



# INSIDE OUTLINE

## BY JENNIE NASH

### WHAT IT IS

#### **AN OUTLINE**

A short and flexible outline of the major scenes of a novel.

#### **A TIMELINE**

A timeline that captures the chronology of the story.

#### **A MARRIAGE OF PLOT AND POINT**

A way to bring together the two most important parts of the story in one place.

#### **A CONTAINER**

An efficient way to capture and hold the whole story as you write forward, make changes, and revise.

#### **A CAUSE-AND-EFFECT TRAJECTORY**

An illustration of the engine that propels a novel from start to finish.

### WHY IT WORKS

#### **IT LETS YOU SEE THE WHOLE**

You can stand back and see the sweep of the whole story, which is a critical perspective to success.

#### **IT FORCES YOU TO FOCUS ON WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT**

It never lets you forget that every action has to have a point and purpose. You can't write a scene without knowing its point.

#### **IT MEASURES NARRATIVE DRIVE**

It shows you how one scene drives to the next and how one action causes the next, and allows you to measure where your story may have mistakes or holes.

#### **IT GIVES YOU PERMISSION TO INNOVATE**

You can easily cut, add, or move scenes to see how they work in various locations. There is no risk to innovating on a two-page document.

#### **IT SHOWS OTHERS WHAT YOU ARE THINKING**

It's a powerful way to get quick, insightful feedback on your story from critique partners or your book coach.

#### **IT GIVES YOU AN ADVANTAGE WHEN IT'S TIME TO SUMMARIZE**

An Inside Outline is an ideal start to a synopsis (needed for agents) or a book summary (needed for independent publishing).

## THE RULES

The Inside Outline works best if you follow the rules. I am very strict about the rules.

- No more than 2 pages – 3 if you really have to – because the power comes from being CONCISE. Don't cheat by reducing the font or squeezing the line spacing.
- Focus on the major scenes of the novel.
- No more than 3 lines per bullet, and even that is a lot. See how low you can go.
- Each scene must *cause* the next scene to happen. Think “because of that, the next thing happened” rather than “and then this happened, and then this happened.”
- After you develop a 2-page version, you can increase the number of scenes you cover and the page count. In this way, the Inside Outline can become a living, breathing outline that captures each piece of your story as you write or revise.

## HOW IT LOOKS

SCENE — what happens

POINT — why it matters to the protagonist



**BECAUSE OF THAT...**

SCENE — what happens

POINT — why it matters to the protagonist



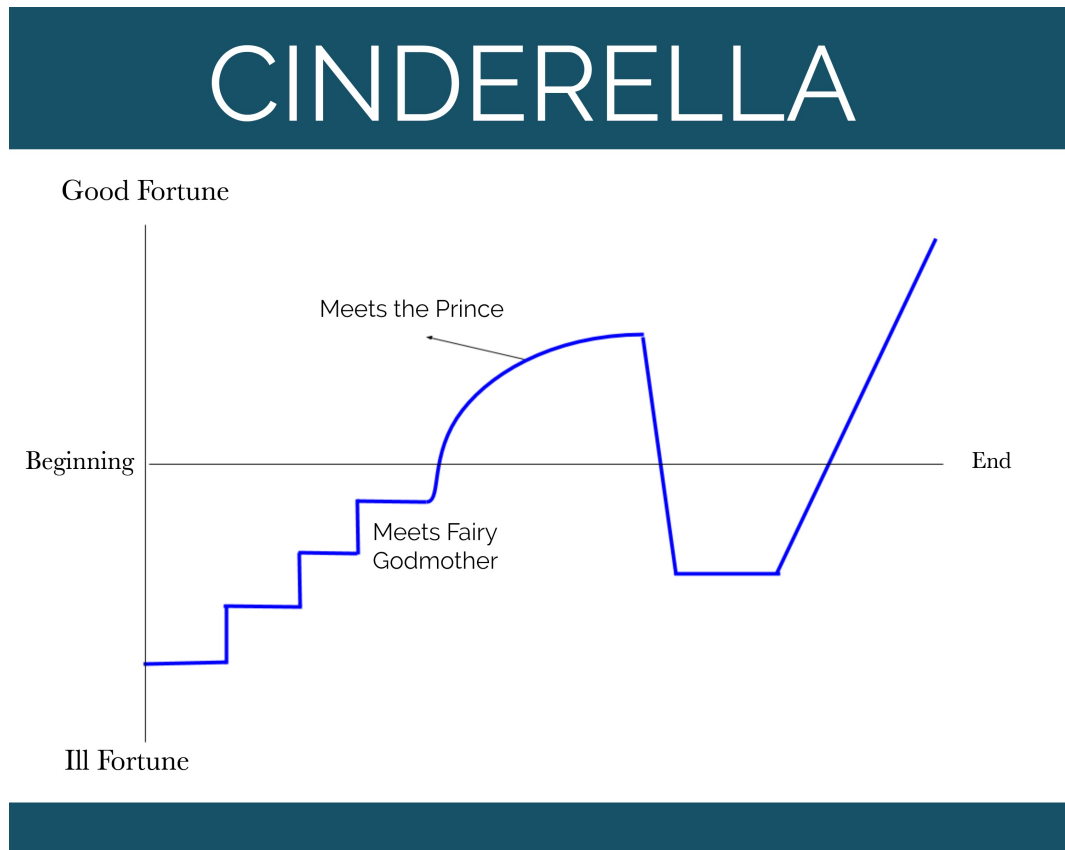
**BECAUSE OF THAT...**

SCENE — what happens

POINT — why it matters to the protagonist

## START WITH A GRAPH

Start by making a simple graph of your novel. Capture the high and low points in the arc of change your protagonist goes through, and label them. Use a pencil so you can play around with it. It will look something like this:



For a fantastic explanation of how to develop a graph like this for your story, see [this Kurt Vonnegut video](#).

## SCENE BY SCENE

Now it's time to outline your story. Following the SCENE / POINT structure from Page 2, take each major scene and describe what happens. For each scene, add the point. Ask yourself:

- What happens in this scene? What does it add to the story?
- Why does this scene have to happen?
- Why does it have to happen *now* (i.e., why does it have to happen after the last scene and before the next)?
- What meaning does the protagonist make take from this scene? And how does that propel them to take the next action they take?

## BE RUTHLESS

Stand back and look at the sweep of your story. Ask yourself:

- Does it make sense?
- Does it drive them from beginning to end?
- Are there holes?
- Are there leaps of logic?

Revise anything and everything until it's perfect, then make your story match it.