StoryDB

What StoryDB is - Click on icon above

- [Introduction to help](#)
- [Overview](#)
- [Getting Around](#)

Forms
- [Story](#)
- [Character](#)
- [Relationship](#)
- [Scene](#)

Menu options
- [Generating a screenplay](#)
- [Author info](#)

Miscellaneous
- [References](#)
- [Bug fixes and updates](#)
- [Writing stories that aren't screenplays](#)
- [Example](#)

Writing stories that aren't screenplays

This application is called StoryDB because the emphasis is more on story development than screenplay development per se.   There are definitely some things that are geared toward screenplays, but you can still use this application for development for other story formats, such as novels.   You can even use the scene concept in different ways if you want, where scene is really a chapter or whatever breakdown you want.   Just because the application calls it a scene doesn't mean you have to!   The main thing to remember is not to use tabs in your "scene" text, since that is what the application uses to detect character dialogue and to handle the formatting accordingly.   If you avoid tabs, you can just choose generate screenplay and it will give you an unformatted document.   You may want to change the page numbering, margins, and title page, to better suit your format, though.   Feel free to send in a request for features that you would like in order to support your other format/s (see <u>Bug fixes and update</u>s)).

Bug fixes and updates

Like any piece of software there are certain to be some bugs and areas for improvement.   As you find things please mail them to Darrell Merrick on CompuServe at 75212,2126 or on the Internet at 75212,2126@compuserve.com, or on America Online as "DarrellMer". Updates will be posted periodically.

The most fragile thing is the screenplay formatting.   If the dialogue formatting isn't correct, make sure the dialogue headings are correct in the scene text.

There is not yet a Windows95 version of StoryDB.   It will be out right after the Windows95 version of Delphi comes out ... circa November or December '95.

Generating a screenplay

To generate a screenplay from the story, choose *Generate Screenplay* from the *File* menu.   This takes the scene text and formats it, creating a "Rich Text Format" (RTF) text file.   An RTF file is ASCII text which has special macros for text styling and formatting.   Any word processor worth it's salt should be able to read RTF files.   If you open your screenplay in Microsoft Word, it will automatically detect that it's an RTF file and give you a *Convert File* dialog box with Rich Text Format preselected - just click OK and it will convert it for you.

Note: The title page of the screenplay shows the story name and <u>author info</u>, so you will need to fill in that information in StoryDB if you want your title page to look right.

Author info

This information is used for the screenplay title page.   To set this information, choose *Author Info* from the *Settings* menu.   You will get a dialog box that lets you enter your name (or your pseudonym), street, city, state, zip, and phone number.

Introduction to help

This help was designed for users with no background in screenplay writing so there are brief descriptions and examples of screenwriting concepts scattered throughout.   But this is no substitute for a good book on screenwriting.   The book that was used for reference, and that is paraphrased in the descriptions, is <u>Writing Screenplays That Sell</u>.

If you are familiar with screenwriting, and want to just start playing around with the system without going through the help very much, you still need to read how scene text is handled in this application.   Read <u>Formating rules and conventions</u> and <u>Dialogue heading shortcut</u>, within <u>Text</u>.

The application also has pop-up help for some of the fields.   If the cursor (the arrow) is on the label of one of these fields, then the pop-up help will show for the corresponding field.   The help is actually small excerpts from this help.   Example: if you move the cursor over the "Concept" label in the story form, you will get a pop-up saying "This is where you express your story idea in a single sentence" after a half-second delay.

Any use of the word "he" in this help is really meant as "he or she" and "his" means "his or her".   If someone could come up with good gender-general pronouns, that aren't cumbersome to use, then I would use them instead!

StoryDB Information

StoryDB is an application for writing screenplays.   It helps you organize many important pieces of information for screenplay development.   It is really a story database (which is where the name "StoryDB" comes from) application rather than a traditional word processing application.   It makes it easy to start playing around with characters, relationships, main events, different ideas, etc., before diving into writing the actual scenes (though the application does help you with that, as well).   Instead of getting writer's block, staring at a blank page, StoryDB can inspire you to jump around and start describing your story in different ways - fleshing out the story as you go.

Overview

To create a screenplay in StoryDB you need to create a <u>story</u>.   Think of the screenplay as something that you are creating from the story.   Within a story you have fields, such as name and outline, as well as a list of characters and a list of scenes.   A <u>character</u> has it's own fields, such as name and personality description, as well as a list of relationships that the character has with other characters.

