

how to plot a novel

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Hello everyone, my name is Mandi Lynn. I'm the author of the fantasy novels, *Essence*, *I am Mercy*, and thriller novel, *She's Not Here*, as well as the creator of AuthorTube Academy.

Today I have a special guest, Brittany Wang. Would you like to introduce yourself? - Yes, hi guys, I'm Brittany Wang. I am an author of an upcoming YA fairy fantasy series, and I also have an AuthorTube channel and I also host a Facebook group called The Plotter Life Writers Facebook Group. We have about 300 members and it's been so fun to collaborate there.

So thanks for having me on your channel. - Oh absolutely, and she also has an awesome Instagram that you should check out as well. - Thank you. - So today we discovered that I'm a pantsier and she's a plotter, so we've been doing some fun interviews so if you wanna hear an interview of her asking me all these questions about being a pantsier, head over to her channel.

I will have a link to that video down below. But today, I'm gonna be interviewing Brittany about how she is a plotter and how that may work. Because I don't know what that life is like. (intense music) So for those of you who don't know, a plotter is someone who sits back and plots the whole novel before they start writing.

A pantsier is just someone who just goes for it, which is what I do. (laughing) So, Brittany, why do you plot your book? - Ah, okay, well I'm a person who love, we were talking about this on the other video, but like I love to have a plan. I just feel more secure (laughing) having a plan, but I also really love studying story structure and really understanding why stories work.

And with that, I really also enjoy just like the story of transformation, which is a lotta stories, and when I'm thinking about where I wanna take a story or even like the theme of a story, I wanna be like really purposeful about that. And you can definitely do that while you're pantsing as well, but it's hard for me to do that without a plan.

So I love to like sort of use story beats and just like a basic outline to figure out okay where am I going, even if that changes later, I love to at least have a direction. And then when I feel like I have that direction, I feel like I can sort of just fill in the holes from there and do that.

How do you plot your novel technique-wise? Like do you have a certain way you go about plotting your novel? -

I've tried a bunch of different ways and I don't know that I have a specific way yet, and again this is my first novel, so as we were talking about before, it could change from book to book. But right now I've tried Scrivener, but I really just like using a Word document.

I love sort of writing down all my ideas, maybe I'll do that first on a piece of paper, but then I'll start seeing connections and I'll start seeing those story beats sorta pop up, like oh this is the inciting incident or this is the ending or this is the midpoint.

And then I'll start organizing that on like a Word document. And then I also really loved when I started using a story bible or a novel bible, series bible, whatever you wanna call it, and I have a video about that.

But it just sorta takes each character profile, and I'm doing fantasy, so that's a whole nother thing where you're trying to do the world-building, and I love to wrap the world-building into the story, make that really purposeful, so I love brainstorming within that, even if it's not in story form, within like those templates and then figuring out how do these things mesh into the story.

So between the outline and the series bible, those are like my main forms of plotting right now.

- I love the series bible, by the way.

- Oh good.

- Almost part of me wants to do it, even though I'm not a plotter. (laughing)

- You could it for editing too.

- That's true, that's true.

- Yeah yeah yeah.

- You can do that for editing.

- Right so you could even, whatever part of the process.

- Now we have Catio - Yes.

- Okay so since you're a plotter, do you feel like the quality of the first draft is better?

- Again I have nothing to compare it to personally, but I will say that when I've shown the first few chapters to some of my CPs, and they have said, hey, this actually feels more like a third draft or second or third draft, and I, yeah I think that it's because I'm already like setting things up, I'm already able to like foreshadow certain things.

That being said, that particular draft was like, I did like a really rough like, I think for Camp NaNo, and that was like terrible. (laughing) So I wouldn't show any of that to anyone. But it was just like I would speed through with the basic outline and then I was like, okay, now I'm gonna go back through.

So yeah, but they said that it felt like pretty strong, and I'm really happy with it, but there are also some drawbacks to that which we'll talk, I'm sure we'll talk about. (laughing)

- Now if you didn't write fantasy, do you feel like you would still need like that plotted outline?

- Yeah, I feel like yeah, with fantasy, you do have like a lot of world-building that you're trying to do, but I feel like with any story I would tell, even if it's contemporary, like I would wanna do research about if it's a real place or if I'm doing like a sci-fi or dystopian, like I'd wanna figure out like where am I (laughing) generally you know and try to pull some of those things in.

So I think for me, I might do a little less plotting, but I think generally naturally I would still go for some plotting. (laughing)

- You would need to. - I would have fun with it, I can't help it. The only other thing I would add is that doing like the plotting, and not just the plotting, but like research, so I didn't get to ask you this in the other video, but like about how much research do you do, because even for like She's Not Here, I know

like you have some knowledge already previous to like where you work, but also do, did you do a lot of research? And for me I feel like I learn a lot during the research and it instructs my plotting.

- Right.

