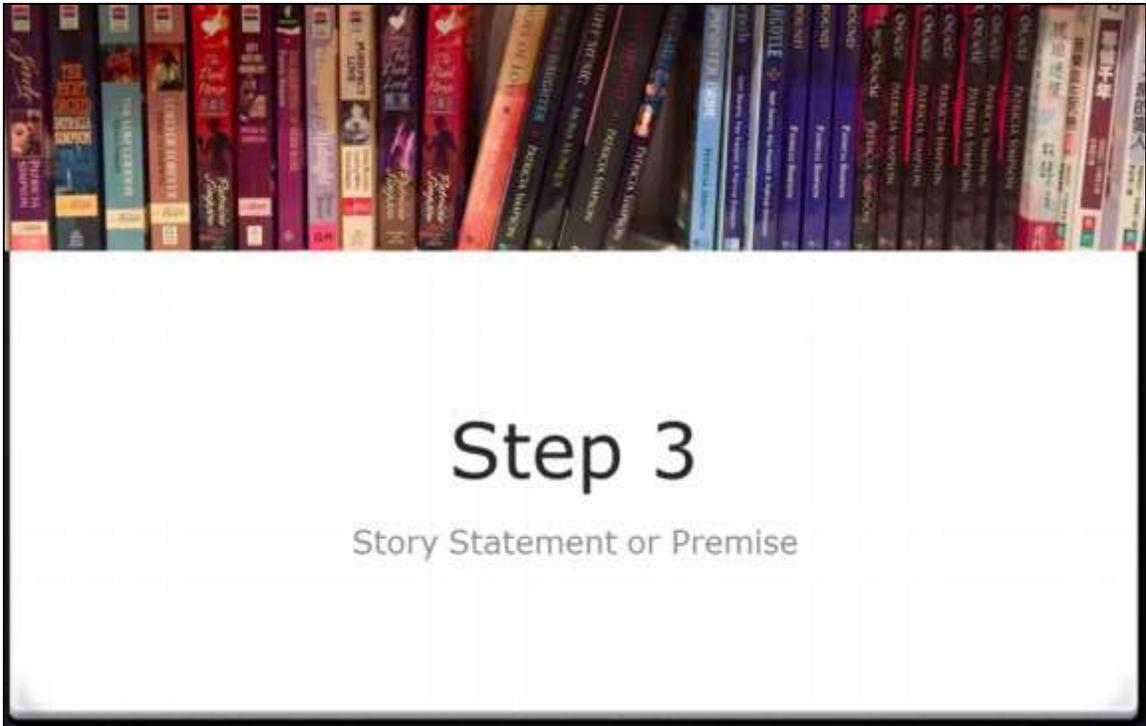




Welcome back to Start a Book in 5 Easy Steps.

I'm Patricia Simpson.



Step 3 in starting a book is coming up with your story statement, also known as the premise of your novel. This is the backbone of your story and is equally as important as the main issue of your book.

Goals of this lesson...

- Define premise.
- Explore the premise of famous movies.
- Learn to use premise to create conflict.



In this lesson, we'll...

Define premise or story statement.

Explore the story statements of some well-known movies.

Learn to use the story statement to create conflict between characters.

Story Statement: Definition

- A statement you want to make about an issue.
- Statement will prove or disprove a theory about the issue.
- One sentence.
- NOT: goal, logline or plot summary.

So what is a story statement?

The premise is a statement you want to make about the issue you developed in Step 2.

This statement will prove or disprove a theory about the issue.

It should be one sentence.

It is NOT a goal, logline or plot summary.

Story Statement: Example

- Two hearts are better than one.
- Love conquers all.
- No man is an island.
- Immigration enriches a country.

Here are some examples of story statement:

Two hearts are better than one.

Love conquers all.

No man is an island.

Immigration enriches a country.

Premise is NOT Plot

Q: What's your story about?

A: Issue. And in my story, the heroine learns that Story statement.

Many young writers confuse story statement with plot. When I ask, what is the premise of your book, they tell me, "My book is about my grandfather who lived in North Dakota and was kicked in the head by a horse and blinded. But even though he was blind, he became one of the richest wheat farmers in the state."

That isn't a premise. That's a plot. In fact, the next time someone asks you what your story is about, tell them what your ISSUE is first:

"So, what's your book about?"

"It's about injustice." Or "It's about immigration."

