

Plotting vs. Pantsing vs. ???

Stan C. Smith – WoW Meeting

Plotting: Refers to sitting down and planning out your plot—that is, the surface events in your story—step-by-step, so you know exactly what’s going to happen from the get go.

For some authors it might also include detailed character development, world-building, and other details.

Pantsing Refers to sitting down and writing by the seat of your pants, letting it all pour out to see where your creativity takes you. The idea is that if you write forward, the story will appear.

This may or may not start with creating detailed character development, world-building, and other details.

IMPORTANT QUESTION: Are you writing the way you write because it is simply a habit? Is it *really* the best approach for you?

I would like to suggest that we all approach this as if our own methods are merely habits that can be broken in order to replace them with what *really* works best for us.

There is no right way! There is only what is right for you (which is why the above question is so important)

Stephen King is (famously) a pantsier. He says he likes to put characters in a stressful situation and see what story emerges. He seems to have done quite well with his approach.

James Patterson is (also famously) a plotter. His outlines are extensive and read like little stories themselves. He also seems to have done quite well with his approach.

As you can imagine, the idea that there are just these two approaches is *myth*. It is actually a spectrum, with everything in between, and with every author doing both when the need arises.

The difference, if there is one, lies not in the **‘how’**, but in the **‘when’**.

Plotters are pantsing, but they do the pantsing **in advance** and/or **as they go**.

Pantsiers are plotting, but they do it **as they go**, or **after**.

Lisa Cron suggests there is a THIRD approach (rail) to consider:

(<https://writerunboxed.com/2014/03/13/what-both-pantsing-and-plotting-miss-the-real-story>)

“Think of your *protagonist’s internal struggle* as your story’s third rail – the live wire that gives meaning and juice to everything. Which means that everything that happens in the plot must in some way “touch” it – causing the protagonist to grapple with it as she makes sense of what’s happening, and decides what to do as a result.”

In other words, approach your story from the viewpoint of your protagonist (his or her past experiences, goals, internal struggles, etc.).

*Learn what approaches other authors use. Then ask yourself: Am I using the approach that **really** works best for me? Is it possible I could write better stories? Or write faster?*