

**Plot Beforehand or Write by the Seat of Your Pants?
Or: Are you a Plotter or a Pantser?**

Susan Alice Bickford

Basics: Plotting

Detailed planning of world-building, pacing, character development before actual drafts. Actual tools and techniques vary.

- **Pros:** Known roadmap, consistent pacing, fewer structural issues, avoiding plot holes, avoiding writer's block. Find fun and enjoyment earlier in the planning process.
- **Cons:** Time-consuming, stifling creative, organic development.
- **Famous plotters:** J.K. Rowling, John Grisham, James Patterson, Dan Brown, Brandon Sanderson

Basics: Pantsing

Write by the "seat of their pants" with only a basic concept, character or plot in mind. Discover the story, character motivations while writing. Let the plot and pacing evolve organically.

- **Pros:** Spontaneity, creativity, surprises. Faster time to complete first drafts.
- **Cons:** The saggy middle, plot holes, pacing, consistency issues. May require more editing
- **Famous pantsers:** Stephen King, Margaret Atwood, George R.R. Martin, Neil Gaiman

Personal Choice: They Both Work

Feature	Plotting	Pantsing
Preparation	Longer	Shorter
Flexibility	Lower (once set)	High
Pacing	Planned	Unpredictable
Revisions	Lower	High

Fun Challenges

- If you find an author whose style you love: find out which approach they use!
- Find a writer's organization or group in your genre and share!

Both: Organic / Blended / Plottsing / Plantsing

- More structure / a roadmap needed
- Define basic structure and pacing while retaining flexibility and exploration
- Allows for character-driven choices and similar unexpected developments / inspirations
- Can still lead to problematic middles, dead ends, and pacing

Techniques and Tools

- Manual Methods:
 - Notebooks
 - Postit Notes
 - Whiteboards
 - Colored pens
- Basic composition and tracking documents
 - Word
 - Excel / spreadsheets

Traditional Tools and Apps (Google)

- Scrivner (Best for Organization)
- Plottr (Best for Visual Outlining)
- Campfire (Best for Worldbuilding)
- Manuskript (Free Alternative)
- Beemgee (Best for Story Structure)
- Notion & OneNote (Versatile, general-purpose organizational tools)
- Obsidian (Best for Linking Ideas)

Also:

- Kill the Cat

AI: The Elephant in the Room

- Many negative opinions using for creative work
- Some companies have stolen work to train AI engines
- There may be restrictions from publishers about using AI
- Is plotting help / review different from written version?
- Sudowrite
- NovelCrafter
- ChatGPT/Claude/Gemini
- Squibler
- Marlowe

Thank you!

- Susan Alice Bickford
- susanalicebickford.com
- sabickford@susanalicebickford.com /
susan.bickford@gmail.com