See what kind of reaction you get. I'll bet the person you are talking to will be interested enough to want to learn more.

They'll say, "Immigration? What stance do you take on immigration?"

BINGO! We are getting into the story statement or premise.

You could then reply: “Immigration enriches a country.” OR “Immigration threatens a country.”—whatever it is that you want to express about this issue by the end of your story.

See how to weave issue into premise?

Cool Writer Math

Young Writer:

Plot + Characters = My Book

Seasoned Writer:

Issue + Premise + Characters + Conflict = Great Book

The concept of premise was the most difficult thing I had to wrap my head around when I was a young writer. I thought if I had a plot idea and some good characters, I was set. But noooo. There's much more to writing a satisfying book. A veteran writer knows that a great book requires many more elements. A great book requires an overall issue, a premise, characters who are struggling with the issue and conflict between characters because of the issue. If you have those elements, you are well on your way to writing a great book. In fact, it will almost write itself!

Premise Practice

Let's practice a bit so you get this concept clear in your mind. After the lesson on Issue, this should be easy! Match the premise on the left with its story on the right.



The screenshot shows a quiz interface with a light gray background. On the left, there is a white box containing instructions: "Match a premise to its fallacy name by dragging the word into place." Below this are three rows of text, each with a blank line for a fallacy name. To the right of this box, the title "Premise Matching" is displayed in bold. Below the title, it says "Quiz - 1 question" in a smaller, italicized font. At the bottom right of the interface, the text "Last Modified: May 17, 2017 at 08:17 PM" is visible.

Premise: Romeo and Juliet



It's funny—when I was creating this lesson, I planned to include Romeo and Juliet as an example of premise because everyone knows the story of Romeo and Juliet. But when I tried to think of what that play's premise was, I was stumped.

Shakespeare includes a lot of issues in Romeo and Juliet, (warring families, forbidden love, pride, old guard vs new guard) but he never actually says anything about how he feels in regard to these issues. He merely presents them and ends the play with the famous death twist.

When we get to the end, we walk away with a big question mark. Did we learn anything from the play? What was Shakespeare trying to say, exactly? Love conquers all? No. Love didn't conquer anything. Everyone died.

So I googled this play, and guess what? This play is considered to be the work of an immature Shakespeare. He hadn't quite honed his writing chops when he wrote Romeo and Juliet. He didn't have anything to say. He was simply creating conflict and trying to evoke a reaction in the audience with worry and surprise. Guess what? That's not good enough for us.

Premise: Issue to Ending

- What's your issue?
 - What is the last line of your book?
 - This will clue you in to what to focus on in your book.
 - Write toward the last line.
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Belonging | • Home. She was finally home. |
| Injustice | • Free at last. |
| Dissatisfaction | • There's no place like home. |

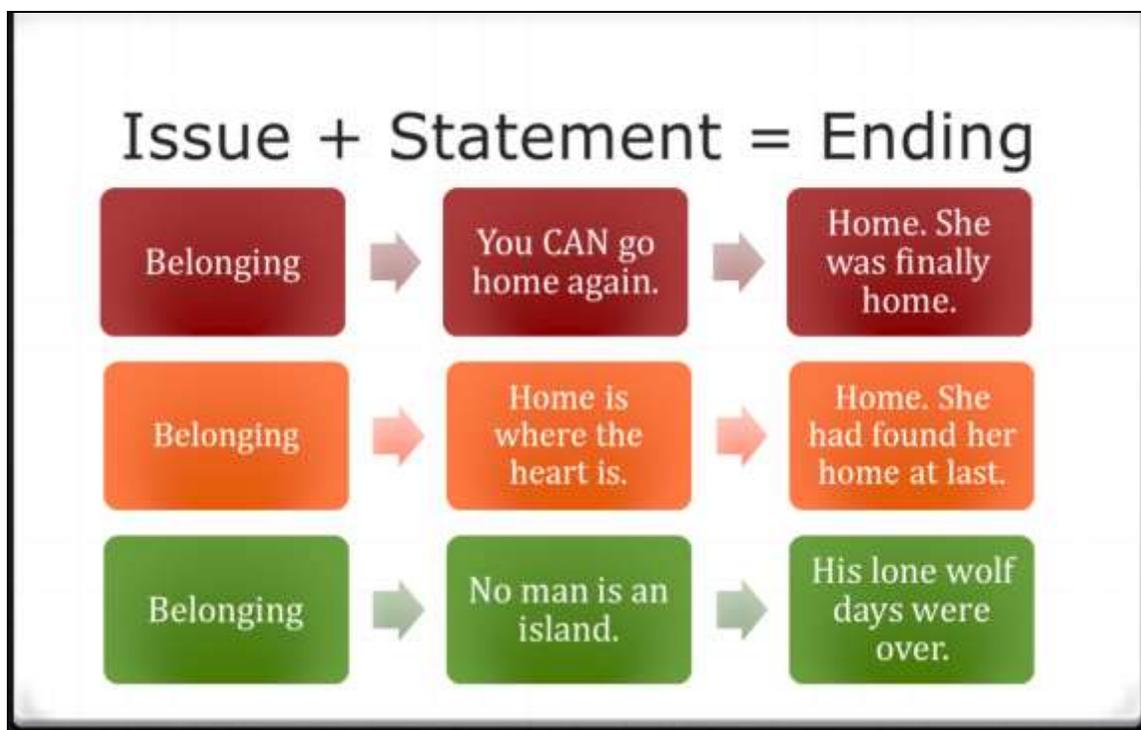
Here's an easy way to know what your story statement is and what you are really writing about. Take your issue and write the last line of your book. This will clue you in to what you should say about the issue. This will be your premise.

