

The Writer's Kimberley Process

Your Guide To Ethical AI Collaboration

Introduction: The Conflict Diamond Problem

You're using AI to help with your writing. It feels productive.

And now your voice doesn't sound like you anymore.

Here's the painful truth most fiction writers learn too late: AI collaboration that looks helpful on the surface can be destructive underneath.

This guide will show you why unethical AI use erodes your craft, and more importantly, how to fix it using three proven diagnostic questions that transform dependency into strength.

PART ONE: Understanding the Problem

Why "Helpful" AI Kills Your Voice

Conflict diamond mining and unethical AI collaboration operate on the same destructive principle:

Conflict Diamonds:

- Look beautiful on the surface
- Hide exploitation underneath
- Extract value without building sustainability
- Destroy communities in the long term

Conflict AI:

- Produces words quickly
 - Hides craft erosion underneath
 - Extracts creative decisions without building skills
 - Destroys your authentic voice over time
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When you use AI as a content generator rather than a coach, you create what writers experience as "the dependency trap." Fast output that stops your creative development dead.

The Three Warning Signs

Warning Sign #1: Accepting Without Understanding

You're taking AI suggestions without knowing why they work. The prose looks good. The pacing seems better. But you can't explain the craft principles behind the changes.

Example of the problem: AI suggests rewriting your opening paragraph. You accept it. The new version is tighter. But you have no idea what made the original weak or why the revision works.

Why it fails: You haven't learned. You've outsourced a decision. Next time you write an opening, you'll need AI again.

Warning Sign #2: Voice Erosion

Your writing starts sounding generic. Professional. Competent. But not distinctly yours.

The test: Have someone read a passage you wrote without AI six months ago, then read something you wrote with AI last week. If they can't tell both came from the same author, your voice is eroding.

Warning Sign #3: Dependency Over Development

You feel anxious writing without AI. You second-guess instincts you used to trust. The tool that was supposed to help you become a better writer has become a crutch you can't put down.

The pattern: Week 1 – "I'll just use AI for brainstorming." Week 4 – "I'll use it to polish dialogue." Week 8 – "I can't write the next scene without asking AI first."

PART TWO: The Three-Question Solution

QUESTION ONE: Does This Make Me More, or Less, Myself?

The Principle: The best collaborators reveal what's already inside you rather than imposing their vision from outside.

Bad Collaboration (Content Generation): AI: "Here's how your character should respond in this scene..."

You accept the dialogue without examining whether it matches your character's psychology, your story's themes, or your voice. It sounds good enough. You move on.

Good Collaboration (Socratic Coaching): AI: "Given your character's wound from Lesson Three and the lie they believe from Lesson Four, what would terrify them most about this situation?"

You pause. You think. You access what you already intuitively know about your character. The AI question unlocks your understanding—it doesn't replace it.

What Changed:

- Ownership: The insight came from YOU, not AI
- Understanding: You know WHY the choice works
- Skill building: You're learning to ask better questions
- Voice preservation: The solution sounds like your writing, not generic prose

The Implementation Framework:

- 1. Before accepting any AI suggestion, ask:**
 - Why does this work?
 - What craft principle explains it?
 - Could I make a similar improvement next time without AI?
 - Does this sound like my voice or generic prose?
- 2. If you can't answer these questions:**
 - Don't accept the suggestion yet
 - Ask AI to explain the craft principle
 - Experiment with the technique yourself
 - Only implement once you understand
- 3. Track your independence:**
 - Can you write strong openings without AI help?
 - Can you fix pacing issues yourself?
 - Are your creative instincts getting sharper or duller?

4. Demand explanation, not just execution:

- "Don't rewrite this—explain what's weak about it"
- "Don't solve this plot problem—help me see what I'm missing"
- "Don't generate dialogue—ask me questions that help me hear my character's voice"

Practice Exercise:

Take a recent AI suggestion you accepted. Write down:

1. What was wrong with your original version?
2. What craft principle made the AI version better?
3. How would you apply that principle to a different scene?

If you can't complete this exercise, you accepted the suggestion blindly.

QUESTION TWO: Am I Getting Stronger or More Dependent?

The Principle: Ethical collaboration builds your capability. Unethical collaboration creates dependency.

