

Determine Your Stage and Plot Your Weight Loss Course

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**By Lynn Bode**

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We all know that losing weight and improving your overall fitness are things that don't happen overnight. But, did you know in order to be truly successful that important steps need to be taken before you even start a diet or exercise program? The first thing you should do is identify where you fall on the behavioral change spectrum. There are five distinct stages of behavioral change. Do you know what stage you currently fall under?

Knowing what stage you are at will help you to create a road map to the subsequent stages and ultimately help you to be successful in your fitness goals. Below are the five major phases.

**Precontemplation:** This is the point where you don't feel that any change in your lifestyle is necessary. You may be thinking that exercising just takes too much time or that fast food is just too convenient to even consider giving up. Starting a fitness or diet program during this stage would probably result in failure. The best thing you can do during this phase is educate yourself further about health, diseases and risks.

**Contemplation:** During this stage you may start thinking that a change is necessary. So, you think that maybe cutting back to eating fast food only three times a week is not so bad and you might be able to at least take a walk once in awhile. This is a good time to learn more about the benefits of healthy eating and regular exercise.

**Preparation:** At this point you are getting more serious about taking action. You've penciled in a walk with your friend for next week and are planning to go grocery shopping to cook a home meal. You may want to research exercise equipment, gyms, personal trainers, and diet programs to learn more about what you can do (with the help of professionals and/or equipment) to get in better shape.

**Action:** Here's where you actually take the first step. The first step may be as simple as taking a daily walk, reducing your fast food visits to twice a month or just cutting back on daily sodas. Or, you may go

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as far as hiring a personal trainer or joining a gym. During this stage it is very important to learn coping mechanisms that will help you avoid re-lapse into your old ways. One way to avoid being a part of the high exercise dropout statistics is starting slowly into a new program and making permanent lifestyle changes versus temporary ones.

**Maintenance:** This is, of course, the phase that everyone should strive to be at. This means that you have been doing a regular fitness program consistently for quite some time and that you continue your new lifestyle. It's important throughout this stage (which should last a lifetime) that you include a variety of workouts that change frequently. You should also seek social support of friends and family.

So, now can you identify what stage you are at? You may find that you are in the precontemplation stage for nutritional habits but that you are in the preparation stage for exercises. That's okay. It's not critical for you to force both areas into the same stage. You can work on changing your nutritional and exercise habits separately.

The key to success is first identifying your stage and then taking steps to advance to the next level (unless, of course, you are already at the Maintenance stage). Use the suggestions mentioned above in each stage to help you move to the next phase.

For example, if you are in the precontemplation stage, then research and read as much as you can on the subject of health risks and how they relate to an individual's lifestyle. From there you will probably want to learn more about the consequences and benefits of specific lifestyles. Education is a powerful thing. The more you fully understand and can relate directly to the causes and effects of your action, the more inclined you will be to change.

It's also important to tune-in to your fears, past struggles and expectations. Making nutritional and exercise changes is not easy and should be approached slowly. Remember to make small changes. Don't try to go from a completely sedentary lifestyle to an hour of continual exercise in just one day. Build up slowly starting with even just 10 minutes. And lastly, be sure to inform your family and friends of your plans and enlist their support. Support is extremely important for your success.

Lynn Bode, author and certified personal trainer, offers her services online through

. [Workouts For You](#) provides affordable online exercise programs to help even

the busiest of people lose weight, tone-up, build muscles, increase stamina and more via the Internet. Let us guide you one-on-one through your fitness journey with weekly customized workouts designed just for YOU! Visit:

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**Have You Tested Your Plot?**

**By Nick Vernon**

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### Creative Writing Tips -

Our plotting stage is our testing area.

Everything in the plot should be tested for its effectiveness before we put it into our stories. If you believe something in your plot could be better, make it better.

Figuring everything out in your plot will save you time rewriting later.

So how do you test your plot?

Start with everything that has gone into it.

For example... Are the events interesting? Does your plot contain problems for the character to solve? Have you given your character a goal? Is the conflict strong? Is the resolution of the conflict interesting? Is the character interesting? Is the setting of the story interesting? Will the incident or situation be interesting to your readers? Etc

Make a list of what your plot contains. Comb through it carefully and tick off each item. If you find that some things need to be worked on some more, work on them.

I know to some this might be tedious work, but...

"Every one-minute you spend in planning will save you at least three minutes in execution."  
Crawford Greenwald

Besides his passion for writing, Nick Vernon runs an online gift site where you will find gift information, articles and readers' funny stories. Visit

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