**STORY OUTLINE TEMPLATE**

Regardless of whether you’re outlining a non-fiction story (i.e. memoir) or work of fiction, the simplest outline framework is based on writing a synopsis of each scene. For example:

*Chapter Ten*

*Joanna sits on the roof of her farmhouse with a shotgun slung across her lap. Below, a sheep carcass hangs from the old pear tree. Her two children hide inside, where she has boarded up the windows and barricaded the door. Joanna wonders what Tom would think of her plan, if he was still alive. She has killed one of their last animals and called the wolf to them. This could be her biggest mistake so far. But they can’t live in fear any longer. If no one else can kill the beast, she will. Joanna’s eyes are drooping when she finally spots a shadow in the tree line. She’s lining up her gun sight when she hears a shout below, and a window breaking. Her daughter cries out for her. The farm is on fire!*

A few things to note:

* The summary above covers the external action and internal insights. Outlines need to illustrate the emotional journey (character development) as much as the physical one (plot points).
* Some details, like the fact Joanna’s eyes are drooping, are relevant because they indicate a lot of time has passed. But we haven’t included the yellow of the wolf’s eyes, or the lines of dialogue Joanna shares with her daughter. These aren’t needed at a structural stage.

**OPTIONAL ADDITIONS**

**Character Profiles**

In addition to scene synopses, you might want to include character profiles. For example:

***Joanna (Protagonist)***

***Description:*** *A widow and single mother, doing her best to raise two children in rural, 1850s Colorado.*

***Backstory:*** *She was born a young, wealthy socialite. When her parents arranged a marriage with a powerful older man, she ran away and fell in love with a pioneer in the mountains. She found it hard to adapt to country life, but her husband made it bearable. When he died and left her with two young children, she had to learn to survive from one day to the next.*

***Dream:*** *To see her family happy, healthy and safe, and know her late husband would be proud. To prove to her parents and herself that she was strong enough to make it on her own.*

***Strength:*** *She’s strong, courageous, and indefatigable. Her love for her children drives her forward.*

***Fear:*** *That her parents were right: she is too weak and selfish to survive on her own. Her impulsive independence will hurt those she loves.*

***Secret:*** *When she had a fever, her husband went into the snow to get help. He never returned. Her weakness caused his death. She has too much pride to ask her parents for help, but also carries a deep shame for robbing her children of the privilege she enjoyed growing up.*

***Weakness:*** *Her guilt and shame drive her to dangerous lengths and stop her from asking for help. She wants to protect those around her, but if she doesn’t learn to forgive herself, she could make a fatal mistake.*

**Significant Plot Beats**

Some writers like to include specific references to key turning points or progressions in the story. These vary across memoir versus fiction, but can include the following:

* Inciting incident: The event that kickstarts the story and drives the character to action. In the example above, it might be when the wolf kills Joanna’s flock of sheep in a single night, driving them towards poverty.

* Black moment scene: This is when all the protagonist’s greatest fears (internal and external) are realized, and all appears to be lost.
* Climax: When the character must face up to their greatest fears and overcome them.
* Resolution: When the world has been returned to rights, and our character’s dreams have been realized.

**A Timeline**

If you have a dual timeline narrative, or complex plot, you might wish to include a relevant list of dates.

**Readership Insights**

A brief overview of the novel’s genre and your target readership can help an assessor determine if the style and content of the story will meet market expectations. For example: *The Wolf* is an adult suspense novel, that could also be classified as historical women’s fiction. Some might describe it as *Little House on the Prairie* meets Stephen King.