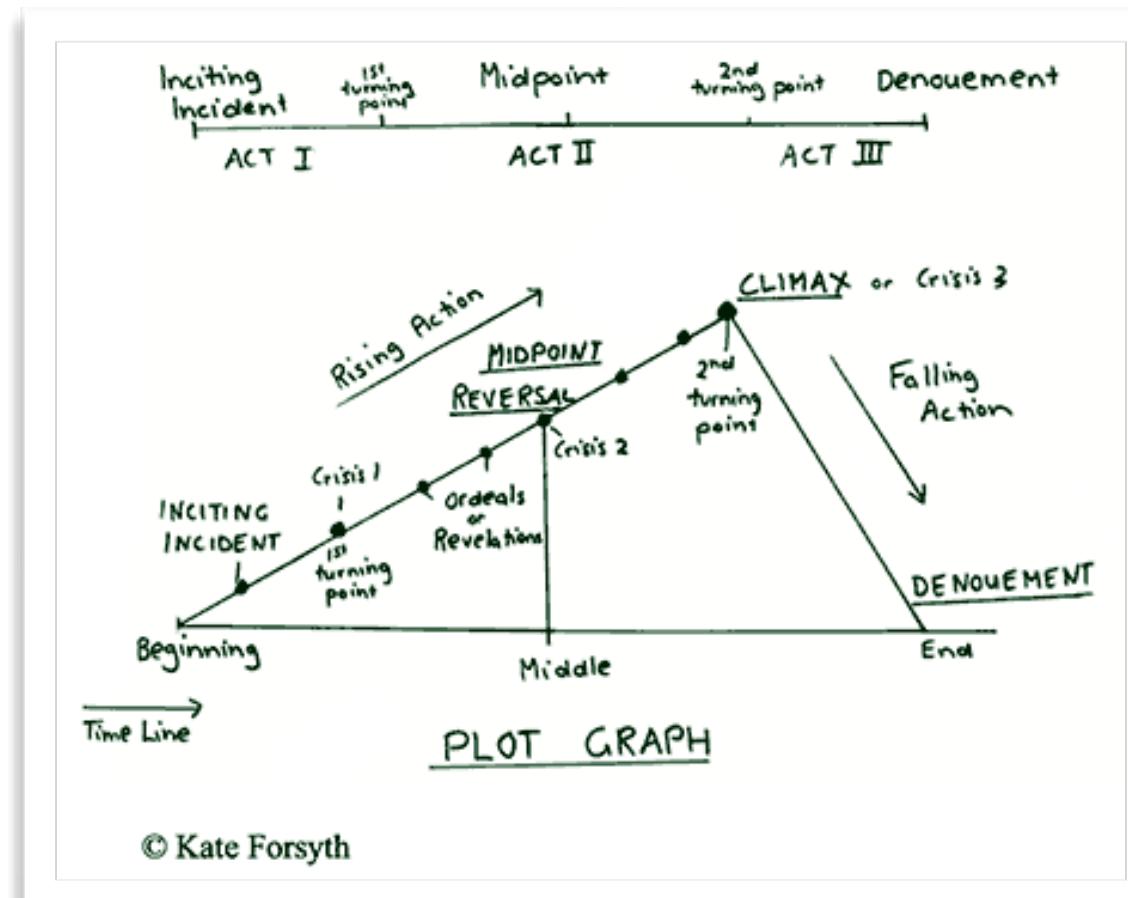
"There's one overriding desire— to survive and prosper— yet each episode contains its own sub-goal — to get off the roof, to get the guns, to find the family or the missing girl. As in all drama, we watch as the characters seek security and vanquish anything that threatens it, just as we'd like to believe we would do to ourselves...What a character thinks is good for them is often at odds with what actually is. This conflict, as we shall see, appears to be one of the fundamental tenets of structure, because it embodies the battle between external and internal desire."

"The quest is an integral ingredient of all archetypal stories. Change of some kind is at the heart of this quest, and so too is choice, because finally the protagonist must choose how to change. Nowhere is this more clearly embodied than in the crisis."

"The climax, then, is the peak of the drama: everything builds to this end, all the strands, all issues, all themes square up. Protagonist faces antagonist — all come together to fight it out and be dissolved."

"It seems impossible to understand how, with only eight notes in an octave, we don't simply run out of music, but just as tones give rise to semi-tones and time-signatures, tempo and style alter content, so we start to see that a very simple pattern contains within it the possibility of endless permutations. Feed in a different kind of flaw; reward or punish the characters in a variety of ways; and you create a different kind of story."

