



Beating Writer's Block

Step One: Random Words

First, write down three nonsense words. Don't stop to think it over, just jot down the first words that come to mind, as in a word-association test.

Example: Cat, Running, Green

NOTE: You might want to include a mix of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. Write your nonsense words in the first box on the form (at the end of this handout) and then proceed to the next step to turn your nonsense words into an inspiration....

Step Two: Meaning

Now, imagine that all of your nonsense words are part of the same phrase. What sense can you make out of it? How many different ideas can you come up with that explain that phrase? Briefly describe each interpretation that comes to mind.

Example:

Cat, Running, Green could mean:

1. The cat fell in the bucket of green paint and ran off.
2. An animated cat is a numbers runner for the mob, carrying the money ("green") to the bookie.
3. Pet kidnappers engaged in "cat-running," are tagged by animal rights activists with spray paint to identify them, a colour that comes to be known as Cat Running Green.
4. A traffic light turns green, and a whole "herd" of cats run across the street.

Step Three: Integrating Ideas

Next, try to incorporate into a single story idea as much as you find interesting from all the new ideas you've just created.

Example:

Let's integrate into a single story concept the ideas we came up with from the nonsense words, "Cat, Running, Green."

As a reminder, the "Cat, Running, Green" meanings were:

1. The cat fell in the bucket of green paint and ran off.
2. An animated cat is a numbers runner for the mob, carrying the money ("green") to the bookie.

3. Pet kidnapers engaged in "cat-running," are tagged by animal rights activists with spray paint to identify them, a colour that comes to be known as Cat Running Green.
4. A traffic light turns green and a whole "herd" of cats run across the street.

One way to integrate many of the concepts together could be:

Animated cats who are numbers-running for the mob are being picked off by pet kidnapers, unaware of the cats' mob connection. Also unaware of the cats' underworld ties, a group of animal rights activists mounts a campaign to identify the kidnapers by spraying them with green paint whenever they catch them in the act.

Unfortunately, this puts a spoke in the cats' plans, making it almost impossible to continue their illegal activities. Tripping over a bucket of green paint in the alley, the "head cat" is inspired with a plan of his own.

The cats all wait around the corner of the animal rights activists' headquarters. As soon as the cats see them drive out, they hot-wire the streetlight to stop the van, and then run out from behind the corner, across the street. The head cat has had himself painted with green handprints on his sides, looking as if the kidnapers have tried to grab him.

The van screeches off in the direction the cats were running from, in search of the kidnapers, leaving the whole area free of their interference so the cats can get back to running numbers without interference.

Step Four: Finding the Holes

Referring to the revised story concept you just created, you'll probably see a lot of obvious holes where ideas ought to be.

For a moment, step out of your role as author, and put yourself in the position of your reader or audience. Read over your story synopsis.

Then, list all the unanswered questions that readily come to mind as you read through your story as it stands so far. Your audience will be unforgiving, so be harsh! If something doesn't make sense, is discordant, or is missing, make a note of it.

Use the example below for an idea of some of the kinds of questions that might come up. Then pick your own ideas apart as thoroughly as you can.

Example:

Animated cats who are numbers-running for the mob are being picked off by pet kidnapers, unaware of the cats' mob connection.

(Why are they kidnapping pets? What do they hope to gain or to do with them?)

Also unaware of the cats' underworld ties, a group of animal rights activists mounts a campaign to identify the kidnapers by spraying them with green paint whenever they catch them in the act.

(What does pet-napping have to do with animal activists?)

Unfortunately, this puts a crimp in the cats' plans, making it almost impossible to continue their illegal activities. Tripping over a bucket of green paint in the alley, (Where did the green paint bucket come from?) the "head cat" is inspired with a plan of his own.

The cats all wait around the corner of the animal rights activists' headquarters. As soon as the cats see them drive out, they hot-wire the streetlight to stop the van, then run out from behind the corner, across the street. The head cat has had himself painted with green handprints on his sides, looking as if the kidnappers have tried to grab him. (Why would the paint on the kidnappers be wet enough to still come off on the cat? Since it would be dry, it makes no sense that this would fool the activists.)

The van screeches off in the direction the cats were running from, in search of the kidnappers, leaving the whole uptown area free of their interference so the cats can get back to running numbers without interference. (Fine, but that only solves the problem temporarily - what solves the problem for good?)

Step Five: Plugging the Holes

Now the job is simple. Go into analysis mode - the same as when you came up with your initial meanings for your nonsense words - and work out as many ways as possible to answer each question you just asked. Your answers don't have to be brilliantly clever, just sufficient to fill in the holes.

Why analysis mode? Because creativity is hard to trigger on demand. But logic is always available. You've already been creative in coming up with the ideas in the first place. So, you don't need to rack your brain for wonderful ideas. Just plug the holes with reasonable ideas that get the job done

Step Six: Putting It All Together

Referring now to your answers to the questions about your story, revise your story description to include as many of those answers as possible.

This new description is the first draft of your story synopsis: a brief outline of your plot and the first step in developing your completed story.

And to reiterate, even if you don't want to develop the story you've just outlined, the very process of working your writer's mind through this exercise will shake off the shackles on your creativity.

This document was found among a package of etexts. The author is unknown. The strategy is unproven. If you've tried it and found that it works – or that it doesn't – then please give me feedback at chris@thorns.info

Chris
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Random Words

Meaning

Integrating Ideas

Finding the Holes

Plugging the Holes

Putting It All Together

(you'll need to continue this on some A4 paper)