For instance, if your issue centers around belonging, your last line might be: "Home. She was finally home."

If you are writing about injustice, your last line might be: "Free at last."

If your issue is dissatisfaction, your last line might be: "There's no place like home."

So we know the issue and ending of these three examples. But where's the premise or story statement?



Here are three examples of a single issue with three different story statements that fire three different endings.

The issue is belonging. At the end of your book, you want the main character to recognize that they are finally home. So you want to state that yes, Virginia, you CAN go home again. That's your story statement. Some people might disagree with you and say that once a person leaves their hometown and sees the world, they are changed forever and can't really go home again. But you don't believe that in your heart of hearts. Do you? And you want to prove it by writing a book. Excellent!

In the second example, the heroine finds a home at last, but it isn't the one she expects. In this story, home ends up being a state of mind, not a physical place. So your story statement might be Home is where the heart is. Same issue as the first example, but a very different story statement.

The last example of a premise for the belonging issue is No Man is an Island. At the end of the book you want the hero to realize that life is better when he's part of a team, and that what he accomplishes is done only by cooperating with someone else or caring for someone else. So your story statement would

be no man is an island. You believe that life shouldn't be lived alone, and you want to write a book about it. Good!

See how the same issue can have three different story statements? And three ways of exploring that statement?



Again, you are NOT writing about a plot. You are writing about an issue. Your main character will be striving to get to the last line of your book, and that line will be the most important thing he or she thinks about during the entire story!

Characters think about premise ALL THE TIME.



All through the story, your main character will be thinking about the story statement, and usually in exactly the opposite way the story ends.



For instance in the example where the hero is a lone wolf, he will go through the entire book believing he works best alone. But we have a character he's going to meet that thinks exactly the opposite way! And what do we have????

Conflict

Yeah, baby, yeah!

