

Meet me in the middle –

Sometimes we come up with a fantastic story we can't figure out how to fill that space between the catchy opening lines and the awesome ending. Don't even think about “phoning in” the second act! A compelling start and a strong finish aren't enough to carry an entire story. Think of your work like a meal. The opening pages are the appetizer that whet the reader's appetite and prepares them for the journey you're about to take them on. The ending serves as the dessert by concluding the experience on a rich, rewarding note. The middle is where the substance comes in. This is the part of the story that fills the reader's metaphorical stomach and provides the true value of the experience. Think about a favorite book and how you dreaded the conclusion because you didn't want the journey to end. See what I mean?

Adding, not padding –

Adding to the middle of a story isn't about adding arbitrary content just to puff up your word count. Padding is never a good idea, and some stories are best left as short fiction or put aside for later use as a subplot in a larger work. Sometimes it is necessary to increase the word count of a story (usually for publication purposes.) In these cases, you have to make sure you're adding words that also add value to the overall work. Running down the page adding adjectives and extra dialogue will do nothing to please your readers! What's the best way to add to the middle? The same way it's best to add anything to a story...through conflict!

How to use this toolkit –

Unlike most traditional prompts, these tools aren't meant to get you writing or inspire you to fill a blank page. These tools are designed to enrich your work-in-progress by adding depth, fleshing out ideas and sharpening the impact of your story.

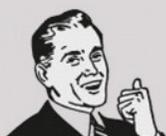
Your tools –

- What's your protagonist trying to accomplish in this story? Make a list of the absolute worst things that can go wrong and get in the way of that goal. Write out these scenarios and see what your protagonist would do to overcome them. Now, take the most interesting of these ideas and use it (or them!) Easy right? Sort of. Make sure you incorporate this new part of the journey into the rest of the book. It has to flow naturally into and through the work. You can't have certain events existing in a vacuum because you added them in a rewrite!
- Thus far, your story has followed the road that you created for it. What happens if you close that road at some point in the middle and force a detour? Where do your characters go instead? What do they learn while they're there?
- At some point in your story, your protagonist was on the brink of a breakdown. Maybe they were so mad they could burst. Maybe they were about to give up and they didn't. Change that. Make them go into a rage. Make them give up. How does that change the story? How will you get them back on track so they can reach the end?
- What's something that can happen to anyone? A common problem or hang up will do nicely. Partway into your story, make it happen to your protagonist. Having a flat tire or being turned

down for a date might seem like small event in a bigger story, but these types of everyday occurrences can have many consequences. Even better, they do actually happen. Including the mundane brings a story to life.

- Pick a secondary character that you really enjoy. If he had his own story, what would it be about? Determine his conflict and his desires. Come up with five ways to complicate the conflict or throw obstacles between him and his goals. Weave this into the story.
- Find a spot in the story where your POV character is idly waiting or standing around. What are some details about the environment that only that character would notice? Add this, and note the impact that it has on how your character feels. Make it into a personal moment. Add that, too! This sort of interlude fills pages, helps to immerse the reader and adds depth to the character.
- Choose a point at the middle of your story and look at it from your protagonist's point of view. What's the one thing that you don't want to happen? It could be massive or relatively trivial. Make it happen. How does your protagonist react?
- It's the middle of the story and your protagonist has one wish. What would they wish for? Give it to them in the story. Now make that gift work against them. How was it disappointing or misleading? How did it set the character back?
- Do any of your secondary characters have conflict with each other despite a common goal? Why not? Find a point that two of them can't agree on and add it. Make them argue about it. Create tension. How can it resolve by the end of the story? Does it resolve at all?
- Is there a romantic element to your story? Examine the characters that fall in love and make their romance forbidden. Why is their love taboo? What stands in the way? Add this conflict to the story and deepen their bond while adding obstacles. Do they succeed in the end?
- Pick a weak scene in your story. Is there a secondary character involved who needs a bit more depth? Have him talk about the environment. Has he been there before? Did something great or something terrible happen to him there? The way he relates to his memories of the place reveals much about the character. Have him discuss these feelings with the protagonist. How does this new information change the way the protagonist handles the scene?
- Add another secret to your story and give the reader a new layer to enjoy. Plant hints of this secret through the story and reveal it early. You don't have to wait for the ending to offer up surprises! How does this new revelation change things? Add that as well.

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