



## The Writer's Compass: From Story Map to Finished Draft in 7 Stages

*Nancy Ellen Dodd*

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# **The Writer's Compass: From Story Map to Finished Draft in 7 Stages**

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## **The Writer's Compass: From Story Map to Finished Draft in 7 Stages** Nancy Ellen Dodd **Map out your idea and finish your story in 7 stages!**

This book will show writers how to develop their ideas into a finished novel by working through it in 7 stages, while learning how to map out their story's progress and structure so they can evaluate and improve their work. It teaches writers to visualize their story's progress with a story map that helps them see all the different components of their story, where these components are going, and, perhaps most importantly, what's missing.

The book simplifies Aristotle's elements of good writing (a.k.a. that each story should have a beginning, a middle and an end) into easily applicable concepts that will help writers improve their craft. The author helps readers strengthen their work by teaching them how to focus on one aspect of their story at a time, including forming stories and developing ideas, building strong structures, creating vibrant characters, and structuring scenes and transitions. Thought-provoking questions help writers more objectively assess their story's strengths and weaknesses so they may write the story they want to tell.

## **The Writer's Compass: From Story Map to Finished Draft in 7 Stages Details**

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Author : Nancy Ellen Dodd

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## **From Reader Review The Writer's Compass: From Story Map to Finished Draft in 7 Stages for online ebook**

### **Biblio Curious says**

A good introduction to writer's craft. It covers the basic aspects of writing fiction in various styles: novels, screenplays or theatre scripts.

I'd recommend this for its fool proof style. It's a compass that covers each stage of writing with exercises and methods for examining your work.

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### **Tomigirl44 says**

#### **Wonderful**

The author did a great job laying out the steps and providing thought provoking, helpful questions to ask while crafting one's story. I look forward to reading more of this author and re reading this book.

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### **Toni M.Ed. says**

Great lucid help for the Christian writer.

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### **Carolyn James says**

The Writer's Compass is a comprehensive book promising to walk you through the stages of writing your novel from the first idea to sending it to a publisher. Overall there were some good parts, but it wasn't what I was looking for. TWC asked a lot of questions to the writer to make sure you are being as comprehensive as you can be, but I wouldn't use it to look back and forth to between every single stage of the writing process. Instead I took it as a book that offered some good tidbits of advice that I could work into pieces I was already in the process of completing. Dodd's style just wasn't on the same wave length for me. There are only so many dream boards a writing studio can have. Overall it wasn't a waste of time, but didn't help me much in the improvement of my writing or direction of my pieces.

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### **Rose says**

Nancy Ellen Dodd has a wonderful approach to writing using the seven step formula in "The Writer's Compass". Her approach to writing uses an easy to follow structure with several visual cues and questions in a way that's organized and engaging - choosing to blend techniques such as mindmapping and plotting details in tables with the different facets of one's story (characterization, plot, etc.) She also gives helpful suggestions and draws from her own experience and education in the explanation of the many ways to

approach crafting a story, even down to the level of drawing from your own creative well. The questions she's provided in this work gave me many opportunities to delve into my stories in more detail, and she writes in an encouraging, yet practical way throughout the work.

This will go on my shelf of most helpful writing books for sure.

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### **D.H. Hanni says**

Learned a lot of ways to help me think more about my writing especially as I get ready for NaNoWriMo. Won't know if it was useful stuff until well after but I'm feeling really confident based on what I read. This book is good for people who like a more structured approach to writing or who are desiring to become more structured and organized in their writing.

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### **Jeffrey Cahhal says**

#### **Great book**

Bought this book for her class on Writer's Digest University, but have to say that I really enjoyed it. I did feel that some points (or steps) were a little on the brief-side, but as with most books on writing, most of it we have seen and heard already elsewhere. The book is well presented and organized logically.

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### **J M says**

This book combines the collaborative efforts of a multitude of writers and workshops dealing specifically with screenwriting. Hence, it's sort of a cliff-notes to writing your first draft, along with the elements you need to keep the re-write process going. However, it's also presented in an almost maternal, or nurturing manner to help the budding writer get through the road blocks leading to living the writers life.

I have read many screenwriting books, taken courses, and attended workshops, and Dodd has managed to include everything I learnt from all of them, while noting any parallel terms that just drive you crazy.

From starting, to setting, to mapping (not outlining - which blocks the creative flow), to character development, to dialogue, through to the Hero's Journey and character arch's - this book covers it in a crazy user-friendly manner.

I've seen other people review it as mediocre, and it may be because it opens with setting up a writers lifestyle, which I personally needed, but know others who did not. If you want to jump right in start at chapter 2. Make sure you answer the questions along the way. When you get stuck it will pull you out of the writers block --> The culmination of which by the way concludes the basis of what you learn in a screenwriting MFA, though minus the group feedback which is essential to writing.

Reading this book will give you a broad basis, and if you read other books in screenwriting after it, you will understand it better based on what you've already learnt.

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## **K. Counihan says**

### **The Whole How to Write a Book Demystified**

The whole process explained in plain English. Especially good for those that are stuck at a certain point in the writing process. Just look up in table of contents what you are stuck on and review it. Very useful book. I found solutions in this book that were not in my other 300 writing books.

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## **Scott says**

I have very mixed feelings about this book on the craft of writing. I love the idea of the 7 stages and the ways to diagram/pictorialize the structure of the story. But I couldn't rate it higher than just a LIKE and I'm not sure why.