Story, Scene, Character, and Relationship are each represented by a form (i.e. a window) which you use to view and edit their fields.   Some fields you will always want to fill in, such as character name.   Others fields you may rarely use, such as character motivations.   Just use them to organize your ideas as you think of them, and also to spur you into planning your story.   For example, it's tempting to just start writing scenes, but in most cases it would be best to first come up with a rudimentary outline and also jot down some notes before writing the specific character dialog.

Getting Around

All forms other than the story form start out as minimized.   To bring up one of these forms, just double-click on it's icon.

- <u>Navigator</u>
- <u>Grids</u>
- <u>Main character icon</u>

Navigator

Each form displays the currently selected "data record", which in this application is a story, scene, character, or relationship.   Each form has a navigator at the top for handling the data records.   The "|<" button goes to the first record, the "<" button goes to the prior record, the ">" button goes to the next record, the ">|" button goes to the last record, the "+" button adds a new record, the "-" button deletes the current record, and the check mark button saves the current record.   Your records are automatically saved when you change records, change forms and when you quit the application, but for peace of mind you may want to explicitly save after entering a lengthy piece of text - so if something happens to your system you don't lose your changes.

Grids

The character list in the story form and the relationship list in the character form are represented as grids.   The grids show the information that is used to identify the records in the lists, and can be used to manipulate those records.   To go to a record just double-click on it in the grid - this will bring up the record in it's corresponding form.   If you double-click on a blank line in the grid it will create a new record and then bring up it's corresponding form .   To delete a record from the grid hit Ctrl-delete.   The scene list in the story form is similar to a grid except it doesn't support deleting or creating records.

Main character icon

To the right of the main character field there is a small character icon - if you click on the icon it will bring up the main character, in the character form.

Story

- [Overview](#)

Fields
- [Story name](#)
- [Category](#)
- [Concept](#)
- [Main character](#)
- [Outline](#)
- [Notes](#)

Story name

The name of the story and the screenplay.   The name you put here will automatically be put on the title page of the screenplay that you generate.

Category

The type of story that you are writing.   Example: Action-adventure.   The most common options are shown in the pop-up menu, but you can still type your own if you have something different.

Concept

This is where you express your story idea in a single sentence.   Example: A depression-era farm woman wants to save her farm by growing cotton (*Places in the Heart*).   You should use this field as a way of screening and developing your stories at a high level.   Can your story be expressed as a concept?   Is there a clearly defined main character?   What is that main character's motivation?

Main character

The main character (AKA hero) is the person who is the central focus and driving force of the story.   The reader must be able to identify with the main character.   There must be a clear motivation or objective for the main character to achieve.

Character

The characters are the people who populate your story.   You need to have a main character and other characters who relate directly or indirectly to that main character.   That is the purpose behind the role field - a character is either the main character, or else relates to the main character in some way.   The more work you put into developing your characters, the better.   You need to have a good idea of the "biography" of your primary characters before writing the dialogue.

Fields
- Character name
- Short name
- Role
- Physical description
- Personality
- Change during story
- Occupation
- Motivations and conflicts
- Background
- Notes

Character name

The full name of your character.   Example: John McBain.   If you don't specify a <u>short name</u> then the full name will be used in the <u>dialogue heading shortcut</u>.

Short name

The short name of your character.   The way that you want to refer to your character in the scenes - usually just the first name or the last name.   Ex: McBain, Jenny.   This name will be used in the <u>dialogue heading shortcut</u>.

Role

How the character relates to the main character.   There are five options for role:

Main character: The "hero" of the story; the person who drives the plot forward.

Nemesis: Character who stands in the way of the main character.

Romance: Romantic interest of the main character.

Reflection: Person who helps main character and gives main character someone to talk to.

Secondary character: Any character who doesn't fall into one of the above categories.

Physical description

The physical makeup of the character.   Age, sex, appearance, disabilities, etc.

Personality

How the character acts.   Intelligence, emotional makeup, etc.

Change during story

The character development during the story.   This is mainly applicable to the main character - where he must grow or overcome his limitations in some way in order to achieve his objective.   But as a counter-example: in *Forrest Gump* (or is it called *Tom Hanks is Forrest Gump*?!) the main character doesn't really change - but Jenny (in the romance role) does change.

Occupation

What the character does for a living.   Doesn't have to be a job: can be student, unemployed, etc.

