

This is first draft, unedited copy for the coming book **Holly Lisle's Create A Plot Clinic**. This clip may not be published in any format, quoted elsewhere, or reprinted in any media, and is Copyright 2007, by Holly Lisle, All Rights Reserved.

How To Use This Book

If you've read any of the other books in this series, you know they start out with a materials list, including worksheets to print off, a method for organizing your work, and usually an organizing list for the notebook you to put together so that you'll be able to pick up and use the background you've developed for subsequent books or stories, even if you're going back to the world years after you've last written in it.

Character development, language development, culture creation, and the building of worlds all lend themselves well to this treatment.

Plotting does not. Plotting is inherently messy, and usually resists all attempts to nail it down into one neat, fixed structure.

Don't get me wrong. There are plotting structures, and we will use them. You'll learn how to do a three-act-structure, a character structure, a cliffhanger structure, organic structures (a board and index cards, an outline, a line-for-scene), how to track write-as-you-go, and how to timeline.

But the thing is, you *can* end up doing all of these structures on one plot. (And suddenly, all the way from here, I hear voices going "Yipe! Yipe! Yipe!" Breathe. It'll be okay. Most of the time you don't them all. Most of the time, you'll get away with using just one or two structures.)

But structure is not everything in plotting. Structure is only a frame for your content, and, as many of you have already discovered, coming up with the content to put into the story and knowing whether or not you have the right content is the hard part.

So most of our work here is going to consist of you learning how to wheedle, cajol, blackmail and twist content from your Muse, the stubborn subconscious.

● Order of Use

This book is a plot walkthrough. Its objective is to get you from your starting point—wherever that might be—to the end of your plot by the time you have worked your way through the book.

No matter whether you're using this book to start a new novel, to work on an existing partial draft, to fix a completed first draft, or to get your final draft ready to go off to an agent or editor, **start by reading Plot Tools and doing the exercises for each one.**

This is big. Huge. Insanely important. Writers get all tied up with structure when they get stuck plotting, thinking that if they had a different, better, smarter structure, they'd get unstuck.

In fact, in almost 100% of all cases, what they desperately need is fresh content. The tools exist solely to give you fresh content.

You'll notice that the tool section is divided into two sections—**When Things Are Going Well** and **When Things Go Splat**.

In **When Things Are Going Well**, you'll find the tools that you'll use every day to get new ideas, figure out middles and plot twists, and sneak up on resonant endings. During those times, you'll be able to get good stuff out of your Muse just by sitting down and writing.

In **When Things Go Splat**, you'll deal specifically and directly with breaking barriers between you and your Muse. When you can't come up with a story, or an idea, or get a plot to hang together, these are the techniques you'll use. I end up using a few favorites in almost every book, but I have dragged my Muse out of hiding with all of them at one time or another.

IMPORTANT: I need to mention something that should be obvious to all writers, that should, in fact, never need to be mentioned, but that all of us tend to forget when things get weird and frustrating and the Muse goes into

hiding. If you write every day, (or at least on as regularly as you can *make*—not *find*—time), your subconscious, your Muse, will stay mostly well-oiled and active and interested in tossing cool ideas to you when you need them. Think of regular writing as regular exercise for your subconscious mind. You put it on a leash, take it for a run every day, and it doesn't get bored or feel neglected and go sulking off into a corner every time you show up. The more you write regularly, the less often things will go splat.

While it wouldn't hurt to read straight through the rest of the book once, after you've finished **Plot Tools** feel free to skim, jump around, try bits and pieces of any of the other sections. If you have the book done except for a final edit, go ahead and read the section on **Plotting While Revising**. You might find things you can use in the other two sections as well, but reading the rest of the book out of order will work just fine. The same is true for those of you just starting a first draft, or for those of you who are stuck somewhere in the middle. **Plotting While Writing** is for you, but so is everything else. Feel free to poke around any of the sections, pull what you can use from them, and come back later to pick up more.

There's no one way to write a book, there's no one way to plot one, and one way or the other, you'll get through this. You have lots of tools, lots of options, and you'll learn more from every mistake than you ever would from getting it perfect the first time. Knowing that, the only way you can fail is if you give up.

● What You'll Need

While there aren't any worksheets in this book, you will be doing plenty of writing. Some of it you'll do longhand, some you'll do on the computer. There will be a few tools you'll need to develop

structure, and to get you through the stuck bits. These will vary from writer to writer—don't buy everything in advance. Developing your plot will take you the same amount of time it takes you to write and revise your entire book, because you'll be doing both simultaneously. Get things as you need them.

Besides—and I've said this before, but I'll say it again—on bad writing days, sometimes getting cool new office supplies will be the high point of your day. Save some of that shoppy goodness for the days when you need it most.

Here's what you'll be using:

- Absolute Necessities

- Paper, lots of it. Reams of both white printer paper for use with your computer, and lined notebook paper.
- Index cards. I strongly prefer the lined 3x5 variety because they prevent me from writing too much on a card, and I buy both all-white and multi-color packs. They have different uses.
- Pens. Smooth-writing, and lots of them.

- Should Haves

- A corkboard.
- A hole punch if you want to put drawings or maps or other unpunched pieces of paper in a binder, OR if, during editing, you need to build a four-color line-for-scene index-card plot.
- Ring binder, the kind you used to (or perhaps still do) drag around in high school. There is no organizational structure for this thing. Every plot is different, not all of them require notebooks, and you can accomplish just as much by letting your desk get really messy (my usual method).

- Outlining software.

- Things You Might Need

We start getting a little esoteric here.

- A sketchbook and drawing pencils, black and white or colored.
- Magazines you can cut up.
- Paste.
- Yarn. Knitting needles or a crochet hook.
- A lawnmower and a yard.
- A few good woodcarving tools and some wood.
- Whack-Pack cards, tarot cards, writers' decks.
- Flour, salt, chocolate, sugar, baking soda ...
- A blank diary.
- A candle and something fireproof upon which to place it.
- Other and sundry stuff

Really. I have used everything on the list above, and more, to restart a stuck plot. You can't know what exactly you'll need until you need it. Some of it you might never need. Some you might need every single time you plot. That's why I said you shouldn't go out and buy everything before you start.

NOTE: Cork boards, white index cards, outlining software and most of your word processor can be replaced by:

- Scrivener* for the Mac (<http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html>)
- Liquid Story Binder** for the PC (<http://www.blackobelisksoftware.com/>)

*I can personally recommend Scrivener as being the tool that has replaced all my other writing software except for Inspiration (<http://www.inspiration.com>). Better yet, you can try it for free before you buy it.

**I don't have a PC anymore, so am in no position to recommend writing software for the PC. However, several PC users who read my weblog gushed about Liquid Story Binder and have said the things it does look like the things Scrivener does, so I'm adding a cautious I-have-not-tried-this-but-hear-it's-really-good recommendation, along with an aside that you can try the software for free before you buy it, too.