

# The Life Gets In The Way Syndrome (LGITWS)

Do you have the Life Gets In the Way Syndrome (LGITWS)?

The first sign is when all kinds of self-doubt appear: This will never work; nobody will read this; this is a lousy idea.

But the story idea keeps you up at night and sometimes you dream about it and maybe a few characters pop into mind as you are showering. Or maybe when you hit the pillow at night, the characters rap you on the shoulder and you start having a few words with them.

A few months later, you jot down some ideas on a napkin while you're at a café. You search the internet and see if anyone has already "worked" your idea. Then you do the laundry or wash the dishes or go to your day job. Your story sits, like a gift unopened, for another few months or years.

You go back to your story and either throw it away, delete it from your Dumb Story Ideas file, or...You say, "Hey! This is fantastic! I still like this and I love my characters." Then you pick the kids up or go out to dinner or maybe you get sick or someone you know is sick and needs attention. Or maybe you are in the military and get called to action; maybe you get fired from your job...So many maybes, so much time...Things to do and places to go... So you shelve the story for another few months or years.

To overcome the LGITWS, find your **writer's voice** in addition to coming up with your **story idea**. When you are sitting in the café, write down your favorite movies or novels. When you get home, add this list to all your other lists. After a few months or years of the LGITWS, make a master list. Then check

out genre on the internet. Take each movie or novel on your list and match it to the genre you think it is. Take some time and look up the movie on [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) and see if your “genre guess” matches how the film was marketed. Then do a cross-check list for yourself and make columns and see which genres are your favorite.

Now ask yourself: WHY do these genres *speak* to me? And then ask yourself what values were most prevalent in these films and novels? And then ask yourself: WHY do these values *speak* to me?

So, the next time you get the LGITWS, go to your favorite movies/novels/genres/values list. Then have a little talk with your characters, who have been waiting for you to get over the LGITWS so they can be completed! They’ve been very patient with you. It’s time to sit down and put your characters first and push the LGITWS away...Even for a few minutes. Let your characters out of the bag. It’s time...

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## How Do I Start to Write?

**1) Decide on your genre.** Think about genres that really speak to you, that move you deeply.

Is this an historical epic? Are your characters real or fictional? Is this a drama? A political thriller? An action/adventure? Is this a mix of romance and comedy? Drama and historical epic? Science fiction mixed with Drama and Mythology?

**2) Where did your story originate?** Are you the sole author? Is it a derivative work based on other material, such as a book, magazine article, short story? Is the derivative work public record? If not, you have to acquire rights of the living person to write the story.

Maybe this was an event that occurred that you now want to write about. Maybe you “read about this person” and always wanted to write a story, incorporating this person’s story, but fictionalizing it.

Maybe you lived in the arena you want to write about—Journalism, tennis, ballet, medicine, education, the oil industry, the legal profession, politics, art, music. This is good. But if you did not live in the arena you want to write about, you need to start doing research about the arena. As you get deeper and deeper into the research, you will be amazed how inspired you will become. New ideas and perspectives will reveal themselves. You will become knowledgeable and feel that you have the depth to write a story that is believable and “grabs” your audience!

**3) Story values within your story idea – Come up with a main character who has those values.**

**What draws you to that story?** What does the story reveal about the human condition? Your main character has psychological needs and moral needs – What are they? What happened to him/her that caused this character to have these needs? What flaws does this character have as a result of his/her psychological/moral make-up? All of this moral structure value

system for your story will give it spine and a theme, and the moral structure value system of your main character will play out in the climax. So it's important to devote some time to this in the very beginning!

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## What the Protagonist Thinks He Believes

**Desire is the motive energy behind all action.**

When doing a character bio the trickiest thing to do is to create an area of misunderstanding or misguided belief in your protagonist, (the one who changes the most) and in your antagonists (the characters who obstruct, impede, challenge, love, hate, and generally impact the protagonist.) It means you have to know the difference between what they actually need, and what they believe they need.

If a character is motivated to act because he is "barking up the wrong tree," then this will cause him to act, but soon he will realize that the antagonist blocking him from getting what he wants is precisely why he must re-evaluate what it is he wants. If he can get closer to that core truth about what he really wants, then the action will be ramped up a notch. The desire will increase to obsessive desire. This is where audiences witness character change through story. The ramped up desire also increases narrative drive, which in turn increases conflict. This "barking up the wrong tree" is the basis of all desire in your characters, and desire is the motive energy behind all action.

The main character will also think: What will happen if he doesn't get what he wants???

In books (and to a much greater extent in movies) the protagonist's obsessive drive is wanting something more than we do. In our lives we make compromises. We usually follow the path of least resistance because we can't endure the conflict. We generally want easy lives. In stories, characters want stuff so badly that they actually go about getting it, doing whatever it takes to get it, in ways we probably wouldn't.

If a protagonist doesn't want something badly enough, he or she won't do anything about trying to get it, and then there won't be any story!!

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## An Artist With Words

Practice having eyes in the back of your head; use your imagination! Show, don't tell! The following exercises will help you with your description and your scenes. Practice writing the scenes in the first person and in the third person\*(see NOTE below).

**SHOW, DON'T TELL.**

How would you “picture write” the following scenes:

1. You are drunk.
2. You are abandoned.
3. You arrive at a foreign airport.
4. A policeman stops you for speeding.
5. You witness/are in an accident.

**Hint: Describe the surroundings, the weather, your clothes, etc. Position every object/person/animal/bird/reptile, etc. around yourself. “Action” yourself with verbs, such as jump, hop, crawl, slide, slither, enter, slump, crumble, skip, climb, run, limp, sprint, etc.**

### **HAVE EYES IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD**

**Take the following scenes, and describe other scenes that occurred at the same exact time.** 1. You are drunk. A bank is robbed. A dog runs down the street. 2. You are abandoned. A car races down the street. Firemen put out a blaze. 3. You arrive at a foreign airport. A man bumps into you. 4. A policeman stops you for speeding. You faint in the driver’s seat. 5. You witness/are in an accident. A helicopter lands on top of a building. An earthquake tremor cracks the sidewalk where you are standing.

\*NOTE: If you are writing a novel in the first person, the “I,” then this is a limited view of the world because the person writing the story cannot get into the minds of the other characters and you, the author, have that same limitation. The “I” person can get information and report it, but the “I” person is always limited: “My best friend told me she didn’t want to see me anymore because her mother didn’t want her to be around someone like me. Imagine that!” But the “I” point of view can really get into the mind of the character, which can be very revealing to the reader.

If you are writing a novel or a screenplay in the third person, the "he, she, or they," then this is an omniscient view of the world. You, the writer, can get into the lives and motivations of the protagonist, all the sub-plots, the point-of-view character, and all the other characters. You, the writer, can describe three different scenes, all occurring concurrently: The protagonist, or main character can be struggling with a car accident. But at the same time, you, the writer, can cut to the main character's house where his girlfriend is eating a sandwich and drinking from a bottle of Scotch; the teenage daughter is in her room with headphones on, rocking to some music; the main antagonist is driving away from the scene of the car accident (a hit and run).

Depending upon the genre of your story, you might prefer to use the first person or narrator approach or the third person omniscient approach. Sometimes, you might want a mystery narrator who is not revealed until the end of the story.