Motivations and conflicts

Motivation is what the character wants to accomplish by the end of the story, while conflict is what stands in the way of the character achieving his motivation.

Both motivation and conflict exist on outer and inner levels.   Outer is what shows visibly or physically.   Inner comes from within and is revealed through dialogue.

You will probably only need to describe motivations and conflicts for your primary characters and even for some of them you may not have inner motivation and inner conflict.   You should still strive to define as many of these as you can to nail down the dynamics between the characters.

- <u>Outer motivation</u>
- <u>Outer conflict</u>
- <u>Inner motivation</u>
- <u>Inner conflict</u>

Outer motivation

What the character wants to achieve by the end of the story.
The main character's outer motivation is especially important since that is what drives the plot of the story.

Outer conflict

Stands in the way of the character achieving his outer motivation.   It is the balance between the outer motivation and this outer conflict that makes your story compelling.   If your hero tells his nemesis to give up in the first scene, and the nemesis immediately gives in, then what kind of story would that be?!   The conflict should be difficult, but not impossible.

Inner motivation

Why the character wants to achieve the outer motivation.   It is closely tied to theme and character growth.

Inner conflict

Stands in the way of the character achieving his inner motivation.   The inner conflict involves character flaws and character growth.   The character has to overcome the inner conflict in order to achieve self-worth.

Background

What happened to the character prior to his appearance in the story. This is where you really emphasize the biographical details of your character. This background should then be reflected in the behavior of the character during the story. This is critical to making the character seem real to the reader - like the character exists beyond the story that you are telling (unless, of course, your story covers the whole lifetime of the character!).

Relationship

This is more esoteric than story, scene, and character, so you may want to hold off on using it until you really need it.   It is used for information that is specific to a relationship, rather than an individual character.   From a given character, you define a relationship with another character (related person) as well as the type of relationship.   Then you can give a general description and/or describe the change in the relationship during the story.

Fields
- Related person
- Relation type
- Relation general description
- Relation change during story

Related person

The "related" character.   You can choose an existing character or type in your own - this is useful if you want to describe a relationship with a group rather than a character, like the relationship between someone and his co-workers in general.

Note: a current limitation of the application is that the relationships are defined "one-way".   So if you define a relationship with Sally, for Harry, then it will only show up under Harry's relationships, not Sally's.   The related person doesn't "get" the relationship.

Relation type

The category of relationship.   These types are more specific than character role, so you can use this to define the initial basis for the relationship.   For instance, the relationship type may be "co-worker" but the character role (of the related person) would be "romance" if the relationship becomes a romance.   But you don't have to get too tied up in that - just use these categories as you see fit, or even come up with your own.

Relation general description

A general description of the relationship, independent of the <u>change during story</u>.

Example: They are both very independent, but are forced to depend on each other.   Jenny likes to poke fun at McBain's expense.

Relation change during story

The evolution of the relationship during the story.   This is especially important between the main character and the romance character.   For example, Harry and Sally's relationship in *When Harry Met Sally* would probably take a whole page!

Example: After initial friction, they start to have a little begrudging respect for each other.   Then they become a close intimate team.

Scene

- [Sequencing](#)

Fields
- [Number](#)
- [Location](#)
- [Outline](#)
- [Text](#)
- [Notes](#)

Sequencing

Scenes are automatically numbered as you create them.   So the first scene you create will be numbered "1".   But it doesn't have to stay that way.   You may want to start with a scene that is really in the middle of your story, and then after you create the preceding scenes you can move it down so that it becomes scene number 5 (or whatever).The scene list in the story form is where you change the sequence of your scenes.   Use the "Move up" and "Move down" buttons to move a scene up or down in the sequence.   This approach is easier than having to manually change the scene numbers.

Location

Location is where the scene takes place.   Example: Joe's Bar.

Note: Any text you put into location will automatically be made into uppercase for the screenplay.

 There are two script conventions that are often used for scene headings: "INT" and "EXT" for interior and exterior as well as "DAY" and "NIGHT". Example: INT - Joe's Bar - NIGHT.   These things are optional, in terms of proper screenplay format, but if you think they make your screenplay look more professional or aesthetically pleasing then go ahead and add them as part of the location name.

Outline

Outline is a general description of what happens in the story or a scene. This doesn't have to be anything formal - just a place to describe events at a general level.   In fact you may even want to start with a very general description and then resolve that into something more specific later on. Example: "There is a shoot-out and Jim is killed" becomes "Jim and McBain burst into the warehouse and ...".

