



Writer's Rank Advancement Guide

This guide contains fifteen pages of suggested resources! Follow these directions to know how to use the resources without becoming overwhelmed.

If you haven't already, take the [Writing Craft Quiz](#) to determine where you rank in fourteen different categories. If you score less than a 30, that may be a sign that our Writer's Journey Plan is a better resource for you.

Once you've taken the Writing Craft Quiz, choose one or two areas to focus on. These will probably be the areas you ranked lower in on the quiz. Find them below and go to the rank you selected for yourself. Underneath each rank is a list of resources we think are best suited for your current skill level.

You're welcome to study other resources in a category even if they aren't listed under your specific rank, but they may not be as applicable. Either way, utilize those resources to enhance your understanding of the craft and improve your writing.

Once you've explored the resources listed for your rank and combined that with extensive practice to drill down those concepts, re-take the [Writing Craft Quiz](#) to see if you've mastered a new rank, then repeat the process with one or two other categories!

If you've exhausted all the resources under your rank and still haven't advanced yet, [shoot us an email](#) and we'll see if we can diagnose what steps you need to take next to better hone your skill in that area.

Happy learning!

-The Story Embers Staff



Section 1: Plot

Plot Structure

Rank One: I don't know how to structure my story.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke](#)

[The 12 Key Pillars of Novel Construction by C.S. Lakin](#)

[The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler](#)

Rank Two: I know how to create a general structure where my protagonist seeks to achieve a goal over the course of my story, but my plot is frequently bogged down with side trails when I'm writing.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The 12 Key Pillars of Novel Construction by C.S. Lakin](#)

[The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler](#)

[Plot and Structure by James Scott Bell](#)

[Outlining Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

[The Secrets of Story Structure by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Structuring Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Reverse-Outlining Your Novel by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Three: I create plot structures that follow standard guidelines, but my structures can feel forced or clumsy in their execution.

[Structuring Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

[5 Secrets of Story Structure by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Layer Your Novel by C.S. Lakin](#)

[Reverse-Outlining Your Novel by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Four: I create stories with solid and natural plot structures that generally hit the right beats at the right times.

[5 Secrets of Story Structure by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Layer Your Novel by C.S. Lakin](#)

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)



Pacing & Suspense

Rank One: I don't know how to write stories that don't bore the reader.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[5 Ways to Create Nail-Biting Internal Conflict by Brandon Miller](#)

[Outlining Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

Rank Two: I write stories that have some interesting parts, but my stories tend to drag and are not paced well.

[5 Ways to Create Nail-Biting Internal Conflict by Brandon Miller](#)

[Plot and Structure by James Scott Bell](#)

[Outlining Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)

[4 Ways to Ramp Up Tension and Pacing In Your Fiction by C.S. Lakin](#)

[A Novel Idea by ChiLibris](#)

[Keep Readers Turning Pages by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Three: I create stories that are generally interesting, but I struggle to fix pacing problems and sagging sections.

[The Anatomy of Story by John Truby](#)

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)

[Tension and Pacing through Conflict and Emotional Narrative by C.S. Lakin](#)

[Ramping Tension to the Max in Your Novel Checklists by C.S. Lakin](#)

[A Novel Idea by ChiLibris](#)

[Keep Readers Turning Pages by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Four: I create interesting stories and know how to imbue them with a natural flow of suspense. I know how to keep people reading my story.

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)



Story Uniqueness

Rank One: The story ideas I have are derivative of other works and easily predictable.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke](#)

Rank Two: My stories are somewhat unique, but heavily borrow elements from other works.

[Plot and Structure by James Scott Bell](#)

[Outlining Your Novel by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)

[Are Cliches to be Avoided? by Hope Ann](#)

Reverse-Outlining Your Novel by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: My stories are generally interesting but lack real surprises.

[Three Reasons You Shouldn't Fear Cliches by Hope Ann](#)

[Four Types of Plot Cliches that May be Dragging Down Your Story by Brandon Miller](#)

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)

Reverse-Outlining Your Novel by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Four: I regularly craft interesting and unique stories with several plot developments that surprise readers.

