FREE TEMPLATE

Story bible

Everything one novel has to keep straight, in one place: the cast and how they change, places, objects and who holds them, the rules of the world, the timeline and open threads.

How to use it

1. Fill in what the next chapter depends on, not everything at once.
2. Whenever a fact changes, write the chapter it changes in. Many continuity errors are old facts.
3. Keep story time and chapter order apart on the timeline page: flashbacks live in the gap.
4. Before you revise a chapter, read its rows here first. Page 6 is a filled-in example.

01 The book at a glance

Working title _____

One-line pitch _____

Genre and readers _____

Point of view and tense _____

Story time covered (from / to) _____

Chapters planned _____

The question the book answers _____

02 Characters

One block per character who matters. Copy the block for more.

Name _____ **Looks (details you repeat)** _____

Aliases and nicknames _____ **Voice and habits** _____

Role in the story _____ **Secret, and who knows it** _____

Wants _____ **Faction or group** _____

Born (date or year) _____ **Key relationships** _____

FROM CHAPTER	WHAT CHANGES (AGE, JOB, SIDE, STATE OF MIND)

02 Characters (continued)

Name _____ **Looks (details you repeat)** _____

Aliases and nicknames _____ **Voice and habits** _____

Role in the story _____ **Secret, and who knows it** _____

Wants _____ **Faction or group** _____

Born (date or year) _____ **Key relationships** _____

FROM CHAPTER	WHAT CHANGES (AGE, JOB, SIDE, STATE OF MIND)

Name _____ **Looks (details you repeat)** _____

Aliases and nicknames _____ **Voice and habits** _____

Role in the story _____ **Secret, and who knows it** _____

Wants _____ **Faction or group** _____

Born (date or year) _____ **Key relationships** _____

FROM CHAPTER	WHAT CHANGES (AGE, JOB, SIDE, STATE OF MIND)

03 Relationships

Write each side separately when they see it differently.

A	B	HOW A SEES B	HOW B SEES A	CHANGES IN CHAPTER

04 Places

Inside which larger place? Distances and travel times help catch route slips.

PLACE	INSIDE	WHAT IT LOOKS AND SOUNDS LIKE	FIRST CH.	TRAVEL TIMES

05 Objects

Anything that changes hands or matters to the plot. Record every hand-off.

OBJECT	WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MATTERS	FIRST CH.	LOST OR USED UP?

Who holds it, chapter by chapter

OBJECT	FROM CHAPTER	HELD BY	HOW IT GOT THERE

06 World rules

Magic, technology, law, custom. Note where a rule applies, its limits, and its cost if it has one.

RULE	COST OR LIMIT	WHO KNOWS IT	FIRST STATED

07 Timeline

Story date is when it happens in the world; chapter is where the reader meets it.

STORY DATE	EVENT	WHO IS THERE	CHAPTER

08 Open threads

Setups, promises and mysteries. Close each one, or drop it on purpose.

THREAD	SET UP IN	REMINDERS	PAID OFF IN	STATUS

09 Style sheet

Spellings, capitals, invented words, how numbers and titles are written.

TERM	WRITE IT AS	NOTES

10 Continuity log

When you find a slip, log where the fact was first set before deciding which side to change.

CHAPTER	WHAT DOESN'T ADD UP	FACT FIRST SET IN	FIXED?

WORKED EXAMPLE

A Christmas Carol, by Charles Dickens (1843)

Examples from five of the sections, filled in from the novella. Chapters are Dickens's five staves.

02 Characters

NAME	ROLE	WANTS	FROM STAVE: WHAT CHANGES
Ebenezer Scrooge	Miser, the lead	To be left alone	5: generous, keeps Christmas
Jacob Marley	Late partner, a ghost	To warn Scrooge	Dead seven years at the start
Bob Cratchit	Scrooge's clerk	To keep his family	5: gets a raise

05 Objects

OBJECT	WHY IT MATTERS	FROM STAVE	WHERE IT IS
Marley's chain	Forged in life from cash-boxes, keys, ledgers	1	Marley's ghost
The door-knocker	Shows Marley's face; first sign of the night	1	Scrooge's front door

06 World rules

RULE	LIMIT	FIRST STATED
Three Spirits will visit Scrooge	Expect them one by one, as Marley says	Stave 1
What the Spirits show can be altered	Only if Scrooge changes	Stave 3

07 Timeline

STORY DATE	EVENT	STAVE
Years earlier	Fezziwig's ball; Belle leaves Scrooge	2 (shown as the past)
Christmas Eve	Marley's ghost visits	1
Christmas morning	Scrooge wakes and sends the turkey	5

08 Open threads

THREAD	SET UP IN	PAID OFF IN	STATUS
Will Tiny Tim live?	Stave 3	Stave 5	Closed: he lives
Can Scrooge change in one night?	Stave 1	Stave 5	Closed