



# MAKING YOUR CHAPTERS ENGAGING



This workbook was designed to help you focus on building chapters that create tension through action. Readers crave tension, which is the possibility of change by having a character struggle to get what they want. A protagonist changes as they encounter new conflicts and obstacles, caused by their actions, while trying to achieve their goals. Conflicts that cause bad outcomes for the protagonist create negative tension by creating the possibility that something worse could happen. On the other hand, conflicts that prevent good outcomes for the protagonist create positive tension by creating the possibility that something even better could happen.

Be detailed in your responses to the prompts; feel free to approach them in any order that feels natural to you. An answer in one section may inspire ideas for other sections.

# THEREFORE, BUT

If the actions in your story can be connected with the words AND THEN, it will not be as Engaging as if you were to connect them using the words THEREFORE and BUT. This is a story hack made famous by the creators of "South Park." [In this video](#), Trey Parker and Matt Stone briefly discuss why causality makes for more Engaging stories.

If your beats are connected by AND THEN, your story runs the risk of being dull.

*I wanted to get a pizza. AND THEN, I got on the bus to go to Pizza Hut. AND THEN, I walked in and ordered a BBQ Chicken Pizza. AND THEN, the Pizza Hut employee made fun of my order. AND THEN, I took the pizza home and ate it.*

However, if you use THEREFORE and BUT, you can build moments of conflict, tension, and change into your action:

*I wanted to get a pizza. **THEREFORE** I got on the bus to go to Pizza Hut. **BUT** my crush also got on the bus, and I didn't want them to see me. **THEREFORE** I stayed on the bus until they left, **BUT** I missed my stop. **THEREFORE** I had to walk to Pizza Hut. **BUT** when I arrived, I realized I had left my wallet on the bus. **THEREFORE** I called my best friend and asked to borrow some cash...*

This is how the THEREFORE, BUT chain breaks down:

*A character wants something. **THEREFORE** they try to do something to get closer to it. **BUT** a conflict or obstacle interrupts their progress, which increases tension. **THEREFORE** the character has to change and try something new. **BUT** another consequence gets in the way..*



# REMEMBER

- 1) This is a tool to help you better structure your chapters, and you don't need to include the words THEREFORE, BUT in the chapters of your story.
- 2) Include as many THEREFORE, BUT segments in your chapter as you see fit.
- 3) Sometimes you'll need multiple THEREFORE segments before a BUT interruption.
- 4) Your THEREFORE answers might be longer than your BUT answers.



# SUBJECT + GOAL



Who is the chapter's central character and what is their goal? Their goal doesn't have to be their main story-level goal, just their goal for this specific chapter, which should directly link to their story-level goal. (e.g. In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy's story-level goal is to get back to Kansas; a chapter-level goal could be to get to Emerald City, or to get the witch's broomstick, depending on the chapter)

Where on the Storycoaster did the last chapter end? Are they in the Valley climbing to the next peak? Or are they about to plunge into the consequences of a turning point? How have the events of the previous chapter put your character in the position they're currently in?

# THEREFORE



What are the first actions taken by your character in this chapter to achieve their chapter-level goal?

How will these actions, if completed successfully by your character, get them closer to achieving their goal?

How are your character's motivations influencing their immediate actions? Why is your character doing what they're doing? What are the stakes? What happens if your character doesn't achieve their goal in this chapter?

# BUT...



What conflict or obstacle halts the progress of the action initiated in the previous THEREFORE section? Specifically, what stops or makes it more difficult for the characters to achieve their goal?

Is the interruption caused by an external conflict—like another person—or an internal conflict—like a fear or belief your character has about themselves?

Is this interruption caused by an event that the character wants or fears? How does this interruption create tension? Is it positive tension or negative tension? Why does this obstacle/conflict need to happen at this exact point in the story?

# THEREFORE



What does your character do to respond to the conflict/obstacle from the previous BUT section? These are the consequences of your character's interrupted attempt at achieving their goal. How does your character feel about the interruption?

How does your character adjust to the complication? What is their new plan of action? What has changed?

Why does your character respond the way that they do? Why do you think this is the best or the most logical response for them to have to the BUT interruption?

# BUT + CLIFFHANGER

You can use as many THEREFORE, BUT segments as you think your chapter needs, but at the end of your chapter you should answer the following questions:



Where is your character when the chapter ends? How is this a moment of high-tension or high-emotion? Is your character closer or farther from their goal? How do they feel about their progress?

What is the final image of your chapter? What question do you want your reader to have in mind when the chapter ends?

Where on the [Storycoaster](#) are you ending your chapter?

Are you delaying a reveal (i.e. chapter ends before a critical piece of information is relieved), or are you delaying a consequence (i.e. chapter ends after a crucial piece of information is revealed or after a significant event has happened, but the before the full consequences are felt)?

How will your next chapter start? Where on the Storycoaster will it begin?