

Create a Story Bible for Your Novel or Book Series

~ Zara West ~

<http://www.zarawestsuspense.com>

LESSON 1 WHAT IS A STORY BIBLE?

The term **story bible** (also known as a show bible, universe bible, series bible, or simply "bible") comes from the television industry, although "bibles" are also used in movie and video game production.

In this course, I purposely choose "Story Bible" over "Series Bible", because even stand-alone novels benefit from having one.

HOW THEY CAME ABOUT

It is quite common in TV series to have multiple or sequential screen writers. The story bible is a way of making sure every writer has the same information available from past episodes in an organized format.

The information recorded keeps everyone on track and makes sure there are no inconsistencies. A new writer to a series will usually be given the story bible to use in writing their script.

Trivia Fact: TV series often have a person on staff who knows many of the details relating to the show. They are sometimes called a "walking bible."

Visit the website TV Tropes if you would like to see some TV series story bibles. They provide quite a few examples along with a wonderful mix of TV and movie trivia.

(<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/UniverseBible>)

You can even download the original Series Bible for *Batman*. Here is the link. It is fun reading. At the beginning they describe Batman's character. Do you think there is enough detail there so anyone writing for the series would be able to use that description in creating an episode?

<https://comicsastonish.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/btas-series-bible.pdf>

BUT I'M A NOVELIST? WHY DO I NEED ONE?

A novel or a novel series can be just as detailed and complex as a TV series, so it makes sense for writers to take a tip from our screenwriting buddies and to invest in making our own story bibles.

Here are what two authors say:

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“A series ‘bible’, for those not familiar with the term, is a reference document that contains everything *about* a series (book or TV) except for the actual text/content. Think of it as *meta-content*.” [Karen Myers](#)

<http://hollowlands.com/2014/09/creating-a-book-series-bible-using-scrivener-scapple-and-aeon-timeline/>

“Something that all writers (should) do is to keep a “bible” for your book/series (even more important in the case of a series) in order to keep up with all the trivial—and not-so-trivial—details going on.” [Kaye Dacus](#)

<https://kayedacus.com/2013/10/08/nanowrimo-prep-creating-a-story-bible-step-1-pick-your-poison-or-software/>

But I’m writing a stand-alone.

Even a single novel is full of specific facts and details that must remain consistent over the length of the story. Eye color. Handedness. The name of the local pub. And you never know. Maybe that stand-alone will spawn a series. That’s what’s happened to me and so many other writers.

TAKE A PEEK

Story bibles can take many different shapes. Let’s look at how some writers have approached this task. Check out these videos of several well-known authors sharing their “story bibles.”

Let’s start with J. K. Rowling’s File Box System. Looks a bit messy and inefficient. But at least she has it. Imagine if she was relying totally on memory when writing the Harry Potter books! To you save time - she shows her story materials in the 2nd half about at the 2.33 mark

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDhtJU7uLrQ>

Now let’s look at an opposite approach – all neat and tidy. Here is Kami Garcia’s Story Bible.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UXCMGjvSU>

And for a little over-the-top elegance - Burgess Taylor’s Bound Leather Writer’s Book

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOxIwIQnVOE>

WHAT’S BEST FOR ME?

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You will notice that these authors do not all do exactly the same thing by a long shot. One fact to remember about a story bible is that it is **YOURS**. You can design it any way you want. What is important is that it has to work for **YOU**, and it has to be organized in a way that provides **YOU** with the information you need when you need it, in the way you need it.

In this course, I will be showing you a whole range of options. I have tried most of them, and I will share what I see as pros and cons. If you see a tool or format that is familiar, I encourage you to chime in with your opinions. There are no right or wrong answers in this course. We can all learn from each other.

BE CREATIVE

A story bible is a creative document just as much as your novel is. If you are a visual person you may be more attracted to formats that allow you to draw and create graphics and collect clippings. If you are an outliner, you may prefer a color-coded formal filing system. If you are eclectic, you might want to combine two or three or four different approaches into your own amazing resource.

Whatever the format, making the story bible should be a fun project. If you love color, use it. If you are into sticky notes and stickers, add them. If you like labels and clips, index cards and file folders, here's your chance to play. If you are a computer freak and hate paper, there's plenty of fun digital playgrounds for you too.

But wherever you choose, if you are finding the process becomes a chore, it may be that you have not chosen the right methodology for you or your novel. Remember: A story bible doesn't have to be fancy. The most important thing is that it works and has all the information you need right there at the flick of your finger.

SUMMARY

The term story bible comes from the TV industry.

Story bibles are any methodology you use to organize the facts and details in your writing.

Keeping a story bible is essential when writing a series, but extremely helpful for stand-alones too.

There are a multitude of ways to create and to organize your story bible.

In the following lessons, we will investigate a wide variety of organizational methods and materials that you can combine into your own version of a story bible. Somewhere along the way, I hope you find the one or ones that work perfectly for you.

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Who knows? Perhaps someday, you will showing your story bible in a *YouTube* video.

Questions? Thoughts? Hit the post link at the bottom of your email and send them my way.

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