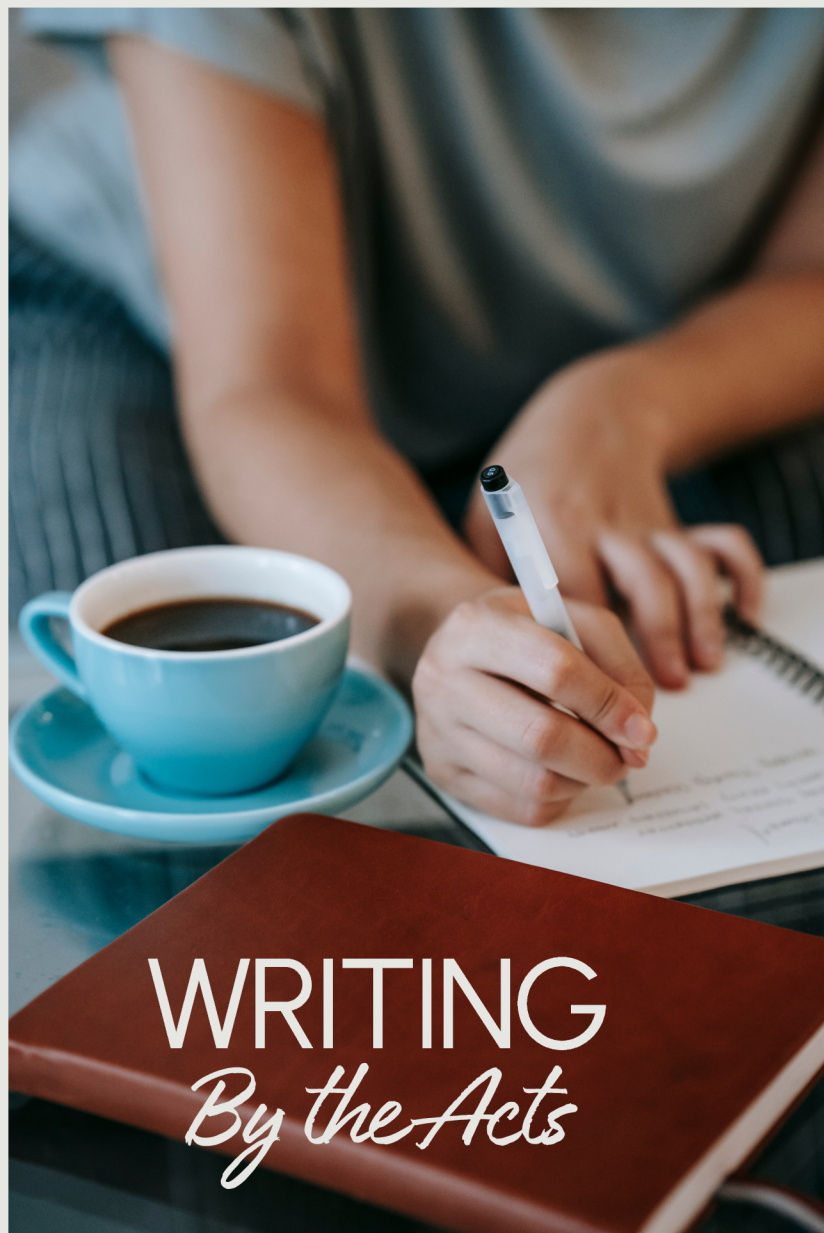


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WRITING *By the Acts*

WRITING BY THE ACTS

When I started this writing journey a few years ago, I used Save the Cat! beat sheets, and over time, I've incorporated what I've learned in different workshops to make this more well-rounded for what I do. As you'll see, much of it is geared toward how I write my cozy mysteries, but I think it's adaptable to most fiction.

To use this, I decide approximately how long my novel will be and then do the math for the percentages. I'm more of a pantsier, so sometimes I go back and make sure I hit the points.

I like to think of the 3-act structure as more of 4 sections: Act 1, Act 2a, Act 2b, and Act 3. I've used index cards on foam board (which gives the hands-on and visual aspect) to delineate those 4 sections. Use whatever works for you!