"Acts are a unit of action bound by a character's desire. They have their own beginning, middle and end, the latter of which spins the narrative off in a new and unexpected direction; this is of course being 'the surprise' Ramsay prescribed. It's something the Greeks called *peripeteia*, a word most commonly translated as 'reversal.' In simple terms, a character is pursuing a specific goal when something unexpected happens to change the nature and direction of their quest. While moonier reversals can occur in every scene, bigger ones tend to divide the work into specific acts...It's important to remember that there is no limit to the number of acts a story can have..."



"Storytelling, then, can be seen as a codification of the method by which we learn — expressed in a three-act shape. The dialectic pattern-thesis/antithesis/synthesis — is at the heart of the way we perceive the world; and it's a really useful way to look at structure. A character is flawed, an inciting incident throws them into a world that represents everything they are not, and in the

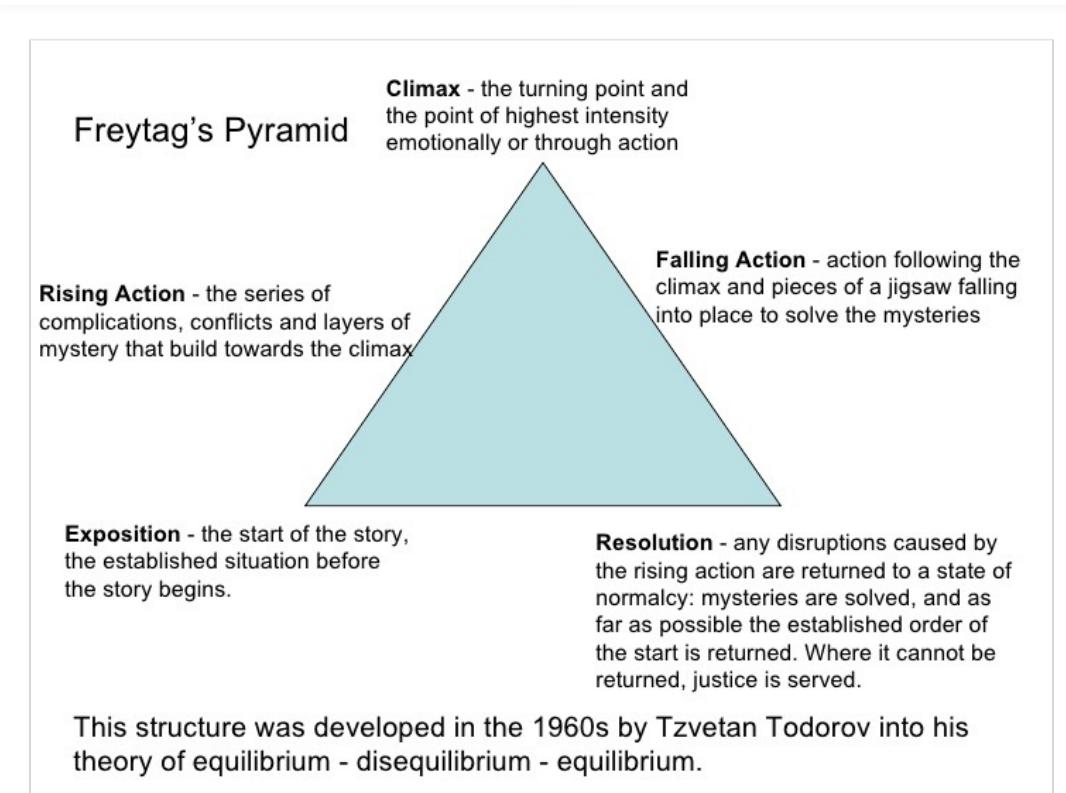
darkness of that forest, old and new integrate to achieve a balance. We cannot accept chaos; we have to order it. If a story involved the invasion of chaos and its restoration to order (and all archetypal ones do), then it cannot help but take the form of the three-act shape..."

"... In the first act of any story a character is presented with a particular flaw or need. An inciting incident occurs towards, or at, the end of that first act, and the protagonist 'falls down a rabbit hole'. In the second act, the character attempts to return to the world from which they came, whilst slowly learning that another equally important world awaits them where valuable lessons may be learned. At the end of this section, at their lowest ebb, the protagonist must choose whether to confront the enemies ranged against them by calling on lessons they have learned, or to return, sheepishly, to their old self. It's at this crisis point that they almost always choose to engage in the biggest battle (or climax) of their life, to test and then assimilate their new skills, before being finally rewarded (the resolution) for their travails."

