

HOW TO FIX A SAGGING MIDDLE

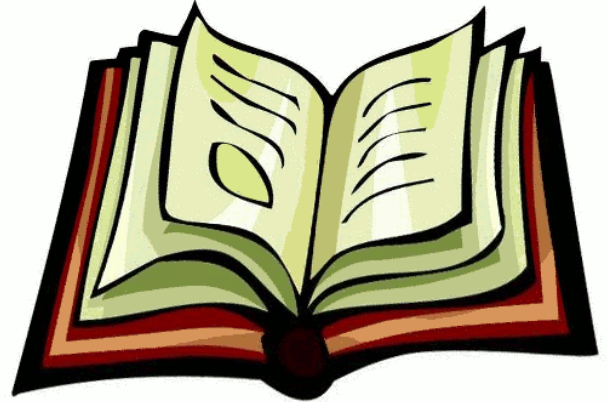
RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF YOUR STORY SLOWDOWN

It has happened to all of us - struck by that brilliant story idea, vividly imagining its attention-grabbing, mind-blowing opening, its emotion-charged beginning, having already jumped to the satisfying conclusion, the happy ending you cannot wait to get started. You sit down in front of your computer and pound away, blazing through the first few chapters, captivated, engrossed...and then something happens. The action is slowing down, and the characters are starting to drift aimlessly, to lose their focus. Much as you hate to admit it, the story is starting to get a little, well a little boring. Now you are not quite as eager to reenter that world you created so happily, and you are starting to see a blank screen in front of you instead of an inviting, waiting canvas. What happened? You have become a victim of the Sagging Middle.

The Signs of a Sagging Middle:

Your story has lost its focus – if you read something you’ve written and ask yourself “What’s the point? And the answer is there is none, you probably need to take it out because it is not adding anything to the story.

Nothing is happening –there is too much description, for example, or there are a lot of facts strung together, maybe the hero/heroine have been apart too long, or have yet to get together, or someone or a subplot is getting too much play – the story is all over the place but is going nowhere.



The premise is starting to sound farfetched - to move things along you start to make your characters say or take actions that do not make sense or are illogical or not something that character would do.

You do not know what to do next. The question “now what?” comes to mind and you have no idea.

Fixing the Sagging Middle

The good news is – all is not lost. There are ways to breathe life back into your story, to rekindle your enthusiasm, to write something that grabs your reader’s attention from page one and does not let go until they read “the end” on the final page. Try any one or all these methods to restart that creative engine.

Create a story outline – it’s easier to get from the beginning to the end with a map that details where you are going and how to get there. Instead of asking yourself “now what?” ask yourself, “and then what happens? And then what happens?” Write it down – it doesn’t have to be elaborate, or it can be as detailed as you want it to be. For example:

Story Outline

Young princess is called into her mother’s presence (and then what happens?)

Mother tells daughter her father the King will be calling for her to announce her impending marriage (and then what happens)

Marriage preparations begin, the princess leaves home to begin the long journey to where her affianced husband awaits (and then?)

The princess arrives after a long sea voyage, to the second part of her journey across the desert (and then?)

Bored stiff the princess does something impetuous that almost has disastrous consequences (and then?)

She is rescued in the nick of time, meets the love of her life and forms a bond of friendship that will last a lifetime (and then what?)

You get the idea?



The image shows a 'Story Outline' form with the following sections:

- Plot**
 - Who is the main character and why does he/she exist?
 - What is the main conflict?
 - What is the main obstacle of the story?
 - What is the main goal & sub-goals?
- Characters**
 - Protagonist: Heroic Mysterious What Could Be
 - Antagonist: Villainous Greedy Corrupt
- World Setting**
 - Where? Fantasy Historical Modern
 - When? Past Present Future
 - What is the tone? Serious Humorous Dark
 - What is the genre? Action Adventure Drama Mystery Romance Sci-Fi Thriller
- Plot Points**
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
- Notes**
 -

Do your research – a story is more vibrant if the characters and their surroundings are comfortable with one another. Basing a story in ancient times? Be sure you know the basics about those times – what they ate, drank, wore, where they lived, etc. One way to get past the writing doldrums is to spend some time researching interesting facts related to your story and finding a seamless way to introduce them adding interest and depth.

Keep the conflict coming – nothing fixes a sagging middle like a little turmoil tossed in.

Finally, make sure everything you write moves the story forward – we are all anxious to reach that spectacular ending, but want to savor the time and the challenges and hardships and laughter and tears it took to get us there.

But whatever you do:
DON'T GIVE UP!!!