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Story Trumps Structure by Steven James](#)



Section 2: Characters

Protagonists

Rank One: I don't know how to create an interesting protagonist.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb*](#)

[*The Ultimate Guide to Character Development by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke*](#)

[*The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler*](#)

How to Create a Compelling Protagonist by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Two: I can give my protagonists some unique qualities and goals, but I struggle to avoid making them bland or unmemorable.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb*](#)

[*The Ultimate Guide to Character Development by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

[*The Anatomy of Story by John Truby*](#)

[*How to Write Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*A Novel Idea by ChiLibris*](#)

How to Create a Compelling Protagonist by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I know how to develop a great protagonist in theory, but struggle to portray that character effectively on the page.

[*Creating Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)

[*A Novel Idea by ChiLibris*](#)

[*The Emotion Thesaurus by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi*](#)

Rank Four: I know how to create unique, fascinating, and somewhat compelling protagonists. However, my characters take a while to emotionally bond with readers and are not immediately gripping.

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)

[*The Emotion Thesaurus by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi*](#)



Villains

Rank One: I don't know how to avoid creating bland and clichéd villains.

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke*](#)

[*The Writer's Journey by Christopher Vogler*](#)

[*3 Ways Villains Justify Evil by Gabrielle Pollack*](#)

Seven Reasons Your Villain Doesn't Work by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Two: I create villains who have a personality but are rather stereotypical.

[*3 Ways Villains Justify Evil by Gabrielle Pollack*](#)

[*What Makes a Good Villain by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

[*The Anatomy of Story by John Truby*](#)

Seven Reasons Your Villain Doesn't Work by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I know how to develop a great villain in theory, but struggle to write that villain effectively on the page.

[*The Anatomy of Story by John Truby*](#)

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)

[*Beyond the Evil Overlord: Three Dynamic Character Arcs for Villains by Sierra Ret*](#)

[*What Makes a Good Villain by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

Rank Four: I create unique and complex villains. I know how to challenge the protagonist with the villain in a way that makes the story interesting.

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)



Side Characters

Rank One: I don't know how to write interesting side characters.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction* by Jeff Gerke](#)

[*The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler](#)

Rank Two: I craft side characters who have a couple unique aspects, but my side characters are rather forgettable.

[*The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby](#)

[*Making the Most of Your Secondary Characters* by Josiah DeGraaf](#)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I know how to craft unique side characters on paper, but in practice my side characters don't feel fully human.

[*Make Your Protagonists Hate Each Other in Four Easy Steps* by Josiah DeGraaf](#)

[*The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby](#)

[*Story* by Robert McKee](#)

Rank Four: I know how to craft unique and interesting side characters who feel human and who are appropriately developed for their role in a story.

[*Story* by Robert McKee](#)



Section 3: Theme

Theme Analysis

Rank One: I don't know how to create a good moral focus for my story.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction* by Jeff Gerke](#)

[*Theme Made Simple* by Daeus Lamb](#)

Rank Two: I try to give my stories a moral point, but struggle to avoid being preachy or cheesy.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby](#)

[*How to Write Character Arcs* by K.M. Weiland](#)

[*Creating Character Arcs* by K.M. Weiland](#)

[*The Christian Imagination* by Leland Ryken, ed.](#)

[*How to Write Without Sounding Preachy* by Jerry Jenkins](#)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I ask moral questions with my stories, but tend to ask questions that either have yes/no answers or no obvious answer.

[*The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby](#)

[*Creating Character Arcs* by K.M. Weiland](#)

[*Story* by Robert McKee](#)

[*The Christian Imagination* by Leland Ryken, ed.](#)

Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Four: I create fascinating, open-ended moral questions that focus on what it means to live well. I provide answers for these questions, but they tend to be answers that people already believe.

[*The Anatomy of Story* by John Truby](#)

[*Story* by Robert McKee](#)

[*The Christian Imagination* by Leland Ryken, ed.](#)

Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)



Theme Practice

Rank One: I don't know how to give my stories a moral focus.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke](#)

[How to Write Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Creating Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Five Overused Cliches in Christian Fiction & How to Avoid Them by Josiah DeGraaf](#)

[Theme Made Simple by Daeus Lamb](#)

Rank Two: I try to weave moral aspects into my stories by simply having myself or the characters directly explain the moral points of the story.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Anatomy of Story by John Truby](#)

[Creating Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland](#)

[The Christian Imagination by Leland Ryken, ed.](#)

[How to Write Without Sounding Preachy by Jerry Jenkins](#)

[Five Overused Cliches in Christian Fiction & How to Avoid Them by Josiah DeGraaf](#)

[Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Three: I use character arcs and important conversations to unpack the theme of my story and seek to show readers what I am trying to convey instead of preaching to them.

