



Writing Project 1 - Developing a Great Plot in Short Narratives



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Developing a Great Plot in Short Narratives

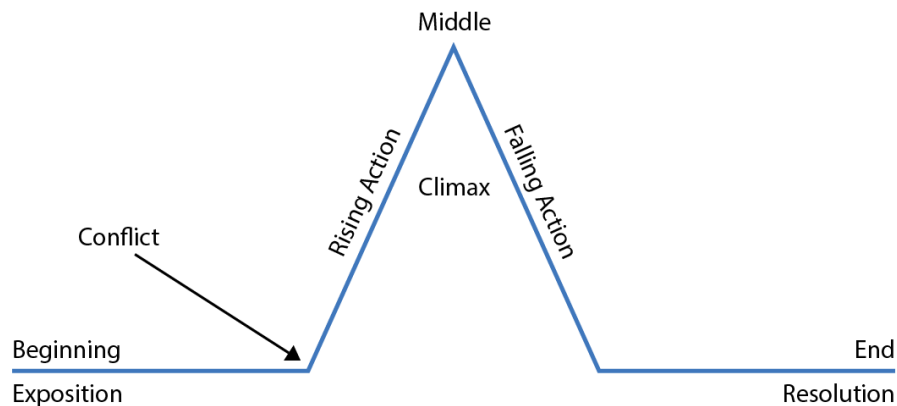
There is nothing more frustrating than listening to a great story, only to find you have suddenly lost track of what is happening, who is talking, and where the story is going. It is a challenge to tell or write a story that engages the

audience from start to finish.

Thankfully, many writers have created meaningful narratives that entertain and provide a model for what great storytelling looks and feels like. Whether you are creating a fictional story or telling a true story, the strength of your narrative depends heavily on the quality and clarity of the plot you develop.

Developing a Plot

You probably recognize the standard plot diagram shown here.



Beginning: Exposition; Conflict; Rising Action; Middle: Climax; Falling Action; End: Resolution.

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This diagram, which represents the classic flow of a story, is a useful tool for understanding the structure of plot. **Plot**, or the series of related events of a story, follows a certain format. It consists of five parts:

- The **exposition** is the beginning of the story. This is where you introduce your setting, any necessary background, and the protagonist.

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- In the **rising action**, the major problem or conflict becomes clear, and the related events begin to unfold. You create events that get more and more serious, and obstacles that become tougher and tougher to overcome. That is how your plot progresses.
- The **climax** is the story's high point or turning point of the action. It may be an action or event that creates a turning point. Your main character possibly either achieves or fails in something at this point of your story. Or your main character may reach a transforming realization.
- The **falling action** includes the events after the climax. The events you include in the falling action will wrap up lesser parts of the action. This part of the story is less complicated than the rising action because the story is coming to a close.
- The **resolution** (also called the **denouement**) is the end of the story and the place where you tie up any loose ends in relation to your main character.

Remember, though, that an effective and impressive plot has many moving parts—such as setting, character, mood, and theme—that make a story much more than just a list of sequenced events.

When you brainstorm about the plot of a narrative, consider these ideas:

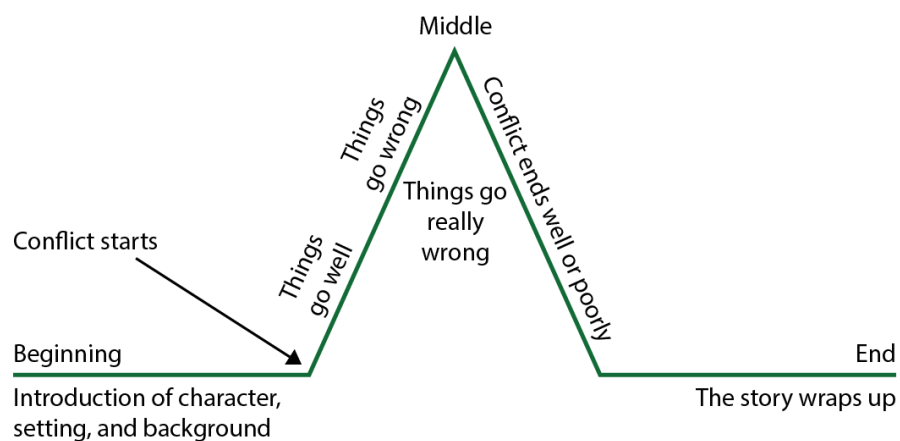
- The plot must make sense.
- A conflict escalates before things get better or

before the conflict is resolved.

- Events, characterization, mood, and theme should center around, connect to, and drive the conflict.
- A great conflict is based on characters' wants versus characters' fears. Therefore, all of the actions and situations that get in the characters' way are the events that develop an effective and impressive plot.
- Characters drive the plot, so just as in real life, characters go for what they want in the clearest or easiest possible way. Do not clutter the plot with unnecessary details or distractions; rather, include back stories, scene descriptions, and plot twists, if they add interest and meaning.

Refining a Plot

Remember, plot is the structure or skeleton of a story, and stories are built on the conflicts created by the plot. Given these ideas, a refined plot diagram might look something like this:



Beginning: Introduction of character, setting, and background; Conflict starts; Things go well; Things go wrong; Middle: Things go really wrong; Conflict ends well or poorly; End: The story wraps up

Guidelines for Developing Plot in a Narrative

As you develop the plot for your own narrative, use these guidelines:

1. Jump right in and hook the audience with an action, event, situation, or decision that creates conflict in the life of the central character. Make the central character's motivations and desired outcomes clear.
2. Introduce the conflict and the obstacles that could prevent the central character from getting what he or she wants.
3. Describe the turning point or climax. This is when the central character might make a decision, face an opponent, find a solution, suffer a consequence, change his or her perception, or learn a lesson. This is where most of the tension and suspense occur in a story.
4. Wrap things up, and decide on an open or closed ending. With an open ending, the audience is left to contemplate the characters' next steps and the continuation of the story line. With a closed ending, there is resolution, and questions are answered.
5. One thing to remember is to choose words carefully. You will have better control of the plot's events if you use accurate words and phrases to describe them. Sensory language, precise words and phrases, and telling details are word choices

and phrases, and telling details are word choices that will make your story more descriptive.

- **Sensory language** describes things using each of the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. It puts your readers directly into the events of the story by showing readers how it feels to be there.
- **Precise words and phrases** use the exact shade of meaning to describe something as accurately as possible, with the fewest words.
- **Telling details** help a reader “see” something precisely. They communicate a lot of information in just a few skillful words. These details also help create a tone, or the author’s attitude toward the subject of a text.

Writing Project 1 Activity

Instruction

Folktales are short stories that convey a message or a moral, and some folktales have multiple messages or morals. In addition, some folktales explain events and elements that are found in the natural world. Many folktales that people read today have been retold over the course of many generations as oral tradition. Characters in folktales can be humans or animals with human characteristics. Writers of folktales commonly use imaginary places and actions, magic, and exaggeration to try to explain the unexplainable and to add interest.

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This writing project gives you the opportunity to write a short narrative of your own.

Prompt

Write an original folktale or a modernized version of a classic folktale you have heard or read before. You should include these elements:

- moral/lesson/explanation of element of nature
- conflict/resolution
- setting
- characters
- imaginary elements
- sequence of events
- descriptive language

Make sure to follow the guidelines for developing plot in a narrative:

1. Jump right in and hook the audience with an action, event, situation, or decision that creates conflict in the life of the central character. Make the central character's motivations and desired outcomes clear.
2. Introduce the conflict and the obstacles that could