**Wired for Story by Lisa Cron**

\*These are my notes for *me*. If you want more information on a certain chapter or topic, I encourage you to support the author and buy the book. Thanks!\*

This book shares a cognitive secret & story secret in each chapter.

**Chapter 1 - How to Hook the Reader**

Broken into Cognitive Secret & Story Secret

Defines a story as how what happens affects someone who is trying to achieve what turns out to be a difficult goal and how he or she changes as a result. Breaking it down in the soothingly familiar parlance of the writing world.

“What happens” is the PLOT

“Someone” is the PROTAG

The “Goal” is what’s known as the STORY QUESTION

And “how he or she changes” is WHAT THE STORY ITSELF IS REALLY ABOUT

Story is an internal journey, focusing more on character than plot

When we read, we want to know ‘all is not as it seems’, we need a reason to care.

What’s the book about?

Whose story is it?

What’s happening here?

What’s at stake?

\*Everything - subplots, weather, setting, tone, etc, must relate to or affect your protags quest (i.e. leave all the boring parts out)

**CHAPTER 1 CHECKPOINT:** Do we know whose story it is? Is something happening, beginning on the first page (so the reader can know ‘what’s next’, why to keep reading)? Is there conflict in what’s happening? Is something at stake on the first page? Is there a sense that ‘all is not as it seems’? Can we glimpse enough of the ‘big picture’ to have that all important yardstick?

**Chapter 2 - How to Zero in on Your Point**

The story is about the protag’s issue, the theme, and the plot.

The story isn’t about whether the protagonist achieves their goal, it’s about what they have to overcome internally to do it.

For theme: What does the story tell us about what it means to be human? What does it say about how humans react to circumstances beyond their control?  How an element of human nature (loyalty, suspicion, grit, love), defines human behavior. What point does my story make? How do I want to change the way my reader sees the world? What do you want people to walk away thinking about?

Tone belongs to the author; mood to the reader.

Your Theme begets the Story’s Tone, which begets the Mood the Reader feels.

The central theme must provide a point of view precise enough to give us specific insights into the protagonist and her internal issue, yet be broad enough to take into account everything that happens (the plot).

**CHAPTER 2 CHECKPOINT:** Do you know what the point of your story is? Do you know what your story says about human nature? Do the protagonist’s inner issue, the theme, and the plot work together to answer the story in question? Do the plot and theme stick to the story question? Can you sum up what your story is about in a short paragraph?

**Chapter 3 - I’ll Feel What He’s Feeling**

We not only need to see what your protag does, but we need to grasp what things MEAN to them. The reader must be aware of the protag’s personal spin on everything that happens.

The protag’s reaction can come across as external, via reader’s intuition, or internal thoughts.

Each detail you share in first person reflects your character’s mindset and reveals something about them.

Every word the narrator says must in some way reflect his point of view.

The narrator never mentions anything that doesn’t affect him in some way.

The narrator draws a conclusion about everything he mentions.

The narrator is never neutral, he always has an agenda.

The narrator can never tell us what anyone else is thinking or feeling.

\*If we know Ann is sad, we don’t need a paragraph describing what she looks like when she’s crying, rather body language should tell us something we DON’T know. It works best when it’s at odds with what’s happening. Body language lets us know what’s going on internally.

\*\*Write what you know EMOTIONALLY!!!

Tap into what you know about Human Nature and how people interact, and then consistently show us the emotional and psychological “why” behind everything that happens.

**CHAPTER 3 CHECKPOINT:** Does your protag react to everything that happens AND in a way that your reader will instantly understand?

If you’re writing in the first person, is everything filtered through the narrator’s POV?

Have you left editorializing to the op-ed department?

Do you use body language to tell us things we don’t already know?

**Chapter 4 - What Does Your Protagonist Really Want?**

Everything we do is goal directed, and our biggest goal is figuring out everyone else’s agenda, the better to achieve our own.

A protag without a clear goal has nothing to figure out and nowhere to go.

Internal and external goals are at odds with each other, but both are driven by the core issue she’s struggling with. What fuels the external reaction is their internal struggle.

External goal changes as the story progresses. By achieving his internal goal, he was able to redefine his external goal.

Only add external problems that the protag must confront to overcome her issue, not for the drama of it.

**CHAPTER 4 CHECKPOINT:** Do you know what your protagonist wants?

Do you know WHY your protagonist wants what they want?

Do you know what your protagonist’s internal goal is?

Does your protagonist’s goal force them to face a specific long-standing problem or fear?

**Chapter 5 - Digging Up Your Protag’s Inner Issue**

Instead of an entire character profile, answer these questions: the event in his past that knocked his worldview out of alignment, triggering the internal issue that keeps him from achieving his goal; and the inception of his desire for the goal itself.

Story is often about a protag coming to realize what’s really causing him to do the things he does. The things we do reveal who we are.

Developing an outline:

Premise

The ‘why’

Differentiate the general from the specific in a story

The details- all the backstory. Are there side characters with a mirror subplot for contrast? A ticking clock?

Figuring out the what - how and when your characters/story will meet/happen. What if.

