

Danielle Sunshine, Editor and Author Coach
daniellersunshine@gmail.com
daniellesunshine.com

Dreamstorming Summary

Dreamstorming is a creative writing technique attributed to Pulitzer Prize winning writer Robert Olen Butler, who described it in his book *From Where You Dream*. Essentially, dreamstorming provides a way for writers to tap into their subconscious in order to access a deeply personal and intuitive space that will help them generate story ideas and narrative elements. According to Robert Olen Butler, there is power in dreaming to create art, because "only the unconscious can fit together the stuff of fiction" (*From Where You Dream*, 85).

It's a bit like daydreaming combined with meditation, except that writers are encouraged to focus on the characters in their stories, with the hope that more organic, more emotional, more artful stories will emerge.

To Begin Dreamstorming:

1. Get a pad of paper and a pen or pencil and place it in front of you- or sit at the computer.
2. Close your eyes and recline comfortably. Bring your character into your mind. Try to free-float, free-associate, to get into a trance-like state as you sit with your character, watching them move around in the world of your novel, all at the level of scene.
3. Don't trust the scene that presents itself as an idea. The scene must have a sensual concrete hook. A sound or taste. A smell or sense of touch. Something your character is seeing.
4. It doesn't matter where you begin. You can move around the beginning, middle, and end of the novel.
5. After the scene has come to you, write down 6-10 words that identify that scene and serve as a scene summary - for example, Jimmy sees his grandfather crying, or Adam's house of cards crashes to the floor.
6. Just record the basics of the scenes that pop up in your mind. Don't write anything more!

Now you have a scene that can elicit emotion from your reader, simply because it stems from one of the five senses. And because it can elicit emotion, it has potential to become art.

Robert Olen Butler recommends that writers dreamstorm for 6-10 weeks before they start to write. You may not need that long, but you'll know you are ready to stop when you sit down to dreamstorm and not much comes to you. By that time, you'll have between 50-300 potential scenes. You may not use all of them, but once the scenes are ordered and numbered, you'll have the structure for your story.

Danielle Sunshine, Editor and Author Coach
daniellersunshine@gmail.com
daniellesunshine.com

How to Organize Your Scenes

Once you've dreamstormed all your scenes, you'll want to organize them before you begin to write:

1. Write each scene summary on a 3x5 card.
2. Begin flipping through your cards. Try to find the first scene to begin the book with. You should wait until a sense impression jumps off the card and hits you. Olen Butler says that you should be in your meditative state while doing this, but I think your conscious mind can help here. You want to find the moment when everything changes, and once you've found it, you can use your meditative state to make certain that a sense impression jumps out at you when you think about that scene.
3. Keep going, reading through the cards, finding the scene that follows the first one. After half an hour or so, you'll have about eight cards in front of you. Number them, bind them together, and then stop for the day, or keep going. It's your choice.
4. You can go day by day, eight cards at a time if you like.
5. If there are gaps in the story, that's okay. You can dreamstorm the scenes in between. When you are finished, you might find that you don't need all the scenes you've dreamstormed. That's okay. Put them aside. You can always reorder things, add scenes, and pull scenes out.
6. Make sure you number all the cards so they are in order.
7. You can always reorder things, add scenes, pull scenes out. You organize structurally before you write.
8. Robert Olen Butler recommends you "keep [the process] open, fluid; realize that nothing you do here is locked in, it's got to stay subordinate to the trance state in order to work."
9. When you have finished, you will have a collection of chronologically ordered scenes that you will include in your story. Use this list of scenes to write your synopsis and flesh out your chapter summaries.
10. Good luck!