"[Freytag's Pyramid] the first person to properly codify Terence's pattern — as it appeared in Elizabethan drama — was the German novelist Gustav Freytag. In 1863, in his epic *Technique of the Drama*, he gave the world 'Freytag's Pyramid.' Taking the long and hard look at form, he detected an underlying shape. There were five stages in every tragedy, he declared:

1. Exposition: We meet the 'dramatis personae,' time and place are established. We learn about the antecedents conflict and dramatic tensions.
2. Complications: The course of the action becomes more complicated, the 'tying of the knots' takes place. Interests clash, intrigues are spawned, and events accelerate in a definite direction. Tension mounts and momentum builds up.

3. The climax of the action: The development of conflict reaches its high point, the Hero stands at the crossroads, leading to victory or defeat, crashing or soaring.
4. Falling Action: Reversals. The consequences of Act 3 play out, momentum slows, and tension is heightened by false hopes/fears. If it's a tragedy, it looks like all may be lost.
5. Catastrophe: The conflict is resolved, whether through a catastrophe, the downfall of the hero, or through his victory and transfiguration."



# Key Terms

Use these key terms to extend your knowledge of fundamental elements in story structure. Different terms apply to different projects, so you don't have to consider *everything* for one poem, script, novel, essay, etc, but it's worth being aware, so you can develop your story with confidence, or at the very least, show-off at a writers' class! Below are some videos providing additional hints and tips for your creative development. *Simply click the video titles to be redirected.*



In Praise of Exposition



Writing stories: journeys and character transitions

- Antagonist: a person who is opposed to, struggles against, or competes with another; opponent; adversary.
- Arc: the transformation or inner journey of a character over the course of a story. If a story has a character arc, the character begins as one sort of person and gradually transforms into a different sort of person in response to changing developments in the story.
- Beats: Pauses of tension used throughout scenes. Commonly used when scripting dialogue.
- Character conflict: The battle between two or more characters.
- Climax: At the peak of the story, the main event occurs in which the main character faces the conflict. The most action, drama, change, and excitement occurs here.
- Dark Inversions: Tragic stories like Macbeth or The godfather tend to work on the 'Dark Inversions' principle
- Exposition: At the beginning of the story, characters, setting, and the main conflict are typically introduced.
- Falling Action: The story begins to slow down and work towards its end, tying up loose ends of the plot.
- Hooks: It's a point in the story which is designed to 'hook' an audience – keeping them engaged, intrigued and loyal to your work. Hooks are often found at the start (at the introduction of an essay or as part of an inciting incident) and at the end of an act or scene (soap operas often use them at the end of an episode, and Eastenders have crowned them, 'the duff-duffs').
- Inciting incidents: The event or decision that begins a story's problem. Everything up and until that moment is Backstory; everything after is "the story."
- Internal conflict: The battle of consciousness a character has within him/herself.
- Major Characters: The leading roles and driving force behind a story
- Midpoints: A point of change in a story, commonly placed at the tip of your 'story arc mountain.' Within a scene, or an act, your character's journey will build up to it, and then unravel down its slippery slope. Midpoints are often when the story reveals its true purpose, it's where audiences are rewarded with a phase of character development—an opportunity to see them at their best and their worst. Midpoints raise the stakes in a story and contribute to the integrity of the climax and resolution.
- Minor characters: Comprised of all the other characters in the story who are of lesser importance.
- Protagonist: The leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama or other literary work.
- Quest: a character(s) search or pursuit made in order to find or obtain the reward, which they hope to receive at the resolution point of the story. Often, when a character doesn't
- Rising Action: The main character is in crisis and events leading up to facing the conflict begin to unfold. The story becomes complicated.
- Resolution: Also known as the denouement, is the conclusion of the story's plot. It's where any unanswered questions are answered, or "loose ends are tied." Interestingly the phrase denouement comes from the French word *dénouement* meaning "to untie." A story with a complete ending is said to have a strong resolution.
- Stakes: What a character (often the protagonist) is at risk of losing and/or being compromised if their quest fails.

# Key Terms

## Types of writing style

The variations of writing style continues to expand and evolve. Here are a few common ones for your consideration.

- Descriptive Writing: The primary purpose of **descriptive writing** is to describe a person, place or thing in such a way that a picture is formed in the reader's mind. Capturing an event through **descriptive writing** involves paying close attention to the details by using all of your five senses.
- Persuasive Writing: A form of nonfiction **writing** that encourages careful word choice, the development of logical arguments, and a cohesive summary. Young children can be guided through a series of simple steps in an effort to develop their **persuasive writing** skills.
- Narrative Writing: The story (fiction or non-fiction) told and the order in which it is told. Sometimes, there is a narrator, a character or series of characters, who tell

the story. Sometimes, as with most non-fiction, the author places himself/herself in the narrator.