The Diagnostic Timeline:

Month 1 with AI:

- You use AI to brainstorm plot ideas
- It helps you see possibilities you hadn't considered
- You feel energized and creative
- **This is healthy IF** you're learning to generate ideas more fluently yourself

Month 3 with AI:

- You've started using AI to fix dialogue
- It catches wooden phrasing you didn't notice
- Your dialogue sounds more natural
- **Check yourself:** Can you now spot wooden dialogue before asking AI? Or do you rely on AI to catch it?

Month 6 with AI:

- You can't start a writing session without consulting AI
- You feel paralyzed by blank pages
- You accept suggestions without questioning them
- **Red flag:** The collaboration is weakening you, not strengthening you

The Six-Month Test:

Every six months, write a complete scene without ANY AI assistance. Compare it to scenes you wrote six months ago.

Ask yourself:

- Am I making better craft choices?
- Is my pacing tighter?
- Is my dialogue sharper?
- Am I more confident in my instincts?

If the answer to most questions is **NO**, your AI collaboration is extractive, not developmental.

How Ethical AI Strengthens You:

Teaching craft principles explicitly: Not: "Here's better dialogue." But: "Your dialogue feels wooden because characters are explaining information both already know. This is called 'As you know, Bob' dialogue. Try revealing information through conflict instead."

Building pattern recognition: Not: "This scene drags." But: "Notice how pages 23-25 have no character decisions or emotional shifts? Readers need stakes to change every few pages. Where could you add a complication?"

Developing diagnostic skills: Not: "Your opening is weak." But: "Your opening focuses on setting description before we meet a character. Readers connect with people, not places. What happens if you start with your protagonist making a choice?"

How Conflict AI Weakens You:

Doing the work instead of teaching the skill: You: "Fix my dialogue." AI: [Rewrites entire conversation] You: [Accepts it without understanding what changed or why]

Creating feature creep dependency: Week 1: "Help with brainstorming" Week 4: "Fix my dialogue" Week 8: "Write this transitional scene" Week 12: "I can't write without you"

Replacing judgment with automation: You stop trusting your instincts because AI's suggestions "sound better." You don't develop the ear to know what "better" means or why.

Practice Exercise:

Make a list of five craft skills (pacing, dialogue, character development, etc.). For each one, honestly rate yourself:

- Getting stronger (I rely on AI less than I did six months ago)
- Staying flat (I need the same amount of AI help as six months ago)
- Getting weaker (I rely on AI more than I did six months ago)

Any skill rated "getting weaker" indicates conflict AI in that area.

QUESTION THREE: Can I Trace My Creative Supply Chain?

The Principle: Transparency reveals whether you're proud of your process or hiding it.

The Transparency Test:

Imagine a reader asks: "How did you develop your protagonist's character arc?"

Ethical Sourcing Response: "I started by identifying her surface behavior in different contexts. Then I worked backward to discover what belief would make that behavior necessary. That led me to her formative wound. My AI coach asked questions like 'What would someone have to believe for this behavior to feel inevitable?' which helped me access what I already intuitively knew about her psychology."

Conflict AI Response: "Well, I described her to ChatGPT and it generated some backstory options, and I picked the one that sounded most interesting and then asked it to develop that further."

Notice the difference:

The first writer can explain:

- The methodology (behavioral observation → belief → wound)
 - What they contributed (their intuitive knowledge)
 - What AI contributed (Socratic questions)
 - Why choices work (causal connection between elements)
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The second writer can only say:

- AI generated options
- They picked one
- The process was largely opaque
- Understanding is minimal

The Three Transparency Questions:

1. Would you be comfortable if readers knew exactly how you used AI?

Not whether you used AI—whether they knew *how* you used it.

Comfortable disclosure: "I used AI as a Socratic coach to help me access my intuitive understanding of my characters through systematic questioning."

Uncomfortable disclosure: "I asked AI to generate character backstories and plot outlines, then selected from the options it provided."

2. Can you explain every major creative choice?

Not justify it. Explain it. What's the craft reasoning?

Can explain: "My protagonist's protective behavior stems from her father's death and her mother's psychological collapse. The lie she believes—'I'm solely responsible for everyone's survival'—creates her want (protect everyone alone) which conflicts with her need (accept collective survival). This generates the dramatic tension throughout the story."