Things to remember:

- An imperfect character goes in & a less imperfect character comes out:
- The external story – your hero's want/goal, the premise
- The internal story/need – what your story is really about
- What is my message in this book?
- What is the premise?
- The character gets what they need, not necessarily what they want

For more writing tips, visit my website, jendoddrillwrites.com, and follow me on Facebook @ Jen Dodrill Writes, Instagram @JenDodrillWrites, and Pinterest @JenDodrillWrites. Sign up for my newsletter: Jen Dodrill Writes Newsletter, and email me at jend@jendoddrillwrites.com.

Jen Dodrill

Credit and appreciation to:
Save The Cat!
Patricia Bradley
Jessica R. Patch



(**I keep track of the day &/or time plus my chapters and word count)

Act 1: 0-20% Foundation/who they are

Set-up (0-10%) – protag’s life w/flaws & supporting characters/shows the tone of the story:

Hook - establish status quo/flawed world

Theme (5%) – what protag will learn before the end of the story

Debate (10-20%) – emphasizes the protag’s hesitation (the chance to bow out of the journey, but the protag jumps in and goes on) & decision-making process

Catalyst/Inciting Incident/Life changing event (10-12%) – No going back – life changes & protag goes new way – hero’s life will never be the same (crime/murder mystery: new info that escalates the investigation)

Break into 2 (20%) – protag proactively accepts the call & goes a new way/steps into the new world/hero tries something new/new way of thinking

**Right now the hero’s motivation is still something external/tangible that they WANT. A new or modified goal (solving the case) is introduced/life is full of purpose.

Act 2A: 20-50% Conflict & Challenges

protag is more reactive/what they've learned – “Fixing things the wrong way”

Fun & Games (20-50%) (in this section you deliver on the promise of the premise/the heart of the story)

Bstory/Sub Plot (22%) – new character (villain or friend) that helps the protag learn the theme

1st plot point (25%) - everything changes/upsets the protag's world/investigation by the protag begins (false clues, hidden clue #1)

1st pinch point (37%) – reminder of the antag's power/gives new clues about the conflict/initial suspects

Midpoint (50%) 2nd plot point/major turning point – protag learns the true nature of the central conflict/shifts from reactive to proactive – false victory or defeat – often a new clue or crime or false lead. A major turning point pushes the hero in a new direction. Often inspires a new, modified, or renewed external goal & moves the hero toward what they NEED – personal, emotional stakes raised.

Act 2B: 50-80% Consequences & Growth

protag is more proactive

Bad Guys Close in (50-75%) – worse & worse/now that the protag understands more, she makes headway against the antagonists

2nd pinch point (62%) – foreshadows plot point 3 and serves to remind of what is at stake for the protag/remind protag how to achieve the goal/suspects dwindle/hidden clue #2

(-renewed push – protag renews her attack on the antagonists)

All is Lost; 3rd plot point/single scene (75%) – lowest point/rip out the rug; new info that worsens threat and stakes/death of a dream – this triggers the dark night of the soul – external action beat that pushes the hero to rock bottom – defeat/failure/loss. Often failure to solve the case or endangerment to someone close to them or themselves. Includes a death – literal or metaphorical death. Symbolizes the death of the old hero and the old way of thinking. **Triggers the biggest moment of growth.

Dark Night of the Soul (75-80%) – darkest hour/multi-scene/hero's reaction to All is Lost

Break into 3 (80%) – protag realizes what she must do to fix the external and internal problem/a twist might occur – things are not what they seem. Aha! moment. Hero solves the case—a breakthrough where the hero realizes what they need to do. Hero discovers what they NEED – life lesson, fear conquered, the wound healed, etc.

Act 3: 80-100% Climax & Fulfillment

Happily Ever After or Hopeful Ever After/who they will become – “Fixing things the right way”

Finale – (80-99%) - protags fears realized; IDs moment of truth that dismantles the lie. The final battle/plan ultimate showdown/pieces begin to fit (breakthrough)

Crisis (88%) – confrontation with a criminal

Climax (90%) – the protag defeats the antag and finds herself changed/hero finds a resolution

Final image (100%) – shows protag’s life after and how she has changed