- Expository style: writing that seeks to explain, illuminate or 'expose'. This type of writing can include essays, newspaper and magazine articles, instruction manuals, textbooks, etc.
- A **conversational writing** style seemingly breaks all of the grammatical rules. It is aimed at the target audience and addresses them as such. Its sentences may begin with pronouns and end with verbs. Sometimes there are fragmented sentences infused to display a thought.

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



What Great Storytellers Know



Inciting Incident Supercut - 50 Movie Moments

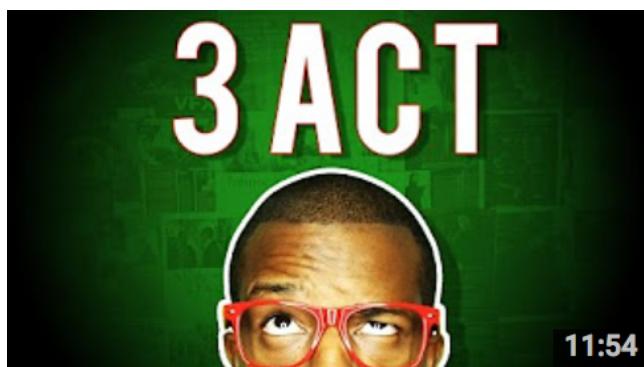


Andrew Stanton: The clues to a great story

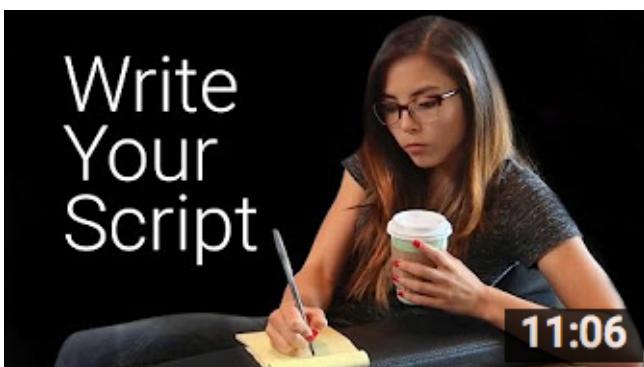
The three act model is famously used in screenwriting, and divides a fictional narrative into **three parts** (acts), often called the Setup, the Confrontation and the Resolution. The turning points are the hooks and links between each act.

This model is something to consider for online mediums such as podcast plays and web series, or for short stories. Use the template (right) to map out your 3 acts; watch the videos (below) for a greater insight into the model, and advice on organising and developing your story.

