

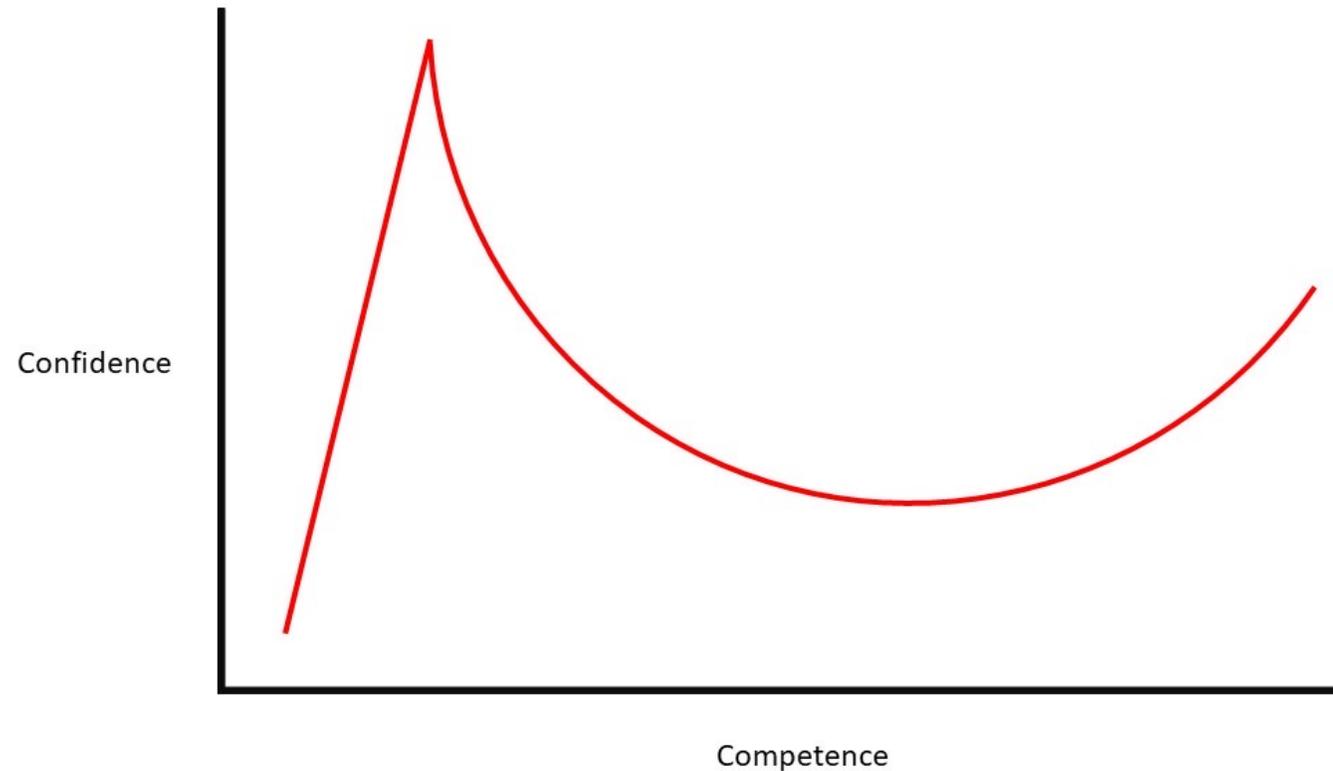
# There are no rules

## Are we still sure we're right?

A motivational-interviewing approach to getting you and your characters to change