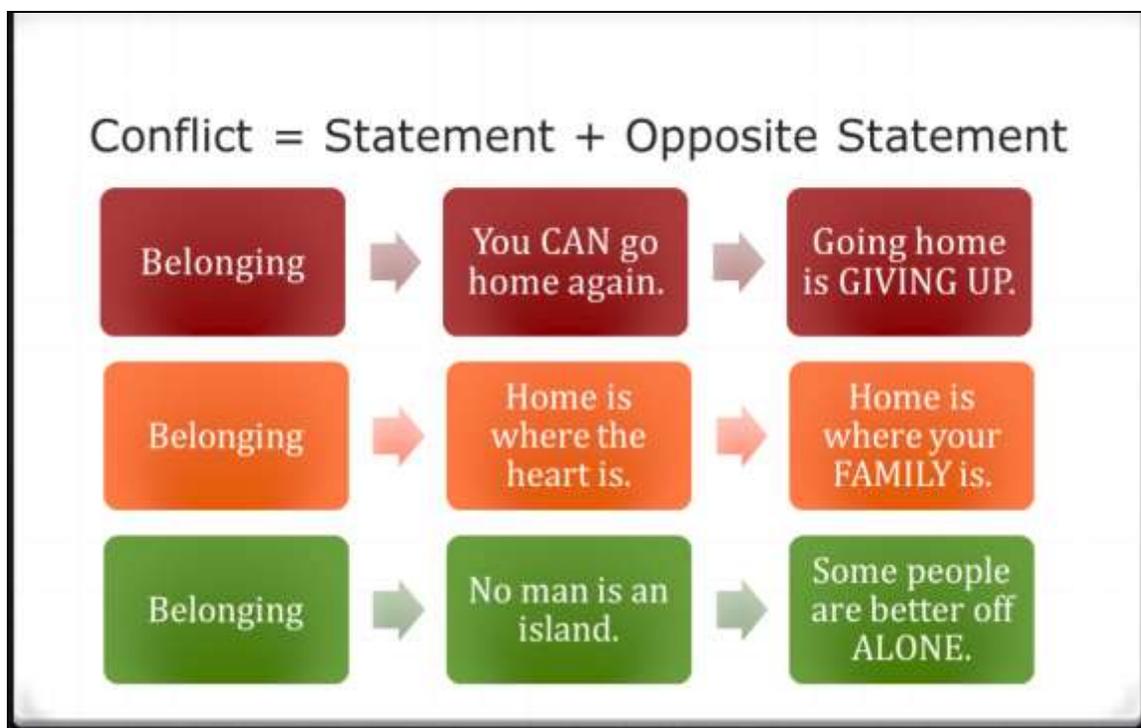


Conflict.

The stuff of easy writing. The stuff that makes our fingers fly and our juices flow!

Conflict is produced by one character thinking the story statement is TRUE and another character thinking the story statement is FALSE.

If you don't get what I mean, think of that friend or relative who always plays the devil's advocate. When you say something, they always say "Na-uh!" That's the kind of interaction we want. Conflict of interest. Different feelings about the issue at hand. A different take on the story statement.



Let's revisit our three examples of Belonging.

The story statement you will be exploring is the concept that you CAN go home again. But the antagonist will cross their arms and tell your protagonist that going home means giving up.

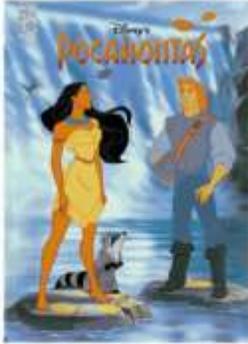
When the story statement is Home is where the heart is, the antagonist will retort that home is where family is.

If the story statement is no man is an island, the antagonist will respond that SOME people are better off alone. And they will believe it until the end of the book.

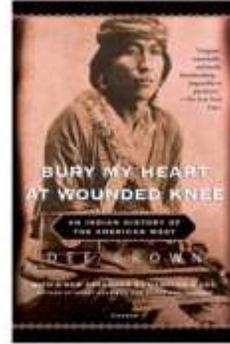
Do you see how easy conflict and characters are created if you know your issue and your story statement?

Premise Example

Immigration enriches



Immigration destroys



Going back to the issue of immigration allows us to see two different premises. In the animated film Pocahontas, you will see a young lady trying her hardest to convince her people to accept a different culture. Read Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee and find out how immigration affected Native Americans.

What statement will you prove or disprove at the end of your book? Immigration is good? Immigration is bad? Or are there many facets of immigration that you are passionate about? You have to say something with your story. I can't stress it enough.

Case Study

Case Study: "My pony is about a third owner who goes to Montana to run a ranch."

True or False: This is the premise of the book.