Cannot explain: "The AI suggested she have abandonment issues and that sounded good, so I went with it."

3. Does this process align with what your readers expect from you?

Your readers come to you for YOUR voice, YOUR perspective, YOUR way of seeing the world.

If AI collaboration strengthens those qualities, it's ethically sourced. If it dilutes them, it's conflict AI.

The Supply Chain Documentation:

Keep a simple log for major creative decisions:

Decision	My Contribution	AI Contribution	Craft Principle	Can I Replicate?
Protagonist's wound	My understanding that she over-functions as protector	AI asked "What would create this belief?"	Wounds create beliefs create behavior	Yes - I can trace this backward from any behavior now
Opening scene revision	Recognized it felt slow but didn't know why	AI explained front-loading context stops momentum	Start with emotional stakes before information	Yes - I now spot this issue in my drafts

If your log has blank cells in "My Contribution" or "Can I Replicate?", you're using conflict AI.

PART THREE: Advanced Applications

Technique: The Skill Transfer Test

Every AI interaction should transfer a skill, not just produce content.

Before each AI session, state your learning goal:

✗ Bad goal: "Help me fix this scene." ✓ Good goal: "Help me understand why this scene feels slow so I can diagnose pacing issues myself."

After each AI session, document what you learned:

- What craft principle did I learn?
- What pattern can I now recognize?
- What diagnostic question can I now ask myself?
- Where else can I apply this skill?

Example:

Problem: Your dialogue feels wooden.

Conflict AI approach: You: "Fix this dialogue." AI: [Rewrites it] You: "Thanks!" [Copies it into manuscript] *Skill transfer:* ZERO

Ethical AI approach: You: "Why does this dialogue feel wooden? Don't fix it—help me see what's wrong." AI: "Your characters are explaining information both already know. This is 'As you know, Bob' dialogue. Real people don't recap shared history unless there's conflict or new perspective." You: "So what would make this more natural?" AI: "What if they disagree about what happened? Or one remembers details the other doesn't? Conflict and asymmetric knowledge create realistic dialogue." *Skill transfer:* HIGH (You now understand the principle and can apply it elsewhere)

Technique: The Independence Benchmark

Set regular "AI-free" writing sessions to test skill development.

Monthly Independence Test:

- Write a complete scene without ANY AI assistance
- Evaluate: pacing, dialogue, emotional resonance, clarity
- Compare to scenes from three months ago
- Ask: Am I stronger in these areas?

If you've used AI ethically, your AI-free writing should be getting better over time.

If you've used conflict AI, your AI-free writing will stay flat or decline because you haven't been learning—you've been outsourcing.

Technique: The Voice Preservation Audit

Every three months, do a voice audit:

1. Pull three passages written before you started using AI
2. Pull three passages written with AI collaboration
3. Have a trusted reader review them (without telling them which is which)
4. Ask: "Can you tell these were written by the same person?"

If YES: Your voice is intact. The collaboration is preserving your authenticity.

If NO: Your voice is eroding. You're letting AI flatten your distinctiveness into generic prose.

PART FOUR: Diagnosis and Repair

How to Diagnose Conflict AI in Your Practice

Diagnostic Test #1: The Explanation Test

Pick five recent AI suggestions you accepted. For each one, answer:

- What was wrong with my original?
- Why did this change improve it?
- What's the craft principle?
- Could I make this change myself next time?

Scoring:

- 5/5 questions answered clearly → Ethical sourcing
- 3-4/5 questions answered → Mixed practice (some conflict AI)
- 0-2/5 questions answered → Conflict AI (you're accepting blindly)

Diagnostic Test #2: The Anxiety Test

Sit down to write without opening AI. How do you feel?

Ethical sourcing indicators:

- Confident in your starting point
- Excited to explore
- Trust your instincts
- View AI as optional support, not required scaffolding

Conflict AI indicators:

- Paralyzed by the blank page
- Need AI to "figure out what happens next"
- Don't trust your creative choices
- Feel incomplete without AI validation

Diagnostic Test #3: The Voice Audit

Read your last three chapters aloud. Then read something you wrote before using AI. Ask yourself:

"Does this sound like the same writer?"