Text

This is where the "meat" of the screenplay goes.   It is basically a sequence of character dialogue and narrative description paragraphs.

- Formating rules and conventions

Dialogue heading suffixes
- O.S.
- V.O.
- (Cont.)

- Dialogue heading shortcut

Formating rules and conventions

Character dialogue must have a dialogue heading, which is a tab, the character name, and then a return.
Example:

          Jim
     What are you doing here?
When you generate the screenplay this is translated into the proper screenplay format for dialogue.   Note: this rule is specific to this application - the tab takes the place of having to indent dialogue and capitalize character names.

Paragraphs are separated by a blank line.

When characters first appear, you should write their full names, in all capital letters, as a flag to the reader.

There is not yet any formatting support for parenthetical direction in the dialogue heading.
Example:

          Jenny
            (defiantly)
     I can do it myself!
But you should be avoiding parenthetical direction anyway, since you shouldn't be telling the actors how to deliver their lines!   In the rare cases where you need it, just put it to the right of the name, rather than under it, in the scene text.

O.S.

"O.S." is used to indicate "off screen" dialogue.   This is used if the dialogue can be heard but the character isn't visible.   You'd use an O.S. for a voice coming from a telephone or intercom, a person in the next room, etc.

Example:

           Jenny O.S.
      I know you're in there McBain ... open up!

V.O.

"V.O." is used to indicate "voice over" dialogue.   This is used when the character is heard by the audience, but not by the other characters in the movie.

About half of the dialogue in the movie *Dune* would be V.O. because it's the characters' thoughts we're hearing.   Well maybe that's not such a good example!   Think of the beginning of *The Prince of Tides* where Tom Wingo (AKA Nick Nolte) is narrating what his childhood was like - that would be V.O.

Example:

                McBain V.O.
        I knew when I first met Jenny that she'd be trouble.

Cont.

"(Cont.)" is used to indicate continued dialogue.   This is used when a character's dialogue continues through action, or when a character is interrupted and then continues speaking.

Example:

          Mendoza.
     You'll have to talk sooner or later!

He quickly backhands McBain across the jaw.

          Mendoza (Cont.)
     Why don't you just make it easy for yourself?

Dialogue heading shortcut

Having to type a tab and the character's name for each piece of dialogue can get tedious, so the application provides a shortcut: hit Ctrl-character number to insert a heading for a character.   Example: Ctrl-1 will insert your first character into the text.   This only works for characters 1 through 9, since the number keys are limited to 1 through 9.   Note: it inserts the character alias, if there is one, otherwise it inserts the full name.   If you accidentally insert the wrong character, you can hit Ctrl-z to undo it, just like any other text.   The shortcut adds a space after the character name so you can enter a suffix right there and hit return, or just hit return if there's no suffix.

Notes

Notes is a catch-all field to put down any thoughts that don't go in any of the other fields.   It's especially useful as a place holder for ideas that you haven't fleshed out yet, and for brainstorming in general.

Example: Show McBain's sensitive side after he gets to know Jenny.

Example

The application database comes preloaded with a sample story called "Revolver".   This isn't meant as a serious example of a story, but it does show how the data fields are used.   To create your own story just click on the "+" button in the story navigator.

References

Book reference: Writing Screenplays That Sell

Premiere magazine has a lot of good articles on the film industry in general, including screenwriting and the business of buying and selling screenplays.   Plus it's a fun magazine to read!

Of course this isn't the only application out there for screenplay writing. You can get a complete catalog from The Writers' Computer Store: 11317 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles CA 90025, (310) 479-7774, fax (310) 477-5314.   The applications are a bit pricey compared to StoryDB (most are between $100 & $300), but there are some interesting ones that are designed to help with story development.   Many of them are available for Macintosh as well as IBM compatibles.

Writing Screenplays That Sell

The information on screenplay formatting and style, as well as some of the data fields, was taken from *Writing Screenplays That Sell* by Michael Hauge, Harper Perennial, 1991.

Short review: It's a great reference and very readable. I was initially put off a little by all the rules that he gives in the book - that maybe he is perpetuating formulaic writing. But he is really being pragmatic: you need to follow some basic guidelines so that the readers won't immediately throw your creation in the trash! You don't want to write something that is nothing but formula, but on the other hand you want to avoid something that is just too far out and self-indulgent for other people to appreciate. The book also goes into how to develop your story, how to sell your screenplay, story structure, and a lot of other great stuff.