*Simply click the video titles to be redirected.*

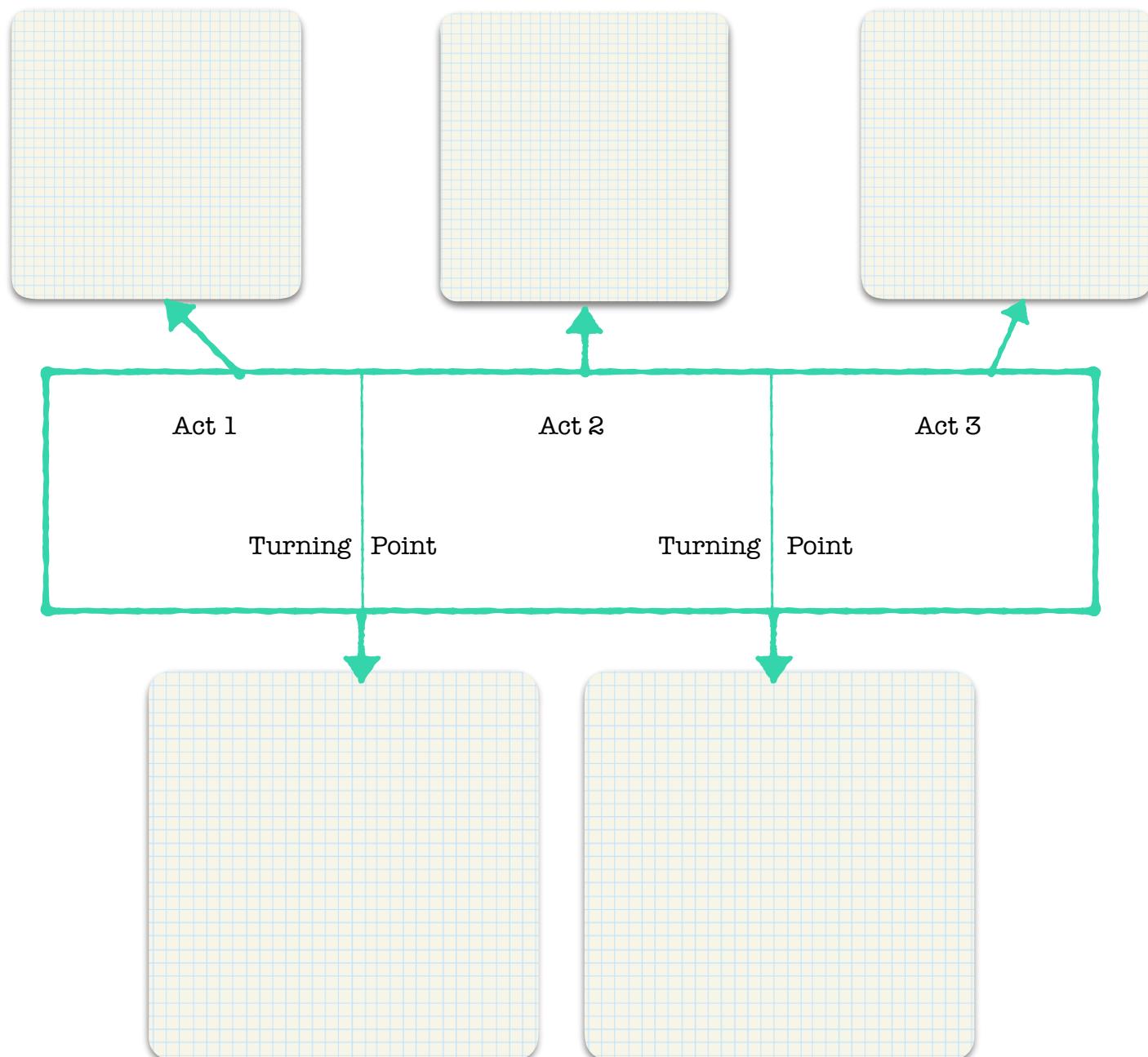


3 Act Structure - Story Structure Tips - Screenwriting



Convert Your Story Idea Into a Script (ft. Anna Akana)

# 3 Act Template



Use the template (right) to create your own Freytag's Pyramid. Print this page, scribble away and stick it on your wall. The videos (below) will give you more insight into Freytag's Pyramid...the 'Flocabulary' video is particularly fun. The tune was stuck in my head for ages, and I loved it! *Simply click the video titles to be redirected.*