Warning signs of voice erosion:

- Prose feels more polished but less distinctive
- Sentences sound professional but generic
- Metaphors/word choices don't feel like yours
- Beta readers say "This doesn't sound like you"

Diagnostic Test #4: The Growth Trajectory Test

Compare your writing now to six months ago (before AI or in early AI use):

Ethical sourcing growth indicators:

- Stronger pacing decisions
- More confident dialogue
- Better narrative structure
- Clearer understanding of craft principles

Conflict AI stagnation indicators:

- Same weak areas persist
- Can't explain why your writing works
- Relying on AI for the same fixes repeatedly
- No improvement in diagnostic ability

The Repair Process

Step 1: Audit

Document every way you currently use AI:

- Brainstorming
- Drafting
- Revision
- Dialogue fixing
- Pacing improvement
- Plot problem-solving

Step 2: Classify

For each use, answer:

- Do I understand the craft principle? (Yes/No)
- Am I getting stronger at this skill? (Yes/No)
- Could I do this without AI? (Yes/No)

Step 3: Redesign

For any use marked "No" twice or more:

✗ Stop this: "Fix my dialogue."

✓ Start this: "Explain what makes dialogue feel wooden, then guide me through fixing it myself."

Step 4: Track Independence

Create a skill development tracker:

Skill	Month 1	Month 3	Month 6	Getting Stronger?
Pacing	Need AI often	Need AI sometimes	Rarely need AI	✓ YES
Dialogue	Can't hear problems	Starting to hear them	Catch most issues myself	✓ YES
Character arc	Fully dependent on AI	Still very dependent	Still very dependent	✗ NO - repair needed

For skills not improving, change how you use AI:

- Demand explanation, not execution
- Ask for principles, not solutions
- Practice the skill without AI
- Don't move forward until you understand

PART FIVE: Case Studies

Case Study #1: The Dialogue Dependency

Original Problem (Conflict AI):

Writer Sarah had been using AI to "fix" her dialogue for four months. The process:

1. Write dialogue that felt clunky
2. Paste into AI: "Make this sound more natural"
3. AI rewrites it
4. Sarah copies the rewritten version
5. Repeat 10-15 times per chapter

Four months later:

- Sarah's dialogue in manuscripts looked polished
- But Sarah couldn't write decent dialogue without AI
- She had no idea what "natural" meant or how to achieve it
- Her skill had not improved despite writing 60,000 words

The Problem: Sarah was treating AI like an automatic dialogue polisher. No learning occurred. Each interaction extracted a solution without building capability.

The Repair Process:

Month 1 - Understanding: Sarah stopped asking AI to fix dialogue. Instead: "Why does this exchange feel unnatural? Don't fix it—explain what's wrong."

AI: "Both characters are explaining information both already know. Real people don't recap shared history unless there's conflict."

Sarah: "Show me the specific lines where this happens."

AI: [Points to exposition disguised as dialogue]

Sarah: "So what makes dialogue feel natural?"

AI: "Conflict, subtext, asymmetric knowledge, emotional stakes. Characters should want something from each other."

Month 2 - Pattern Recognition: Sarah practiced identifying the pattern herself:

- Before asking AI, she tried to spot exposition-disguised-as-dialogue
- She asked herself: "What does each character want in this exchange?"
- Only consulted AI when she couldn't see the problem

Month 3 - Independent Application: Sarah wrote entire chapters without AI:

- Her dialogue improved significantly
- She could hear when exchanges felt flat
- She understood the principles behind natural conversation

Result After Six Months:

- Sarah rarely needs AI for dialogue
- She can explain why dialogue works or doesn't
- Her skill transferred to new projects
- The collaboration strengthened her craft

Case Study #2: The Plot Problem Generator

Original Problem (Conflict AI):

Writer Marcus was stuck on a plot problem: his protagonist needed to discover information, but every method felt contrived.

Conflict AI approach (what Marcus almost did):

Marcus: "I need my protagonist to discover that her mentor has been lying. How should this happen?"

AI: "Here are five options:

1. She overhears a phone conversation
2. She finds a hidden document
3. A secondary character reveals it
4. She sees something that contradicts the lie
5. The mentor confesses under pressure"

Marcus picks option 3, implements it, moves on.

The problem: Marcus didn't understand WHY this solution works. He didn't learn how to solve plot problems. Next time he faces a similar issue, he'll need AI again.