- So I don't know if you wanted to add anything from that, but I just felt like that was, (laughing) it's helpful for my plotting.

- Yeah, so working off the last question, do you feel like you have an easier time with draft two when it comes to the editing process? Do you reference your outline when you're doing draft two?

- Yes, I reference the outline and the draft. Right now I'm taking, I did a fast read-through of the first draft, and I took notes, even though I had an outline, there will still be things that I pantsed as I was going. So it's not like I'm plotting every single scene or every single moment or piece of dialogue.

It's more just getting that picture and like that progression and any specific things I know I want in it, but then like yeah, there were definitely areas where I pantsed and I was like, oh I found out about this character, I found out more about this part of the world.

And so now I'm taking those like little markings in the draft and putting them into a Word document (laughing) which I just showed on my Instagram Stories, I might do another video about, but where I'm then transferring all of those notes and that will then change the outline.

- Right.

- Right now, so here's one of the downsides, is that I think there are certain critical things in my last outline that will change based on this first draft, based on some of the pantsing that did happen, and some of the things that like didn't, like I didn't write as well as I thought I would, like I'm not completely happy with the ending that I plotted, even though it sounded really strong in the outline, it didn't end up being super strong, hi. (laughing)

And so with that, like you can be as prepared as you can, but you can still end up having to trash a lot or having to rewrite a lot. For me I still feel better about having the plotting ahead of time, but that can be the downside.

- Just laughing. (laughing) Okay is this what we're doing now? (laughing)

- She likes the book, no he.

- I'm sorry, he likes the books too. (laughing) Oh really likes the book. (laughing)

- Little destructive, okay, you can sit there, why not. All right, just get a little cat booty in the video. (book thumping) Oh thanks. - I want him, I want the attention.

- You can be the star now I guess. (laughing) Okay, (laughing) would you be able to pants a novel if you had to? Do you think you could do it?

- You mean if I had like a gun to my head? (laughing)

- If I told you, you have to write this novel but you're not allowed to outline it, would you be able to?

- I think I'd be able to. You know I've definitely done like some microfiction, like we were talking about flash fiction earlier, and I feel like yeah I could, I could probably do it in shorter spurts. But I feel like it would be really hard (laughing) to like, I would get into like a certain amount of chapters, then I would be like, ooh and then this thing and then, I sorta wanna write this down and like chronicle a little bit and like brainstorm a little bit to get there.

But if I had to, (laughing) I would, it would probably just take me awhile.

- Yeah. (laughing) If you had a gun to your head.

- Right, all right, which plotting still takes awhile, like I was plotting for months before I even wrote any like real words or any real pages. So that's another downside, like sometimes you might get out like a full draft like sooner than like a plotter would.

- Right. - So yeah, there's that.

- So that was one of my next questions was how long it did take to plot a novel. But with that said, since you kinda sorta answered it, feel free to digest more if you'd like. But with that in mind, once you have the novel plotted, how long does it take to actually write it?

- Okay, well, so the current story that I'm working on, the seedling of the idea I like to say started in like middle school.

So I wrote like a 7,000 word, which actually, I might have pantsed that a little bit, I have, I can't remember. But it was a complete story, and then, now that I'm like sorta getting really back into writing and like have this like trajectory of like I'm gonna publish this book, I really started getting serious about it like in January, and then I was plotting up until like the first Camp NaNo.

So that was like April. And then I tried to write the first like really messy draft (laughing) and I didn't, I reached the end, but there were so many scenes that I didn't even write because I was like I don't even know what's going on here.

And then I did more plotting between then and the next Camp NaNo and I tried to write the next draft, which I only got like 25,000 words, but it was something. (laughing) And then I had a goal throughout the summer to get the first real draft done by the end of August, which I did.

So that's sort of the timeline, but even before then, there was more like plotting even before January that was like sprinkled. But once I got serious, it did take, what is that, like four or five months, somewhere around there, to get to a place where I was like okay, I feel comfortable diving in now. (laughing)

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

- I would just say that if you have pantsed your whole life and you really haven't done any kind of plotting, I would just say to like try, just like you know there's so many videos out there, especially if you're struggling. If you're not struggling, why mess up something that isn't broken, right?

But if you're having some struggles with it, there's so many different forms of plotting, there's so many different forms of outlining or approaches, and some of them are like really general and simple and you could do really quickly and some of them like take forever, like my process. (laughing)

So yeah, so I would just say that it's something, especially to strengthen your idea or understanding of story structure to study that a little bit and even if you just have it in your head, then that helps produce I think a stronger story from the beginning.

- Thank you for joining us today in this discussion of plotting a novel. Thank you to Brittany Wang for joining. Be sure to check out her video down below so you can see her interview me on pantsing. Which one is superior?

Let us know in the comments down below. Give us your vote and say what you are and which one you think is better. Otherwise, that is it for today's video. Be sure to give it a thumbs up, comment down below, and subscribe.