Need to know what the protag is going to learn along the way, the ‘aha’ moment.

Have a clear view of the world as your protag sees it - where and why that world view is off base- and how she interpreted, and reacts to, everything that happens to her. So, you can construct a plot that forces her to reevaluate what she was so sure was true when the story began.

**CHAPTER 5 CHECKPOINT:**

Do you know why your story begins when it does? What’s the time clock & what’s forcing the protag to take action?

Have you uncovered the roots of your protag’s specific fears and desires? Do you know what their inner issue is?

Have you made your characters reveal their deepest, darkest, secrets to you?

When writing character bios, are you being specific enough?

Do you know where the story is going?

**Chapter 6 - The Story is in the Specifics**

Sensory details should only be used to convey necessary information to the character/plot.

-if it’s part of a cause and effect trajectory that relates to the plot

-it gives insight into the character

-it’s a metaphor (for the how they view the world/situation/etc)

“Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.”

Description of scenery needs to set the story’s tone.

The description of a room needs to reveal something about the person who lives in it, or hint at the whereabouts of a missing diamond, or tells us something crucial about the community, etc.

**CHAPTER 6 CHECKPOINT:**

Have you translated every ‘generic’ into a ‘specific’?

Have the specifics gone missing in any of the usual places?

Can your reader see what, specifically, your metaphors correlate to in the ‘real world’, grasp their meaning, and picture them, when reading at a clip.

Do all the ‘sensory details’ (tastes, feels, looks like) have an actual story reason to be there beyond ‘just because’?

**Chapter 7 - Courting Conflict, the Agent of Change**

‘All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy, for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter into another.’ - Anatole France.

Story is about change, which results from unavoidable conflict. It’s a battle between fear and desire. Comfort vs change.

The protag is caught between 2 forces of ‘vs’. What they believe is true vs what’s actually true. What protag wants vs has. Protag vs herself. Fear vs goal (external, internal or both). Protag vs a tag.

Will your protag have to face her biggest fear, and so resolve her inner issue, to achieve said goal? If not, that’s a false goal.

When overcoming an obstacle it’s important the protag put up a good fight. The protag is only as strong as the antag forces her to be.

Don’t make your big reveal at the end be via convenience, contrivance, or coincidence. Add little hints along the way. Because if the reader doesn’t know intrigue is afoot, then there is no intrigue afoot.

**CHAPTER 7 CHECKPOINT:**

Have you made sure that the basis of future conflict is sprouting, beginning on page one?

Have you established the ‘versus’ so that the reader is aware of the specific rock and hard place the protagonist is wedged between?

Does the conflict force the protag to take action, whether it’s to rationalize it away or actually change?

Have you made sure the story gains something by withholding specific facts for a big reveal later?

Once the reveal is known, will everything that happened up to that point still make sense in light of this new information? It has to make sense without the reveal, but make even more sense with it.

**Chapter 8 - Cause and Effect**

Our brains follow an ‘if this, then that’ process. A story follows a cause and effect trajectory from start to finish.

Life and story are driven by emotion, but they’re ordered by logic.

If-then-therefore ——- action-reaction-decision

No matter how much something catches you off guard, nothing ever really occurs out of the blue.

Plot-wise cause and effect plays out on the surface level, as one effect logistically triggers the next. (The plot = External events)

Story-wise cause and effect plays out on a deeper level—that of meaning. (Protag’s internal struggle = the story)

The WHY is the cause, the WHAT is the effect.

There’s an external and internal cause and effect.

\*Myth: Show, Don’t Tell is literal - Don’t tell me John is sad, show him crying.

\*Reality: Show, Don’t Tell is figurative - Don’t tell me John is sad, show my WHY he’s sad.

Show a character’s train of thought, internalization.

Competing desires, fears, and therefore choices.

Every action has a cause and consequence.

Every scene must:

-In some way be caused by the ‘decision’ made in the scene that preceded it

-Move the story forward via the characters’ reaction to what is happening

-Make the scene that follows it inevitable

-Provide insight into the characters that enables us to grasp the motive behind their actions.

You can ask yourself these questions for cause and effect:

-Does this scene impart a crucial piece of information, without which some future scene won’t make sense?

-Does it have a clear cause the reader can see (even if the ‘real reason’ it happened will be revealed later?

-Does it provide insight into why the characters acted as they did?

-Does it raise the reader’s expectation of specific, imminent action?

Ask yourself - if I cut it out, would anything that happens afterward change?

Does it pass the ‘and so?’ Test. What’s the point? How does it further the story? What consequence does it lead to?

**CHAPTER 8 CHECKPOINT:**

Does your story follow a cause-and-effect trajectory beginning on page one, so that each scene is triggered by the one preceding it?

Does everything in your story’s cause-and-effect trajectory revolve around the protagonists’ quest (the story question)?

Are your story’s external events (the plot) spurred by the protagonist’s evolving internal cause-and-effect trajectory?

When your protagonist makes a decision, is it always clear how she arrived at it, especially when she’s changing her mind about something?