Ethical AI approach (what Marcus actually did):

Marcus: "I'm stuck on how my protagonist discovers her mentor's lie. Don't give me solutions—help me think through what would make the reveal feel earned."

AI: "Let's start with what you know about your character. What's her wound from Lesson Three?"

Marcus: "She has trust issues because her father abandoned her."

AI: "So betrayal isn't just a plot point for her—it's her deepest fear manifesting. Given that, what kind of discovery would devastate her most?"

Marcus: "Something she can't deny. Something where she actively participated in her own deception."

AI: "Tell me more about that."

Marcus: "She'd have to discover evidence she'd been seeing all along but refused to acknowledge. That would make the betrayal about her vulnerability, not just his actions."

AI: "How might that manifest in your story?"

Marcus: "She's been ignoring inconsistencies in his research because she wanted to believe in him. The discovery isn't new information—it's her finally allowing herself to see what was there."

What Changed:

- Marcus discovered the solution himself
- The solution emerged from his character's psychology
- Marcus learned a principle: plot revelations are most powerful when they connect to character wounds
- Next time Marcus faces a plot problem, he asks: "What would wound my character most?"

Result:

- The scene feels authentic (it came from Marcus's understanding)
 - The craft principle transfers to other situations
 - Marcus's skill improved
 - The voice sounds like Marcus, not AI
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PART SIX: The Ethical Collaboration Checklist

Before using AI for any writing task, run this checklist:

Pre-Collaboration Check

- Have I clearly stated what I want to LEARN from this interaction?
- Am I asking AI to explain rather than execute?
- Do I have a hypothesis about what's wrong before consulting AI?
- Can I articulate why I'm stuck (not just that I'm stuck)?

During Collaboration Check

- Am I asking follow-up questions to understand the reasoning?
- Am I resisting the urge to just copy AI's solution?
- Am I experimenting with the principle myself?
- Do I understand the "why" behind every suggestion?

Post-Collaboration Check

- Can I explain what I learned to someone else?
- Do I understand the craft principle well enough to apply it elsewhere?
- Could I have done this myself by the end of the session?
- Does the solution sound like my voice?

Long-Term Health Check

- Am I using AI less frequently for tasks I struggled with three months ago?
- Is my AI-free writing improving over time?
- Do I feel more confident in my creative judgment?
- Can I trace my creative supply chain transparently?

If You Answer "No" to More Than 3 Questions:

Your AI collaboration has shifted toward dependency. Time to redesign your practice using the repair process in Part Four.

PART SEVEN: Resources and Further Reading

Recommended Resources on Ethical AI Use

Alliance of Independent Authors (ALLi) Guidelines

- Comprehensive ethical AI framework for authors
- Distinguishes between AI as tool vs. AI as creator
- Updated regularly as technology evolves

"The Ethics of Using AI Writing Tools" (2025)

- Research on collaborative approach vs. replacement approach
- Data privacy considerations
- Quality control frameworks

Academic Writing Standards for AI (2025)

- Authorship attribution principles
- Transparency requirements
- Intellectual property considerations
- Applicable to fiction writing ethics

Writers Using AI Ethically

Study These Approaches:

Authors who document their AI coaching process, maintain transparent supply chains, and demonstrate skill growth over time provide excellent models. Look for writers who:

- Explain their collaboration method publicly
- Show improvement in AI-free writing over time
- Focus on AI as question-asker rather than content-generator
- Maintain distinctive voice despite AI collaboration

Online Communities

Fiction Writing Communities Discussing AI Ethics

- Reddit: r/writing AI ethics threads
- Writer forums with established AI guidelines
- Professional organizations developing best practices

PART EIGHT: Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: The Transparency Audit

Take your last completed chapter. For every significant creative decision, complete this transparency statement:

Decision: [Example: Protagonist's reaction to betrayal]

My contribution:

- What I knew intuitively about the character
- The craft principle I applied
- Why this choice serves the story

AI contribution:

- The question AI asked that unlocked my understanding
- The craft framework AI provided
- How this improved my diagnostic ability

Can I replicate independently: YES / NO / PARTIALLY

If you have more than 3 decisions you can't complete this exercise for, you're using conflict AI.

