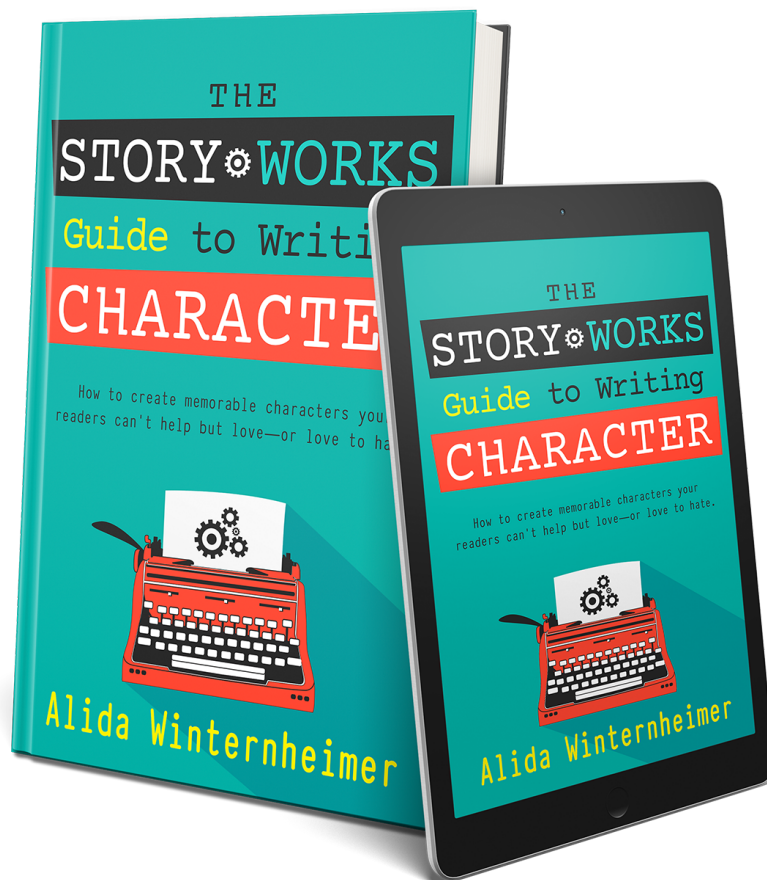


Thank you for joining Story Works!



May your protagonist always be active!

KEEP YOUR PROTAGONIST IN THE GAME

WITH THE

ACTIVE PROTAGONIST AGENCY TREE

Do you have a passive protagonist?

Does stuff keep happening to her? Or happening around her?

Or do you have an active protagonist?

Is she making choices, taking charge, and directing her fate?

How can you be certain your main character is an active protagonist?

Give her agency.

The Active Protagonist

A passive protagonist is not engaged with her fate, which means she doesn't drive the story. If her choices don't affect the plot, if the story could go along just fine without her, she's not special enough to wear the crown of the main character.

To fix this problem, give your main character the agency she needs to drive your story forward to its exciting climax.

Agency is all about making choices, taking action, and facing the consequences of that action.

Every active protagonist is a free agent: free to make her own choices, free to screw up, free to shape her own destiny.

The Agency Tree

To ensure your main character is an active protagonist, fill in this simple diagram of possible choices and consequences for every plot point through your story--or at least for the plot points that cause you any hesitation over your character's agency.

Use the Agency Tree as a brain storming tool to discover the strongest course of action for your character and your plot.

Use the Agency Tree to make sure your protagonist is being given choices and is making decisions that keep the stakes and tension rising.

Keeping Your Protagonist in the Game with The Agency Tree

Read from bottom to top, moving up the tree's trunk toward the climax at the top.

Each black square presents your protagonist with a situation she must respond to; that is, she must choose her next move.

Each colored square offers a choice your protagonist could make. Consider each option and decide which of them is the most interesting, plot-advancing, stakes-raising choice she can make. Advance that option on the Agency Tree.

NOTES:

Each time your protagonist chooses to act, the story is advanced. The best choice is the one that most dramatically ups the stakes and tension.

Each choice has the potential to take the story in a new direction.

