

CONFLICT QUESTIONS

Use these questions to tease out the conflicts in your novel.



Use this sheet to:

DISCOVER YOUR
PROTAGONIST

TEASE OUT A
CONFLICT

INVOLVE YOUR
PROTAGONIST IN
YOUR STORY

CONFLICT IS THE BEATING HEART OF YOUR NOVEL

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This worksheet contains a list of questions you can use to tease out conflict, motivations, wounds, and other story elements when you're feeling stuck.

I use questions like these in the early stages of planning a new novel, when I'm figuring out the story I want to tell. You may find other uses for them – it's up to you :)



RAGE AGAINST THE MANUSCRIPT

Characters

Why is my protagonist the absolute wrong person to be involved in this story?

Why does that actually make her the perfect person to get involved?

What does my protagonist believe she wants more than anything in the world?

Why is it impossible for her to have this thing, or if she gets this thing, why won't she enjoy it? (hint: this is about her wound).

What does my protagonist believe about herself that's a lie?

What happened in my protagonist's past that has given birth to this lie?

What ghost from the past (literal or figurative) follows my protagonist around and makes her miserable?

What place is a 'refuge' for your protagonist? What about this places makes him feel loved and accepted?

How can you threaten this refuge?

What is the defining strength of your protagonist?

What bad habit are they trying to overcome? (The habit is usually an outward manifestation of their wound).

What is their biggest regret?

What kind of person do they WISH they could be?

Is there a specific person in their life they admire in this way?

What is my protagonist afraid of more than anything else?

What might threaten her life or the life of those she loves?

Why does your antagonist want the same thing as the protagonist?

Who hurt your antagonist and how does it affect their relationship with the protagonist and the decisions they make?

What makes your antagonist feel helpless?

What's a line your protagonist/antagonist will never cross? (then, force them to cross it in the climax).

Which character can see your protagonist for who they truly are? What do they see?

Genre

What settings are common in your genre/subgenre?

What about those settings appeal to readers? (For example, domestic settings in supernatural thrillers, because they feel familiar and make the reader ask, "what if this could happen to me?")

What do readers expect in the ending of your genre?

What tropes in your genre do you love? Use TV Tropes as a great resource.

How do writers in your genre begin their books?

Do you have special knowledge you want to incorporate into your book (for example, about martial arts or crime-scene analysis).

Setting/worldbuilding

Where is the ABSOLUTE WORST PLACE your protagonist could end up based on their personality? How will you shove them into that place?

What connection does your protagonist have to the setting/world?

What memories are triggered by the setting?

What is her role in this world? Her job? How does this role enforce the rules of this world, and how will she be forced to break those rules?



RAGE AGAINST THE MANUSCRIPT

What parts of the setting are taboo/forbidden (any time you make something forbidden, your protagonist has got to end up going there).

How does the world act as a mirror, reflecting your protagonist's lie back on her?

How does the world/setting act as a foil/threat?

How does the world/setting get in your character's way?

What assumptions do you automatically make about the setting of your story? (For example, small town = safe). How can you play with those assumptions?

What in the history/folklore of that world can inspire your ideas?

What about the world is foreign/unusual/scary to your protagonist?

Magic

What are the rules and consequences of magic?

Why is a magical gift or object a double-edged sword?

How will the use of magic change your characters?

How can magic more directly impact the protagonist and the people she loves?