Exercise 2: The Voice Preservation Test

1. Write 500 words without any AI assistance
2. Write 500 words using your current AI collaboration method
3. Write 500 words using ethical AI (Socratic questions only)
4. Have 3 beta readers rank them for "voice authenticity" (don't tell them which is which)

Analysis:

- If #1 ranks highest: Your voice is intact but AI isn't helping
- If #3 ranks highest: You're using ethical AI successfully
- If #2 ranks highest but differs significantly from #1: Voice erosion from conflict AI

Exercise 3: The Skill Transfer Challenge

Pick one craft area where you rely heavily on AI (dialogue, pacing, etc.).

Week 1: Use AI to understand the principle

- Don't ask for fixes
- Ask for explanation of what makes good [skill]
- Document the craft principles you learn

Week 2: Practice without AI

- Write 3 scenes focusing on this skill
- Use the principles you learned
- Don't consult AI at all

Week 3: Self-evaluate

- Review your Week 2 scenes
- Identify what worked and what didn't
- Use AI only to understand problems you can't diagnose yourself

Week 4: Independent mastery test

- Write 2 more scenes completely without AI
- Compare to your work from before Week 1
- Measure improvement

Success indicator: Your Week 4 writing shows measurable improvement over pre-training baseline without AI assistance.

CONCLUSION: The Supply Chain Question

Here's the paradox every AI-collaborating writer must embrace:

The more capable AI becomes, the more important your voice becomes.

AI can generate competent prose. It can solve plot problems. It can polish dialogue. But it cannot give readers YOUR voice, YOUR perspective, YOUR way of seeing the world.

That's what readers come to you for. That's what makes your writing worth reading.

Ethical AI collaboration amplifies those qualities. Conflict AI dilutes them.

The Three Questions Revisited:

1. **Does this make me more, or less, myself?** Good collaboration reveals. Bad collaboration replaces.
2. **Am I getting stronger or more dependent?** Good collaboration builds skills. Bad collaboration creates addiction.
3. **Can I trace my creative supply chain?** Good collaboration invites transparency. Bad collaboration requires hiding.

Your Collaboration Should: ✓ Strengthen your craft over time ✓ Preserve your distinctive voice ✓ Transfer skills to new projects ✓ Make you more confident, not more anxious

Your Collaboration Should Never: ✗ Make you dependent on AI for basic decisions ✗ Flatten your voice into generic prose ✗ Replace learning with shortcuts ✗ Create shame about your process

The Ultimate Test:

Six months from now, will you be a stronger writer who can explain every creative choice and work independently when needed?

Or will you be more dependent, with a voice that sounds less like you and skills that haven't improved?

The difference between those outcomes is the Writer's Kimberley Process.

Three questions. Applied consistently. To every AI interaction.

It's that simple. And that essential.

About STRATUM

This guide is based on principles taught in STRATUM, a comprehensive character development course for fiction writers.

STRATUM teaches systematic character "excavation"—discovering what you already intuitively know about your characters through AI-assisted Socratic coaching. The course shows writers

how to use AI ethically as a writing coach rather than a content generator, following the exact framework outlined in this guide.

What You'll Learn:

- Complete psychological architecture for your characters through 17 systematic lessons
- How to use AI as a Socratic partner that strengthens your craft
- Techniques for maintaining voice authenticity while leveraging AI tools
- The excavation methodology that builds independence, not dependency
- How to trace your creative supply chain transparently

Visit myaiwritingcoach.com.

Your Commitment

Before you close this guide, complete this commitment statement:

The one way I will change my AI collaboration practice:

The diagnostic I'll use to track my progress:

My goal for skill development over the next 6 months:

The date I'll conduct my next Voice Preservation Audit:

AI doesn't have to erode your voice.

It can amplify it.

But only if you source the collaboration ethically.

The Writer's Kimberley Process gives you the framework to choose wisely.

Your voice matters. Your craft matters. And you deserve tools that strengthen both.



Ready to trace your creative supply chain?

Visit myaiwritingcoach.com and discover how ethical AI collaboration makes you the writer you were meant to be.

Transform dependency into strength. Generation into discovery. Conflict AI into ethically sourced collaboration.

Join us at myaiwritingcoach.com

The future of ethical AI collaboration in creative writing starts here.