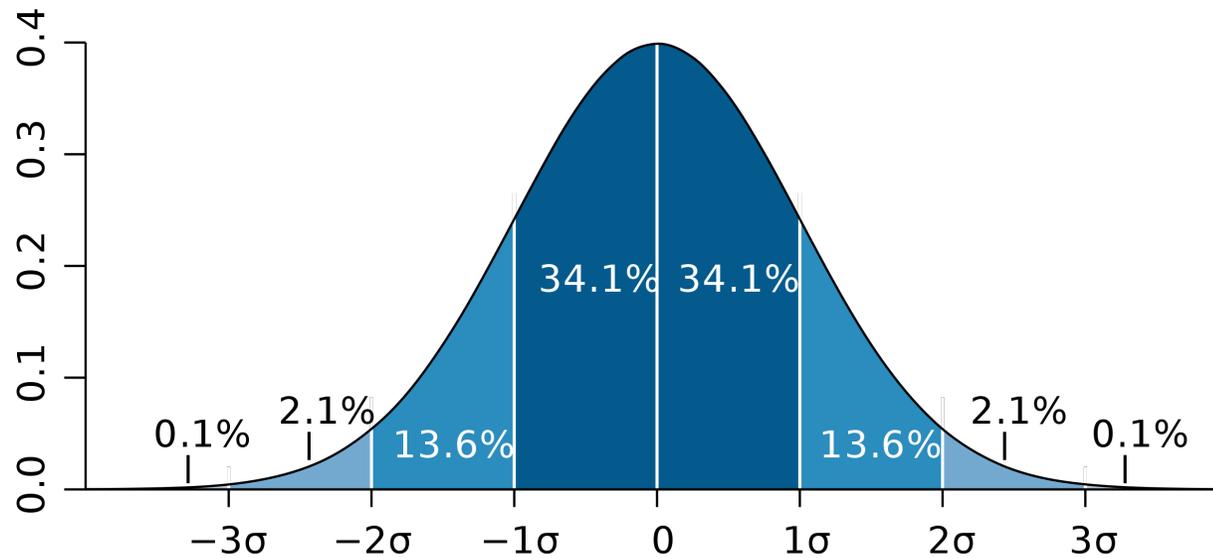
Word on the Street  
**Presenters:**  
Barb Geiger

# learning to drive as a teen



**“There are no rules” insulates writers from the crashing realization that whatever they are trying to do is more complicated than a beginning learner assumes it to be.**

# The myth of the outlier



Writers should not be taught as though every student is an outlier who doesn't need to learn by deliberate practice.

# So how do you do plan a better story?

Terms:

**Engaging fiction:** The fiction that keeps the ideal reader reading longer than they know they ought to. This is staying up reading late at night or staying in cold water in the tub.

**Craft:** The tools of a professional writers' trade. These include the *static aspects* – description, dialogue and exposition as well as the *moving aspects* – Tension, conflict, character development, pacing, theme used in conventional storytelling

**Assumption** -- the writer wants to improve

# Forgotten Last Scale objective-subjectivity

**Good stories** – stories in which the last thing a reader remembers is the premise

**Very good stories** – stories in which the reader forgets their favourite part of it the last

**Great stories** – stories in which the reader forgets how they felt when they read it the last

**Excellent stories** – stories in which the reader never forgets how they felt when they read it

There is no correlation between “I liked this” and “this is meaningful literature.” Engaging fiction is the fiction the reader wants to read

# Questions writers should answer honestly

- Am I happy with the level of success I have?
- Is it proportionate to the level of work I put into it?
- How willing am I to change what I'm doing for what I need to be doing to produce writing at the level I want?

# Foundational structures

**Foundational structures** can be broken down into two sets of writing skills

## **World building skills:**

exposition describes something that is known by or told to the character

## **Story building skills:**

Character development requires conflict to drive the tension to the point where a character needs to make a change

# Motivational interviewing

What is motivation?

The difference between motivation and discipline

On a scale of 1 – 10, how motivated are you to learn new techniques to better write engaging fiction?

1 – I've already clicked out.

5 – I could take or leave it

10 – I would do anything

# The ugly truth vs a very pretty lie

**No part of creating a story where a character experiences necessary and meaningful change is easy.**

**It is hard work.**

# 3.5 MALIGNED FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURES

## ALL WRITERS SHOULD START LEARNING

Conflict

Tension

Point Of View

Theme (kind of) –

If you feel the need to say NOT NECESSARILY! write it down and underline it every time you want to argue with something I say here

# External Conflict

Imagine a closed door

Write down all the reasons you can think of that a character can't go through the closed door.

