

HOW TO AVOID PLOT HOLES

Ever made a recipe devoid of key ingredients? Picture it. Your dinner guests force a swallow, mangle cheeks discreetly, then flash you a toothless smile. The minute you turn your back, they reach for their napkins and expulse. Your meal tasted awful and everyone seated knew it. That's what a novel with plot holes is like—a recipe lacking key ingredients.

In fiction, a plot hole is an error in the story due to poor logic. What is poor logic? It is logic that is unbelievable. It is logic that does not make sense. It is logic that is based on cheap tricks. And such logic leads to plots with impossible events and statements; or to events that contradict earlier events in the storyline.

Plot holes arise when you write your novel without a sensible plan, when you let inspiration alone drive your writing instead of inspiration paired with a good dose of planning. That's right. I like to call it pinspiration and it's often what unripen manuscripts suffer from in early drafts. A development editor with a sharp eye can catch and flag these for you—which is why you should hire one you trust and view that person as a partner, as an asset to your story's success. While certain genres require or allow for suspension of disbelief (such as action, comedy, fantasy, and horror), continuity in fiction is key.

Does your manuscript have plot holes? If so, let me ask you this: From start to finish, how much time have you spent “thinking” about your plot? Five minutes? Fifty-five minutes? Five hours?

Consider this: It took J.K. Rowling five years to finish the first book and to plot out the remaining six. In fact, in an interview with South West News in 2000, Miss Rowling said *Goblet of Fire* is so long because she realized partway through writing it that there was “a big hole in the middle of the plot and I had to go back and unpick and redo.” This from a billionaire author? You bet. Because every great author, famous or not, must write a novel with good logic. From Du Maurier to Le Carre', the best novelists are those who spend a great deal of time “thinking.”

So, here's an exercise for you:

- Take out a sheet of paper
- Draw two squares roughly two inches apart— Box 1 and Box 2
- Draw a line between the two boxes; treat each box as a chapter

Your challenge: Write a sentence to explain how Box 1 is related to Box 2. Then do this for every chapter in your novel, in as many variations or combinations as you need. Time-consuming? You bet, but it's better to iron out your wrinkles now than watch your readers do it for you on Goodreads or whisper behind your back when you leave the table.

Plot holes are problematic. But so is lazy writing. Edit wisely and remember: “A great writer is nothing but a fabulously persistent thinker.” – Linette Allen, *The Page Reader*