[The Anatomy of Story by John Truby](#)

[Creating Character Arcs by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)

Rank Four: I create characters who embody different answers to the thematic questions I am asking and convey my message by giving those characters poetic justice for their actions.

[The Anatomy of Story by John Truby](#)

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[Theme Mastery by Josiah DeGraaf \(coming soon\)](#)



Section 4: Style

Prose

Rank One: I don't worry about how my prose sounds. I simply write.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke](#)

[Wordsmithy by Douglas Wilson](#)

Rank Two: I want to write good prose and attempt to do so, but don't know how to spot problems apart from simple spelling and grammar mistakes.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[Stein on Writing by Sol Stein](#)

[Wordsmithy by Douglas Wilson](#)

[5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing by C.S. Lakin, et al.](#)

[Tension and Pacing through Conflict and Emotional Narrative by C.S. Lakin](#)

[Powerful Verbs by Jerry Jenkins](#)

[Spellbinding Sentences by Barbara Baig](#)

Rank Three: I know what strong prose looks like and attempt to revise my writing accordingly, but have trouble achieving it. My writing is often clunky, wordy, or basic.

[Stein on Writing by Sol Stein](#)

[5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing by C.S. Lakin, et al.](#)

[Choose the Right Sentences by K.M. Weiland](#)

[5 Ways to Choose the Right Words by Alicia Rades](#)

[Most Common Writing Mistakes: Purple Prose by K.M. Weiland](#)

[Writing Voice: 6 Things You Need to Know to Improve It by K.M. Weiland](#)

[How to Write Dialogue that Captivates Your Reader by Jerry Jenkins](#)

[Spellbinding Sentences by Barbara Baig](#)

Rank Four: I often write in active voice using vivid words and descriptions to add spice to my prose. While my work may not have obvious flaws, I still occasionally struggle with wordiness and/or mechanics.

[Stein on Writing by Sol Stein](#)

[5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing by C.S. Lakin, et al.](#)



Show, Don't Tell

Rank One: I may have heard the saying “show, don't tell” before, but I don't know how to apply it to my writing.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction* by Jeff Gerke](#)

[*Show, Don't Tell* by Jerry Jenkins](#)

Rank Two: I realize that I must not only avoid telling but show well too. I know not to use *telling* to convey my characters' emotions and I have a basic understanding of how to *show* characters' emotions.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Show, Don't Tell Course* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*Four Tips for Deepening Your Characters' POV* by Josiah DeGraaf](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction* by Jeff Gerke](#)

[*The Emotion Thesaurus* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi](#)

[*5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing* by C.S. Lakin, et al.](#)

[*Shoot Your Novel* by C.S. Lakin](#)

[*Three Types of Telling You Must Erase to Create an Intimate POV* by Gabrielle Pollack](#)

[*A Novel Idea* by ChiLibris](#)

Rank Three: I am beginning to understand that “show, don't tell” applies to almost every sentence I write. I also know several techniques for showing that allow me to construct more emotionally engaging, vivid scenes.

[*The Show, Don't Tell Course* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*The Emotion Thesaurus* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi](#)

[*5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing* by C.S. Lakin, et al.](#)

[*Shoot Your Novel* by C.S. Lakin](#)

[*A Novel Idea* by ChiLibris](#)

Rank Four: I am comfortable with avoiding telling and using showing for scene and character descriptions, internal monologue, theme, emotions, intentions, action beats, etc. I know many techniques for showing and when to use which type for the best effect. I mostly write with these techniques in mind.

[*The Show, Don't Tell Course* by Daeus Lamb](#)

[*Shoot Your Novel* by C.S. Lakin](#)



Setting

Rank One: I don't describe settings much in writing. Settings don't largely impact their respective scenes.

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke*](#)

[*Masterful Setting Description by C.S. Lakin*](#)

Rank Two: I seek to describe the settings my characters are in, but tend to only include basic descriptions. My characters occasionally interact with their environment, but not terribly often.

[*Info Dumps by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*How to Describe the Setting of a Story by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

[*How to Avoid Info Dumps by Gabrielle Pollack*](#)

[*5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing by C.S. Lakin, et al.*](#)

[*Connecting Characters to Settings in Your Novel by C.S. Lakin*](#)

[*A Novel Idea by ChiLibris*](#)

Rank Three: I seek to write effective descriptions that clearly explain where my characters are, but struggle to do so without info dumping. My characters rarely interact with the setting.