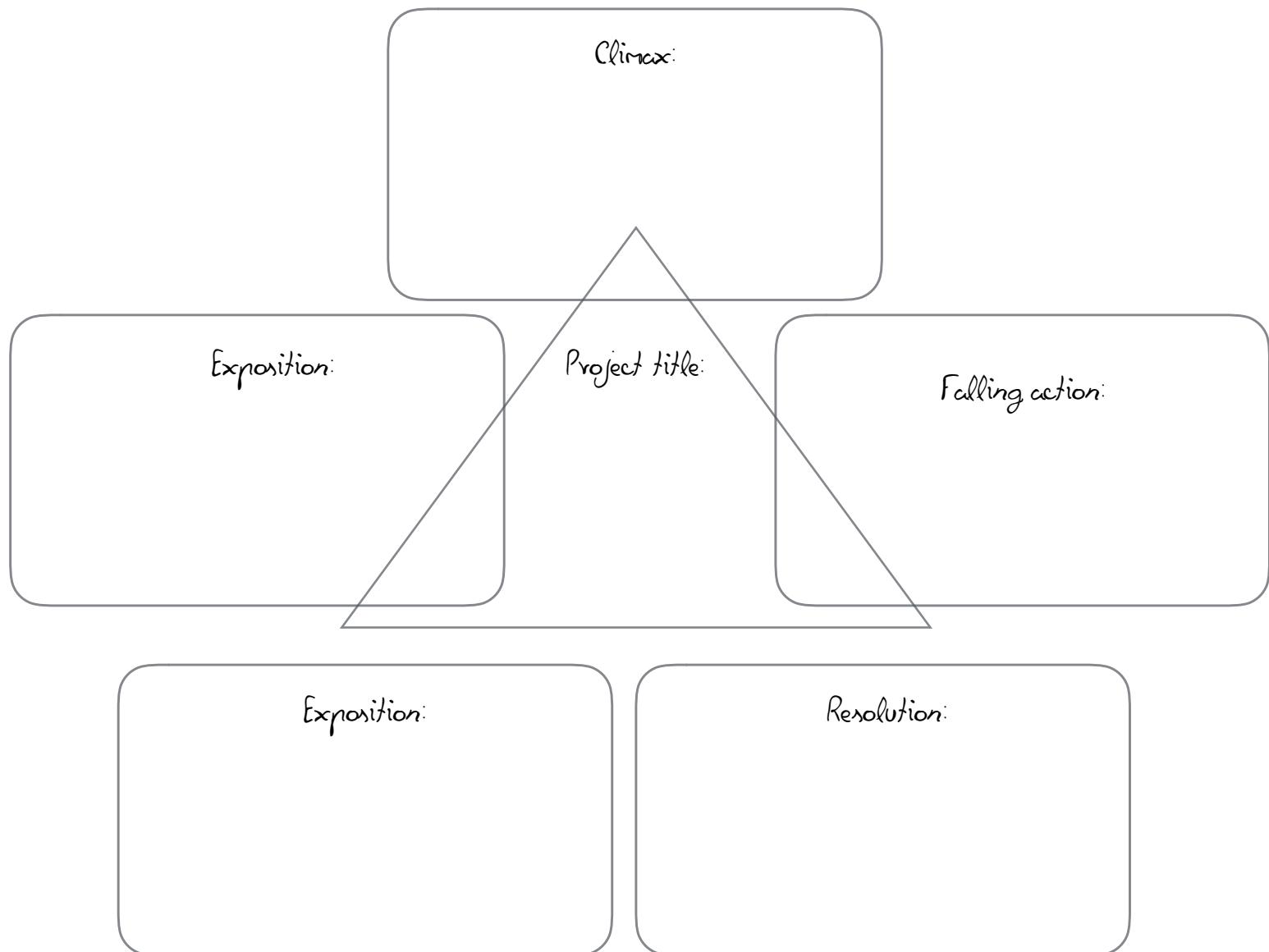


Freytag's Pyramid / Plot Analysis by Shmoop

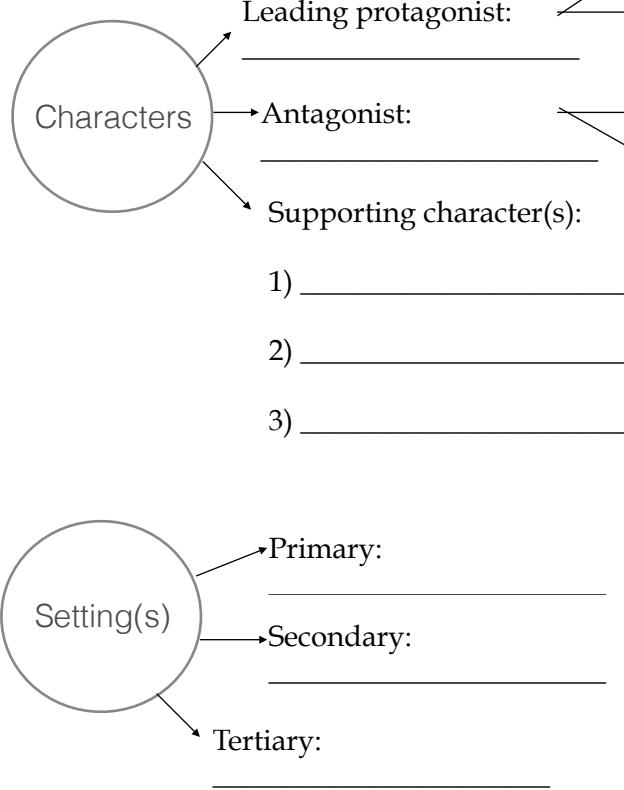


ELA plot elements- Flocabulary

## Story Structure Template: Make Your Own Freytag's Pyramid



Establishing your characters, their dynamics, themes and the story settings will really help with ironing out the logistics of your plot. If the relationships between the characters are unclear, if there are too many or too few settings and if you loose track of the themes, your story (no matter how well you've written the dialogue, understood the journey or quest) will unravel. Use this template to develop an overview of your story structure. It's a great tool to come back to as you develop your project, and is also useful if you're working in a team.



# Story Structure Template: Story Structure Overview.1

Project title:

Protagonist wants:

Protagonist needs:

Antagonist wants:

Antagonist wants:

Major themes

Major themes

Character dynamics: A bullet point list

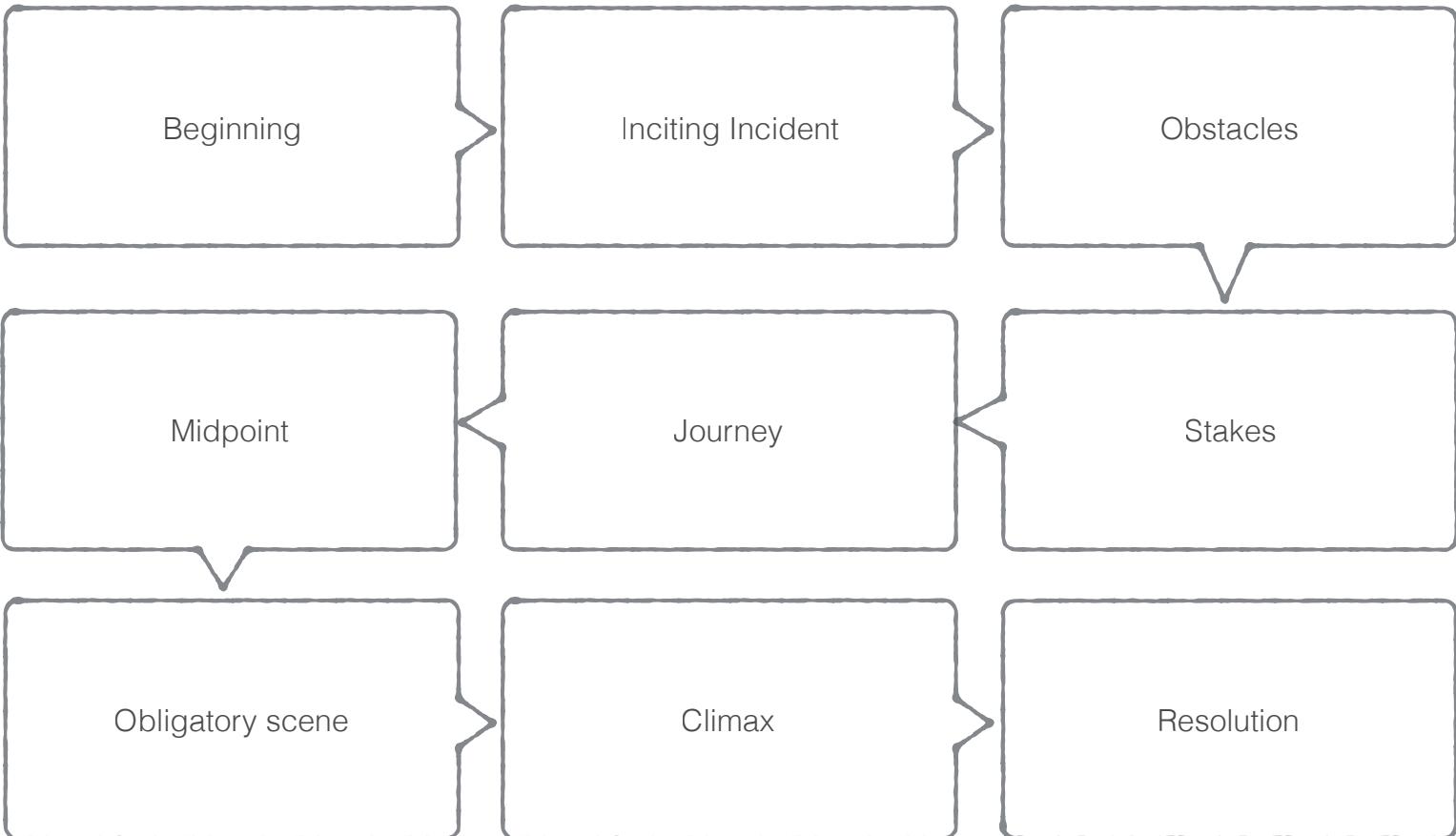
- EG: Leading protagonist A is the son of minor character B.
- The antagonist C wants to kill B.

# Story Structure Template: Story Structure Overview.2

This story structure template will give you an overview of how your story flows. Again, print it off, scribble on each box, then stand back and consider what might need embellishing on, editing, etc.

*Tip: This is a great precursor to developing a scene-by-scene.*

*It's also handy if you're working with a team of writers and you need to delegate the work efficiently and effectively.*