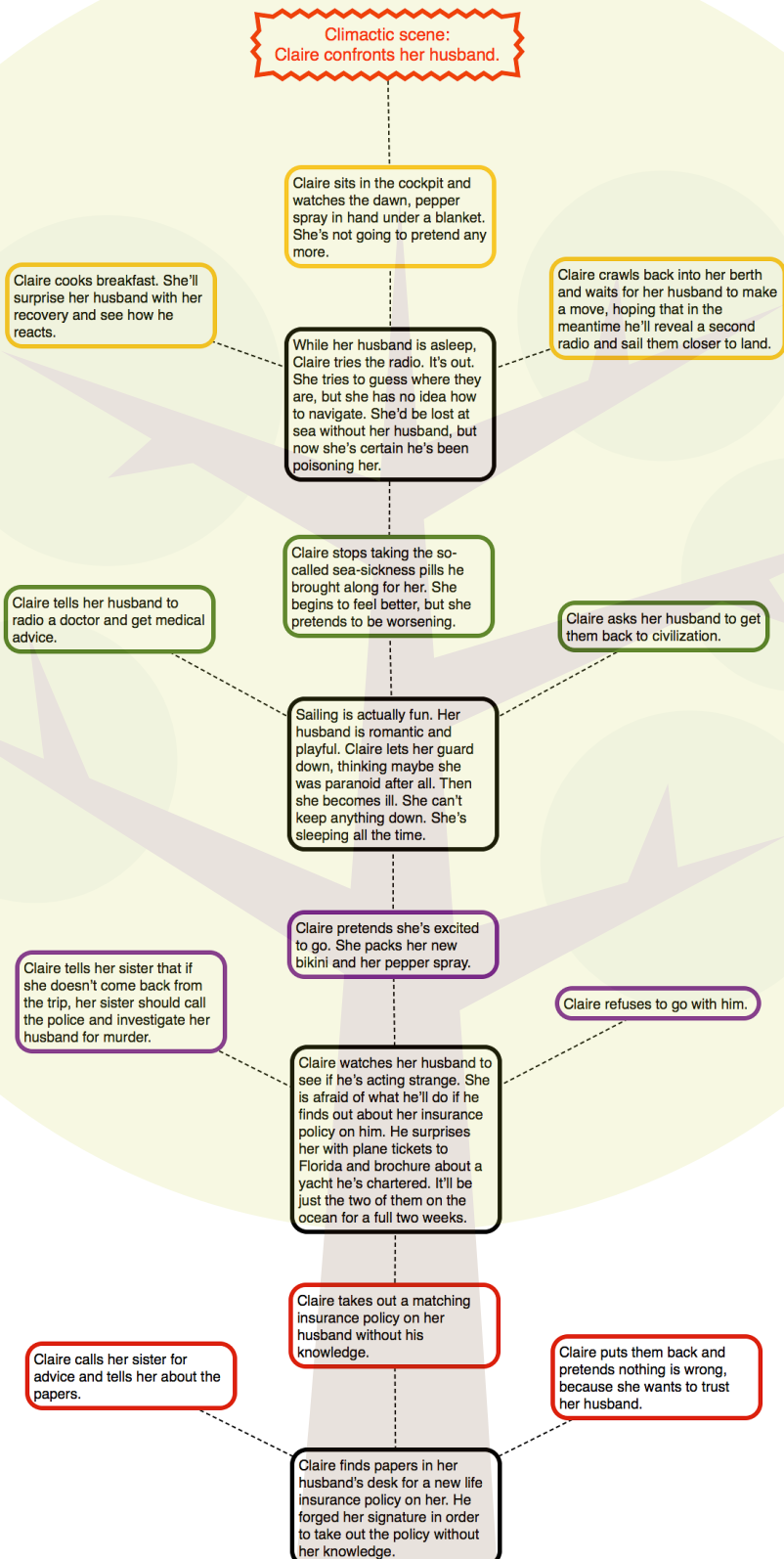
Any time your protagonist asks for outside help that could slow the action, it slows the plot and lowers the stakes.

Any time your protagonist waits to see what will happen, she is being a passive protagonist, and the plot slows.

A key component of agency is the protagonist shifting her approach from defense to offense. Give your protagonist the opportunity to make that shift.

In your story, you will have all the knowledge you need to ensure you, the character, and the reader see the progression of action as inevitable within this story. Your protagonist's choices should align with her motivation.

Naturally, it might be best for a character to do a combination of possible actions. Claire might tell her sister to get the police involved if she doesn't come home and pack her pepper spray with her bikini.



Keeping Your Protagonist in the Game with The Agency Tree

Read from bottom to top, moving up the tree's trunk toward the climax at the top.

Each black square presents your protagonist with a situation she must respond to; that is, she must choose her next move.

Each colored square offers a choice your protagonist could make. Consider each option and decide which of them is the most interesting, plot-advancing, stakes-raising choice she can make. Advance that option in the Agency Tree.

NOTES:

Each time your protagonist chooses to act, the story is advanced. The best choice is the one that most dramatically ups the stakes and tension.

Each choice has the potential to take the story in a new direction.

Any time your protagonist asks for outside help that could reduce her agency, it lowers the stakes.

Any time your protagonist waits to see what will happen, she is being a passive protagonist, and the plot slows.

A key component of agency is the protagonist shifting her approach from defense to offense. Give your protagonist the opportunity to make that shift.

In your story, you will have all the knowledge you need to ensure you, the character, and the reader see the progression of action as inevitable within this story. Your protagonist's choices should align with her motivation.

It may be best for your protagonist to choose some combination of possibilities. Make sure the main choice she acts on is the one that advances the story toward its climax in the most impactful way possible.