- it's on another planet
- it had to be unlocked yesterday

# External conflict tips

External conflict can come from multiple sources. They should hinder the character's forward movement unless the character overcomes them by their own actions.

Setting up the conflict is the role of the first third of your story. Try to keep the initial issue that lures your character away from their everyday life and on to the plot of the story is almost within their ability to solve.

As they grow as characters, the external conflict should grow on a parallel scale. The sword you get in a video game never stays amazing for long as the problems get bigger

Use dialogue to develop conflict as a last, last, last resort.

# The Open Door

Now, imagine an opened door.

What are reasons they can't walk through the door?

- Fear
- Obligation

# Internal conflict tips

The brain has an incredible ability to protect itself from an ugly truth. The characters initial understanding of what their actual internal conflict is will probably not be the truth.

Internal conflict causes cognitive dissonance in characters. When faced with something a character cannot accept yet, allow that dissonance to show.

Don't let your characters "realize" things cheaply. If the character changes their mind about something they used to hold dear, the story should show us how they got there.

Change that doesn't have a cost costs nothing.

# The reader knows what they'd do in any situation

For them, it's a hypothetical with no consequences. If the reasons the character can't walk through the door align with the reader, there's no tension in the decision. Kill a kitten, get a cupcake is not a hard decision.

What makes the final decision matter is the author establishing what it is the character would not do by their actions in the story. Don't trust what they say – words are cheap. The character cannot tell the reader who they are when it matters. **They can only show through their actions** who they were and who they have become once they have to change enough to walk through that door.

# Tension

Tension is the overlay between what happens on the page and why it matters for the greater plot. It comes from multiple sources.

**Macro-tension\*** is the tension of the situation. Oh no, **the closed door** is in another castle and alien bees are infesting the route to it.

**Micro-tension** comes from moments of unease as the character filters what they observe through the macro-tension of the moment. Failure should be a consequence and the most likely one at times.

**Thematic tension** comes from the protagonist wrestling with a meaningful dilemma to them. The protagonist cannot both be loyal and moral at the same time.

Never release tension unnecessarily!

\*Donald Maass, Fire in Fiction, 2009

# Point of View

Point of view is not what your character sees, it's how they see the world. Move the camera from the character's shoulders to behind their eyes. How a character describes an isolated highway they're driving down when they're angry at their spouse, bored with their lives, or have to urinate.

How the character feels significantly changes everything from what they pay attention to to the motivation they ascribe other characters.

**If any one aspect of fiction can sell a story, it's an interesting voice of the character or their point of view on life.**

**Tip:** Pay close attention to how often your character exists in a neutral state. Neutral states are boring for everyone, including the reader.

# Yes, necessarily

It's a Catch-22 to being a young writer. Tension is the breath of a commercial work. The author chooses when the reader holds their breath and when they can relax it.

Learning how to create tension on command is a life-long challenge and people want to publish now.

All writers must face their own --

# Cognitive Dissonance

overcoming the resistance to change

*Each writer must deal with cognitive dissonance of not wanting to put in all the extra work but still wanting the outcome of being able to produce work that uses all the elements together.*

From:

<https://youtu.be/d4aD-epti4c>

Why It's So Hard to Admit You're Wrong | Cognitive Dissonance

THAT TRAIT DEPENDS ON A FEW FACTORS:

- HOW MUCH YOU IDENTIFY WITH YOUR BELIEF
- HOW MUCH SATISFACTION YOU GET FROM YOUR BEHAVIOR
- HOW MUCH PAIN OR LOSS YOU'D HAVE TO ENDURE TO CHANGE THOSE THINGS

Sci PSYCH

1:50 / 5:31

# Ira Glass' Gap

No writer can fill  
what they can't see.