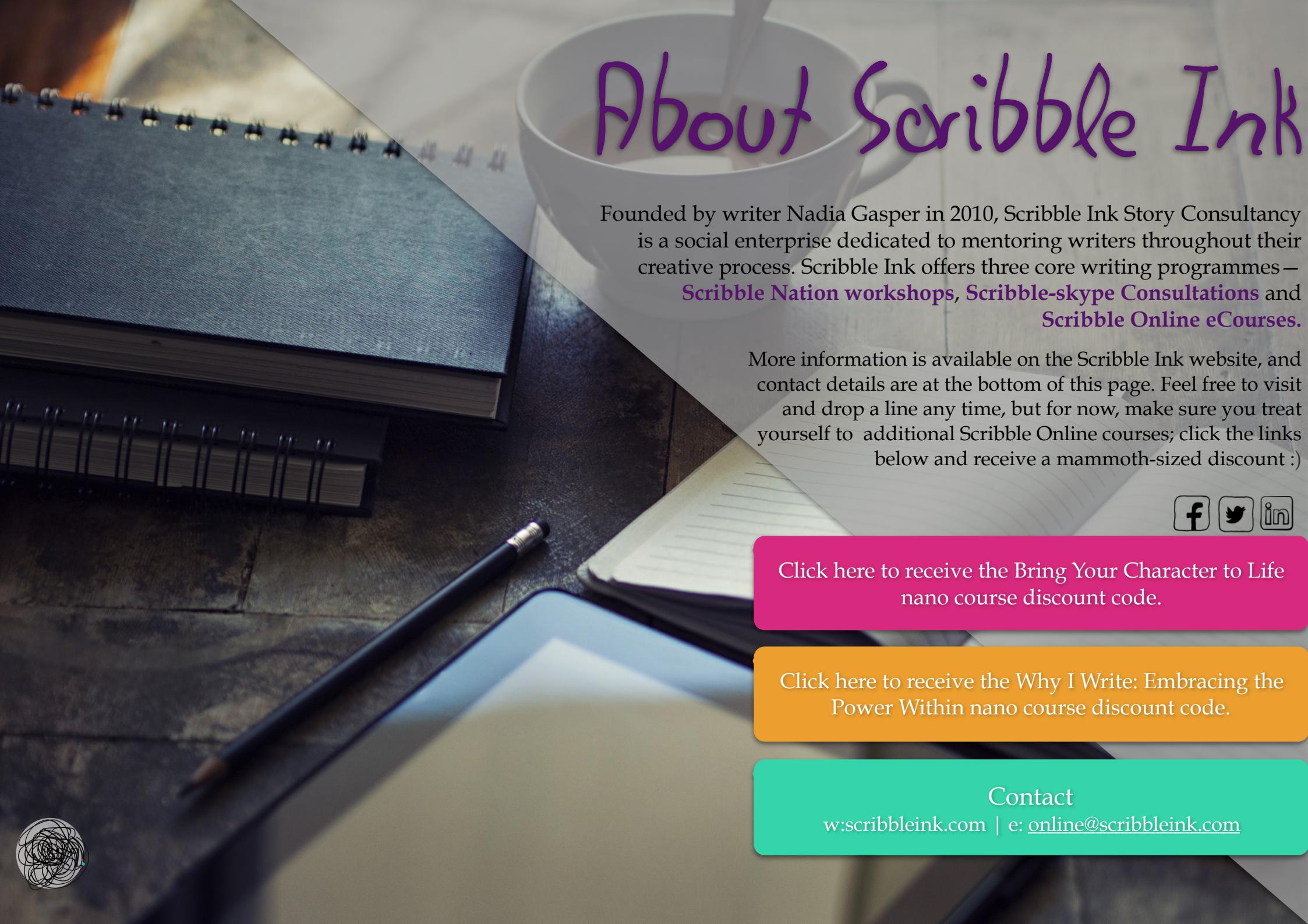
The Top 5 Mistakes Amateur  
Writers Make

# Useful Links

As promised in the nano course lectures, I've added a list of useful links (below) that will help you further establish your ideas for brainstorming, action planning, etc. *Simply click the titles below to be redirected.* Enjoy!

- The 4 Story Structures that Dominate Novels, WritersDigest.com
- Fiction University: How to Plot with the Three-Act Structure
- Playwriting 101: Story Structure and Write to be Read
- Classic Story Structure Begins with Plot
- Screenwriting Tips & Advice: Story Structure
- Ten Simple Keys to Effective Plot Structure by Michael Hauge
- How to Structure A Story: The Eight-Point Arc
- How to Create a Story Structure to Die for
- Story Structure in Short Stories by Philip Brewer





# About Scribble Ink

Founded by writer Nadia Gasper in 2010, Scribble Ink Story Consultancy is a social enterprise dedicated to mentoring writers throughout their creative process. Scribble Ink offers three core writing programmes – **Scribble Nation workshops**, **Scribble-skype Consultations** and **Scribble Online eCourses**.

More information is available on the Scribble Ink website, and contact details are at the bottom of this page. Feel free to visit and drop a line any time, but for now, make sure you treat yourself to additional Scribble Online courses; click the links below and receive a mammoth-sized discount :)



[Click here](#) to receive the Bring Your Character to Life nano course discount code.

[Click here](#) to receive the Why I Write: Embracing the Power Within nano course discount code.

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