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## **Andrea Judy says**

Some good tidbits but it didn't seem to say anything new or helpful enough to warrant a home on my permanent bookcase.

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## **Natalia says**

This book no doubt has a lot of valuable information. The author covers both classic and modern approaches to creative writing and provides a step-by-step formula for crafting a story.

It wasn't clear to me when purchasing this book that the writer was, predominantly, a scriptwriter. This influenced the tone of the book immensely and made the concepts less accessible/ useful to a novel writer. The first few chapters, also, were irritatingly introspective with lots of information about the author's own journey. There was a great deal of pep talk scattered throughout. I can see that this would be excellent for some, but I personally found it distracting.

Nancy Dodd mentions, several times, that her process can and should be adapted to suit the reader's own needs. However, her approach was far too rigid and formulaic for me. The exercises sometimes felt drawn out and forced.

I have no doubt that the advice given is sound and well researched. Personally, however, it didn't suit me. I made it to chapter 7 before giving up so my review is, perhaps, unfair. I will amend it if, in the future, I finish the book and feel differently about it.

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## This is Alli says

Especially good for those with a MS already!

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## Cari says

If you've never heard any writing advice and have never ever read any other book on writing, you'll find [The Writer's Compass](#) moderately helpful. If you have read elsewhere or even so much as passed by the open door of a classroom where a writing course was being held, this book is completely worthless. Trust me: you already know more than Nancy Ellen Dodd offers. Save your money and your time.

Before I delve into my passionate dislike of this book, let me speak of the good.

The cover is awesome, and I'm a sucker for pretty covers. The designer was fantastic.

I liked the visual representation of a story map that breaks down the parts of a story like one might diagram a sentence. There are several of these, but my favorite is the first one, which she gives in several stages that begin with the basics and grows to include other elements of a story. Size restrictions of the physical book crowd the graph and accompanying text, making me wish a full page had been dedicated to the final product. Not Dodd's fault, of course, but I thought I'd throw it out there.

The End. Of the good parts, anyway. Settle in, people, because this is a long one.

[The Writer's Compass](#) doesn't even qualify as Fiction Writing 101. It's extremely basic and there's nothing here that isn't available elsewhere with more in-depth info. (See: [The Elements of Style](#), [The Art of War for Writers](#), [The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers](#), [The First Five Pages](#), and even Chuck Wendig's blog.) Dodd tries to hit the major points but her analysis is shallow, leaving the unlearned writer to stumble through the trials of plot, structure, character development, etc. with the dawning realization that none are as easy as she presents with such simplicity. Writing is *hard*, and she forgets that part.

Repetition. Repetition, repetition, repetition. Two-thirds of this book is padding; remove all the instances where she repeats herself and the book would transform into a pamphlet and not a particularly thick one. Over and over again she gives the same idea, the same suggestion, and—most insulting—she didn't even bother to change the wording more than a minimal amount. These are absolutely unnecessary reiteration of points that should've been made once and then left alone.

One instance stands out so much I wrote down the page numbers specifically for this review: page 88, second paragraph, and page 89, third paragraph. Both of these discuss developing your story's ideas and returning to a questionnaire at the end of every stage to answer the questions anew. Dodd changes a few words (for instance: "reflect" becomes "refine") and flips a few sentences around, but she's saying *the exact same thing*. This example smacked me in the face because the paragraphs are directly opposite each other on the pages, but throughout the book multiple ideas are presented multiple times with nearly identical wording.

Dear Nancy Ellen Dodd: we're not stupid and reiterating something ten times is overkill. We're dead after the first five times; let it go.

Another reviewer mentioned Dodd's "maternal" and "nurturing" style of writing. Seriously? My mother never spoke to me in a manner that implied I was a particularly stupid child and then tried to pass it off as "nurturing." In fact, she never spoke to me like that at all, recognizing the basic intelligence of her children. Dodd forgets one of the "rules" of writing: assume your audience is composed of intelligent people as opposed to morons.

At one point, Dodd breaks down each genre and gives a table for comparison. Since she's juggling fiction writing in various forms, this is a great idea, but she screws it up so badly the pages are worthless. Did you know that a novel has less white space on the page than a screenplay? Or that a short story is shorter than a novel? (If you answered "no, I didn't know that" to the second question, you're an idiot.) I wish I was kidding or exaggerating, but I'm not. *Those are the exact facts she gives*, as if they're gems reserved for the elite.

Really? I mean, *really*? Where the hell was her editor?

When I read a new book on writing, I mark pages that contain something new, an approach I hadn't thought of, a fact I didn't know or a suggestion I had never heard, and fresh twists on old ideas. A writer never stops learning and never stops honing her craft, but not once did I mark a page in The Writer's Compass because Dodd was offering something new. That's not to say I didn't tag multiple pages: ones that are so awful I wanted to remember them for this review. The task drained my entire supply of pink sticky notes.

And finally, on a more personal note:

Lady, I don't care about your consulting jobs, your spiritual life, or your obsession with 5x8 index cards. One mention is fine, but when you choose to tell me twenty times, I get a tad irritated. This isn't about you, so hush and get to the writing.

Don't just skip this one; run away as fast as you can. You're better off learning these tools via trial and error through writing than from this worthless book.

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## **Subject900 says**

As someone who knows NOTHING about fiction writing, I found this book very helpful in getting the basics down.

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