

My Brainstorming Process

I was asked to talk about brainstorming and so here I go. This should be quick and not as detailed as my other stuff as I'm just using the questions they sent me and going more in depth.

Disclaimer. When you're figuring out your brainstorming process there's different ways to go about it. Some people like to do the brainstorming bubbles and write everything out in detail. Some people like to write everything and just get it all out before going back through, that is actually a legit way to brainstorm. You could also do idea mapping where you end up exploring the different relationships and connections. You can even mix the processes together. There is no one way to brainstorm. There's effective ways and ways that work with you but **you** have to experiment.

The thing is, not to experiment every time. Find what's good for you and stick to it, improve it but that's it, don't constantly experiment or you'll find yourself stuck in this process more than the writing.

How would you describe your brainstorming process?

Chaotic. All over the place. Horrible.

Alright, being serious now. I have two ways of brainstorming. On one hand I have the written brainstorm portion. One notebook for each story and it's basically where the roughest ideas go. I use notebooks to help get ideas off my head immediately and then argue with myself. So my notebooks end up being pages filled with just vomit information that most of the time make no coherent sense.

My other way is the computer brainstorming part aka my builder template. My builder template took me a few months, maybe even close to a year to get it right where I want it. It's pretty simple, different sections that just allow me to build on it. So, for example my summary builder is just the section where I'll have tons of summaries and can mix and match and change them up. It's simple yet helpful. The

important part is to not delete. Strikethrough or make another note changing it but don't delete.

But do you have to?

Simple answer, yes. I don't know any successful writer who doesn't. If you meet someone who says, "I don't brainstorm I just write and let the story take me." They're either lying for cool points that don't exist or they literally do just that and the story is a mess. I'm not kidding. Brainstorming is fundamental which is why I said earlier that you should figure out what works best for you and perfect it. Brainstorming is how you get rid of the plot holes and how you get consistency with characters, plot, twists, etc.

How long do you brainstorm?

As long as I need to. I'm still going back to the drawing board with *Insight* and *For the Crown*. The difference is that you shouldn't be doing complete rewrites everytime. At most there should be edits and revisions but nothing that just completely redo the story. Though, that's not a bad thing but that does mean you have to go back to the drawing board.

Is brainstorming for an IF different than a novel? And what do you suggest?

Yes. For an IF you need to brainstorm far more. Anyone who tells you that an IF is easier to write than a novel is lying to you or is ignorant as they haven't tried to write both. A novel has a main character, an antagonist, and supporters. That main character's behavior is fixed, their flaws are fixed, and the ending is fixed. This means that the author envisions what's going to happen and that's what happens. Everything is just that, a story that someone wants to tell.

An IF, if done with the reader in mind, is a story that should feel unique to the reader and the author wishes to tell multiple stories with a common plot. Done right I shouldn't have the exact same story as my friend who's also playing. Can that happen? Yes. You can make an IF that has choices but make it to where they don't

really change anything. That's totally fine ... just don't advertise your story as a "choices make a difference" because ... no it doesn't.

I suggest first getting the basics written down. Your basic plot, characters, themes, and if it will have romance. IF games change a lot based on romance because that means an entirely new side of a character's behavior and actions, variables, endings, etc. If you're not good at writing romance then don't write it. Simple as that. The only thing that can hurt your game more than not having romance is having it and it being horrible. A good game can be without romance, and if you want it to be story centric then it's better to not include.

After the basics, write some things up and figure out variables. I actually suggest doing a Six Structure Sheet or Hero's Journey, if you can't fill it out (notice I said fill and not complete, you can always go back and tweak) then you don't need to be diving in head first just yet.

How do you avoid plot holes and other issues?

Writing circle. If you're a writer and don't have a writer's circle then ... I don't know what to tell you lol. Join groups and try to find some but just know that you need other people to look at your work. Just your eyes won't do anything because you will miss things. YOU WILL!

Also, when they give you critique ... putting this nicely, shut up. Omg that sounded horrible. But I'm serious. One of the first things we learned in creative writing classes is that you mess up when you try to argue or defend what you do when someone is giving a critique. When our work is being critiqued we aren't allowed to speak unless the person critiquing is asking us a question that needs an answer. This is to make sure you listen and take notes. If you don't want to go off that advice then don't, but no need to get defensive.

Any other tips?

Keep writing and don't let the brainstorming process take you out of the story. It's needed, it's like the study part of the test but it's needed. There's nothing wrong with

going to write and then coming back later, letting your brain mess with a few ideas before cementing them. Do that. Do what works for you. Do fun little character sheets and quizzes or worldbuild when your brain isn't as creative and is more analytical. (My brain actually does this. Whenever it goes right-side brain I just fool around with code and piss my beta testers off with ideas like Timed Passages.)

But that's it and all I can think of and hopefully this helps!