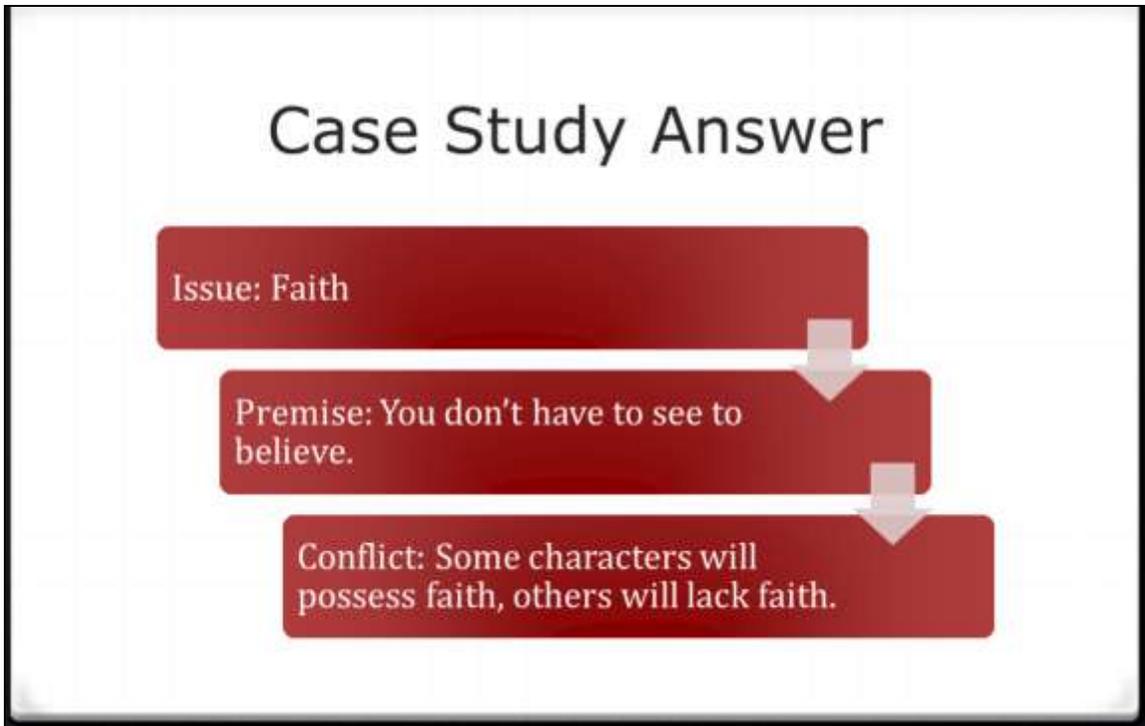
True

False

Issue Question

Quiz - 3 questions

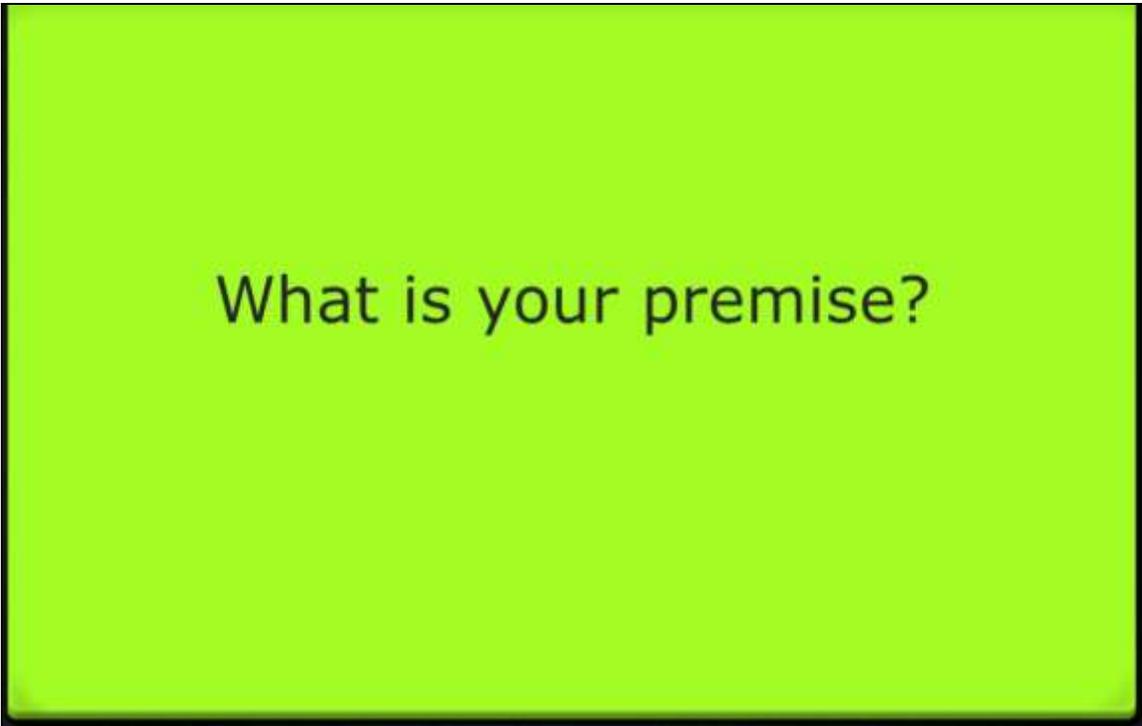
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So if the premise is “You don’t have to see to believe”...