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)

[*The Show, Don't Tell Course by Daeus Lamb*](#)

[*Three Ways You May be Wasting Your Descriptions by Hope Ann*](#)

[*How Advice from a Chess Grandmaster Can Transform Your Writing by Josiah DeGraaf*](#)

[*5 Editors Tackle the 12 Fatal Flaws of Fiction Writing by C.S. Lakin, et al.*](#)

[*Connecting Characters to Settings in Your Novel by C.S. Lakin*](#)

[*A Novel Idea by ChiLibris*](#)

Rank Four: I choose settings that uniquely fit the situation my characters are in and describe them so the audience easily understands where my characters are. My characters often interact with their environment.

[*Story by Robert McKee*](#)



Section 5: Writing Awareness

Genre

Rank One: I don't think about a story's genre when I write it.

The Basics of Writing Genre Fiction by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

[Switching from Literary to Genre Fiction](#) by Kim Wright

Rank Two: I think about genre when writing a story and make sure I read several stories in a genre before writing it.

[The Anatomy of Story](#) by John Truby

The Basics of Writing Genre Fiction by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I read heavily in a genre before writing it and try to replicate what I see other successful authors in the genre doing.

[How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy](#) by Orson Scott Card

[Story](#) by Robert McKee

[The Three Laws of Magic](#) by Brandon Sanderson

[How to Develop Realistic Sci-Fi Technology](#) by Sierra Ret

Rank Four: I understand why readers love the genres I write and try to include those elements. I seek to capture the best parts of the genre while also adding my own unique spin.



Ability to Understand a Reader's Perspective

Rank One: I don't consider what a reader is experiencing when they read my story.

[Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb](#)

[The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke](#)

[Reading Like a Writer by Francine Prose](#)

The Basics of Writing Genre Fiction by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Two: I occasionally think about a reader's experience when writing and revising, but not on a consistent basis.

[Reading Like a Writer by Francine Prose](#)

[The Anatomy of Story by John Truby](#)

[A Novel Idea by ChiLibris](#)

The Basics of Writing Genre Fiction by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Breaking Cliches for Dummies by Josiah DeGraaf (coming soon)

Rank Three: I strive to consider how a reader will approach my story, but either struggle to accurately predict their response or struggle to know how to use that in my writing.

[Story by Robert McKee](#)

[A Novel Idea by ChiLibris](#)

Rank Four: I write with a reader's expectations and experience in mind and tailor my story to that perspective. I often meet readers' expectations to deliver the best experience possible.

[Story by Robert McKee](#)



Revisions/Editing

Rank One: Once my story is down on paper, I'm done. I rarely revise my manuscripts beyond a few spelling/grammar corrections.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb*](#)

[*The Art & Craft of Writing Christian Fiction by Jeff Gerke*](#)

[*Nail Your Novel by Roz Morris*](#)

[*How I Self-Edit My Novels by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*5 Ways to Actually Enjoy Editing Your Book by Adriana Bielkova*](#)

Rank Two: I often revise the stories I write, and I might ask friends or family members for input. However, I don't make any major changes to the manuscript that require reworking large aspects of the story.

[*Jumpstart Your Novel by Daeus Lamb*](#)

[*Nail Your Novel by Roz Morris*](#)

[*Revisions and Self-Editing by James Scott Bell*](#)

[*Stein on Writing by Sol Stein*](#)

[*How I Self-Edit My Novels by K.M. Weiland*](#)

Rank Three: I revise and rewrite my story until I'm satisfied with it. However, I often have trouble figuring out what problems my writing has and how I can fix them.

[*Stein on Writing by Sol Stein*](#)

[*5 Ways to Trim Your Book's Word Count by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*How to Find the Right Critique Partner by K.M. Weiland*](#)

[*The Ultimate Self-Editing Checklist by Jerry Jenkins*](#)

Rank Four: I am generally able to spot problems in my writing and often know how to repair those problems. I recruit beta readers and critique partners to smooth out the kinks in my story, and I regularly rewrite or rework large sections of the book as necessary to tell the story I want to tell.

[*How to Find the Right Critique Partner by K.M. Weiland*](#)