Does each scene follow the action, reaction, decision pattern?

Can you answer the ‘And *so*?’ To everything in the story?

**Chapter 9 - What Can Go Wrong, Must Go Wrong, & Then Some**

A story’s job is to put the protag through tests that, even in her wildest dreams, she doesn’t think she can pass.

Eleven Do’s and Don’ts for undermining your characters’ best-laid plans:

1. Don’t let your characters admit to anything they aren’t forced to, even to themselves.
2. Do allow your protag to have secrets-but not to keep them.
3. Do ensure that everything the protag does to remedy the situation only makes it worse.
4. Do make sure everything that can go wrong does.
5. Do let your characters start out risking a dollar but end up betting the farm.
6. Don’t forget that there is no such thing as a free lunch - unless of course, it’s poisoned.
7. Do encourage your characters to lie.
8. Do bring in the threat of a clear, present, and escalating danger - not a vague facsimile thereof.
9. Do make sure your villain has a good side.
10. Do expose your characters’ flaws, demons, and insecurities.
11. Do expose your demons. - this is where the reader thinks, ‘me too, I thought I was the only one!’

**CHAPTER 9 CHECKPOINT:**

Has everything that can go wrong indeed gone wrong?

Have you exposed your protagonist's deepest secrets and most guarded flaws?

Does your protagonist earn everything she gets, and pay for everything she loses?

Does everything your protagonist does to make the situation better actually make it worse?

Is the force of opposition personified, present, and active?

**Chapter 10 - The Road From Setup to Payoff**

The setup is more than the status-quo before the inciting incident, it’s where you lay hints about a person that’ll come back later and make everything make sense. Like if they speak another language that’s helpful later, etc. OR WHY what’s going to happen is a good thing, or a thing that’ll help achieve the protag’s goal/need.

Readers always look for patterns - to your reader, everything is either a setup, a payoff, or the road in between.

3 Rules of the Road:

1. There must actually BE a road. - need to connect the dots.
2. The reader must be able to see the road unfold. - needs to happen on the page, not told
3. The intended payoff must not be patently impossible.

**CHAPTER 10 CHECKPOINT:**

Are there any inadvertent setups lurking in your story?

Is there a clear series of events-a pattern-that begins with the setup and culminates in the payoff?

Do the ‘dots’ build?

Is the payoff of each of your setups logistically possible?

**Chapter 11 - Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch**

Foreshadowing, flashbacks, and subplots must instantly give readers insight into what’s happening in the main storyline, even if the meaning shifts as the story unfolds.

Memories guide us, our decisions, and shape our future.

Zero in on the heart of the story, and take out the real-life distractions that don’t affect it, and weave in relevant elements.

When you need to slow pacing from the main conflict, turn to a subplot that’ll give further insight into the main plot. All subplots must merge into and affect the main storyline, literally or metaphorically.

Subplots layer the story, and also have an arc/ending.

Subplots can:

1. Supply information that affects what’s happening in the main storyline.
2. Make the protag’s quest that much harder.
3. Tell us something that deepens our understanding of the protag.

Flashbacks:

1. If without the information, what happens next won’t make sense. Thus, there is a specific need or cause that triggers the flashback.
2. The cause needs to be clear why we’re going into it. We must have a good sense of why we need this info now. As it unfolds, we always need to sense how it relates to the story that’s been put on hold.
3. When it ends, the info it provided must immediately and necessarily affect how we see the story from that point on. It needs to give us info without which what’s about to happen wouldn’t quite make sense. But it could also give us info for significance we won’t learn til later.

Foreshadowing:

We need to know they have the ability to do something, that fear, etc, so it makes sense later when it’s needed.

Give your characters a believable reason for everything they do, every reaction they have, every word they say, and every memory that suddenly pops into their head and changes how they see everything. This is what subplots, foreshadowing, and flashbacks come in.

**CHAPTER 11 CHECKPOINT:**

Do all your subplots affect the protagonist, either externally or internally, as he struggles with the story question? - don’t add ones just for fun.

When you leap into a subplot or flashback, can the reader sense why it was necessary at that very moment?

When returning to the main storyline, will your reader see things with new eyes from that moment on?

When the protagonist does something out of character, has it been foreshadowed?

Have you given your reader enough information to understand what’s happening, so that nothing a character does or says leaves her wondering whether she missed something?

**Chapter 12 - The Writer’s Brain on Story**

How does the writer’s brain fit into the equation?

There's no writing; there’s only rewriting.

The first draft is identifying the underlying story you’re trying to tell.

It’s hard to address every trouble spot in a draft. When you correct one thing, it snowballs into other things.

Double check your characters - is what your character does in a scene make sense given what he or she believes is true? What does each character believe is going on? What’s actually going on? Where are their contradictions in perspectives/beliefs? Given what they believe is true, how would they act/react in a scene?

Starter Feedback:

1. What do you think is going to happen next?
2. Who do you think the important characters are?
3. What do you think the characters want?
4. What, if anything, leaps out as a setup?
5. What info did you think was really important?
6. What info were you dying to know?
7. What do you find confusing?