The issue the author will be writing about is Faith. This author will be writing a story about faith and should design characters who have faith and characters who lack faith. The main character will have an epiphany about faith that they express in the final sentence of the novel.

See where this is going?



What is your premise?

Take some time now to practice what we have covered so far. Type in your book idea in the spaces provided. See if you can come up with a clear path for your idea.

Start with the issue you are writing about.

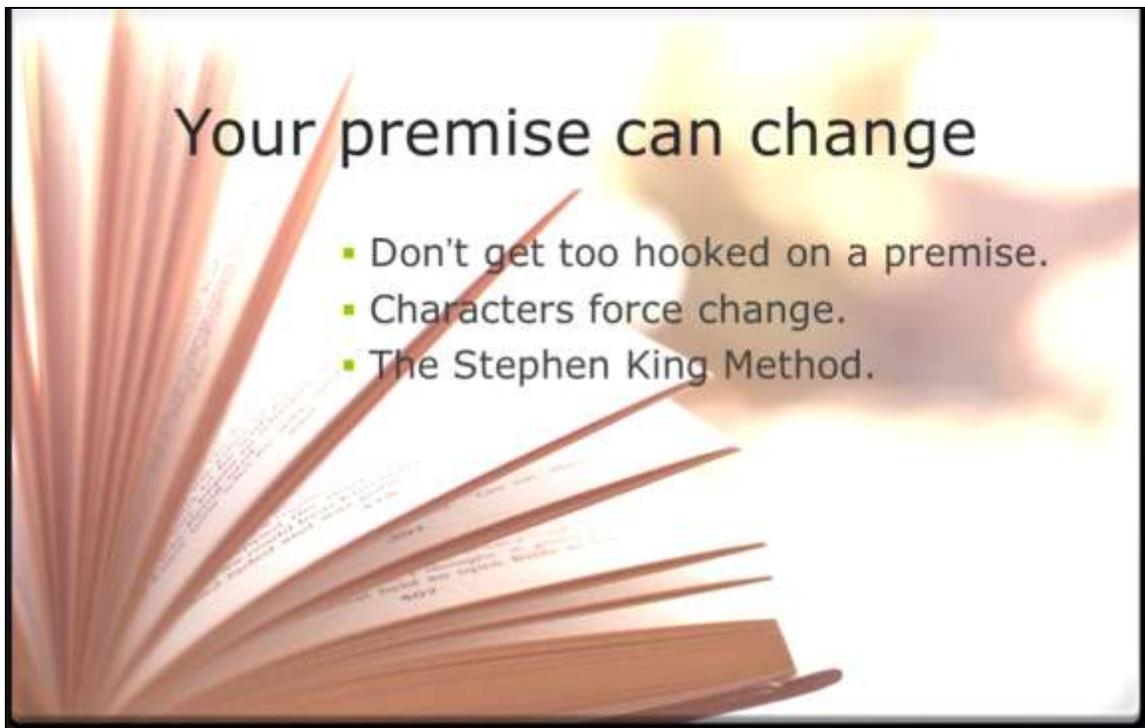
Next, type in your premise or story statement. What you want to prove or disprove by the end of your book?

Then, in the voice of your main character, type in the last line of your book.

Voila! You know where you and your protagonist are headed!



The image shows a screenshot of a quiz interface. On the left, there is a white box with the text "What is the book you will be writing about?" and a "Description" label below it. To the right of this box, the main title "What is your premise" is displayed in bold. Below the title, it says "Quiz - 3 questions" and "Last Modified: Jun 01, 2017 at 06:29 AM". The entire content is set against a light gray background.



And now that I've gone on and on about issue and premise, I'm going to contradict myself.

You can have the best plan in mind when you start writing your book. But after four or five chapters, your characters start taking you down a completely different path. That's okay. It happens. When characters go somewhere of their own accord, you should let them.

Stephen King says that when he finishes a novel, he puts it in a drawer for a few months. And when he takes it out and reads the whole thing with fresh eyes, it is only then when he truly realizes what he was talking about—what the premise was. And THEN he goes back and tweaks scenes and dialog to strengthen his premise.

But if you know how to look at your book idea with issue and premise in mind, you will be off to a good start!

