Sometimes the hardest part of writing a short story or novel is figuring out how and where you want your story to go. There are several ideas to think about when putting together a longer piece of fiction. Preparing a story outline is one of the strategies available that can help you organize your story into its many different parts.

Here are a couple of outlining techniques you can use when arranging your story. You can choose one or a combination of any of the ideas that may be beneficial to you:

**Story Boards**

Story boards are visual representations of the sequence of your story using panels. You can be as creative or generic as you want in terms of how they look and what they include. There are several ways to create story boards, including:

- **PowerPoint or Prezi**: You can use presentation programs to create a general layout of your story so that each slide or point acts as one panel for a specific facet of it.
- **Notecards or flash cards**: You can use cards to write or print different panels of your short story or novel and organize them on magnetic dry erase boards or cork boards.
- **Good old fashion notebooks or printed pages**: The old fashion method of writing or printing pages out and arranging them on a flat and open surface has been a trusted staple of writers for years.

**Diagrams**

Similar to story boards, diagrams are a great visual tool to see all the portions of your story as one whole piece. You can use the SmartArt or Chart functions in Microsoft Word to create diagrams for your stories. There are also diagraming apps available for Macs and PCs depending on what you choose.

**Software Programs**

We do not endorse any particular software program other than the basic use of Microsoft Office because it is available to the TCC community on campus.
However, certain apps and websites may offer you additional support in creating an outline for your story. Below is a small list of what is available, but please know that you can find an app or a website that works best for you:

- **Microsoft Word** - It is a program that is accessible and if you need to work on the nuts and bolts of your story, this is the readily available option.
- **www.storyboardthat.com** - It is a website that offers a free version of their basic storyboard software. It helps to organize your writing in visual components that you can move and change as needed.
- **Scrivener** (available through your preferred carriers for apps. Please note that this is software that you will have to purchase in order to use it and is more suitable for longer works of writing like novels, essays or memoirs.) Scrivener compiles storyboarding, chapter outlining, character synopses, and word processing all into one program. In order to save your story into software for your Mac or PC, you will need to convert your files into PDF format.

Now that you have chosen a technique to plan your story, there are several components that you want to think about before you begin the real work of writing it all out. Here are some points that can help you create a basic outline:

**Write a Basic Summary of Your Story.**

What is your story about? First, summarize what your writing is about in one sentence. Second, summarize your story in one paragraph. Use both the one-sentence summary and the paragraph summary as the foundation for your story development. Always keep them in mind as you are writing so that you can remember to maintain focus. You also want to keep your summary in mind when you are talking to others about your progress.

**How Many Sections/Chapters of Your Story are You Planning to Have?**

This may be a tough one to decide on, but you may want to think about how many parts your story will have. Some stories, depending on whether you are writing a shorter or longer piece of fiction (or even non-fiction), have sections and a number of chapters in each section. What is the best way to divide your writing into manageable portions? For shorter works, you may want to consider numbering sections while for longer ones, you may want to consider numbering chapters. If you decide to name them, you can simply go back to the corresponding numbers.
What is the Major Conflict of the Story?

The conflict of the story is your writing's centerpiece. Choosing an issue, problem, battle, fight, incident, accident, mistake, tragedy, transaction, or crisis will help the plot of your story move from beginning to end. Conflict helps all the parts of your writing make sense. Decide what the struggle is and who or what is on each side. Conflict often works best if you include an internal struggle and an external struggle for your characters in your story.

How Will the Major Conflict be Resolved in the Story?

How do you bring some sort of resolution to the conflict? How do your characters handle the conflict? Which characters move to solve the conflict, leave it as is, attempt to run away from the conflict, or try to ignore it altogether? What happens and how does the conflict affect each character?

How Will You End the Story?

What is the lasting impression you want to remain with your audience? Do you want the conflict completely resolved, or do you want the conflict partially resolved to perhaps continue in another story? The ending is just as important as the beginning because when your audience reaches the last line of your story, you want them to finish a satisfying reading experience. Leave your readers thinking about your writing long after they have completed it! By creating a story outline, it will aid in keeping you organized throughout your writing adventure from start to finish.