



PLOT WITH  
CHARACTER  
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**PLOT WITH CHARACTER**  
**HOW TO PLOT YOUR NOVEL AND ACHIEVE CHARACTER ARC IN**  
**40 SCENES**

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## **Introduction**

Much argument has covered the issue of what drives a story. Is it character? Is it plot? The debate rages. Heck, there's even debate over what a story is, what plot is. (Picture a smiling Bill Clinton answering the inquiry of what plot is by noting it depends on the definition of "is.") Yes, plotting your story idea and fleshing out your character can be overwhelming tasks, both to beginners and to those who have been writing for a while. But it doesn't have to be.

I say that plot and character are connected, insomuch that they should not be viewed as separate pieces of the story puzzle. Rather, they should be conjured together into a whole, a connected series of steps that consider both the storyline (what happens) and the character arc (who changes and why). You can't have one without the other. They are interdependent--like lungs and air are to breathing, so are plot and character to a story.

There is a way to plan for both. That is what this book offers you. A plan. And it does it briefly without the extraneous verbiage. And it gives it to you in an accessible form.

What does a writer need when creating plot? Ideas? Yes. In spades. Time? Yes. Plenty of it. Organization? Absolutely. Ideas, you get them. Time, you can find it. Organization, well, that piece of the writing puzzle can be tricky.

Especially if, like me, you are organizationally-challenged.

A writer needs organization. This book offers you that organization in an easy-to-use and easy-to-understand format. A fill-in-the-blank format that gets your ideas down and organized in an optimal order for plotting a novel with character arc from start to finish. This workbook simultaneously offers character work with an added character sheet at the end for further delving. Together these worksheets offer a complete view of your novel--plot and character.

From here you can skip directly to the worksheets. Plot and structure haven't really changed since Aristotle. We've all heard of these elements I'm discussing. Plot points, pinch points, hook, inciting incident--sometimes they are called different things, but the basics remain the same. The worksheets, however, are new and different and effective.

If you have ever studied plot (plot points, acts, structure, etc.) in any depth, you can bypass the next few chapters and hit the slopes of the working worksheet. If you need a refresher, visit the brief overviews in chapters one through four. Basics outlined without frills. For further instruction on individual elements of plot, story, character development, or general writing needs, see the resources listed below and at the end of the book. Those same resources are those which have shaped my writing, plotting, editing, and teaching. I have synthesized what I found to be the best of all I have read and studied and analyzed and taught. And I present that to you here.

For your further edification I suggest you purchase the following if you are not in possession of copies already.

*Story* by Robert McKee

*Screenplay* by Syd Field

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell

*The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler

*Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks

*Please Understand Me II* by David Keirse

And .... a psychology textbook.

If you need more in-depth study on the various elements that make up the art of writing and plotting, please see the above and my other works.

Otherwise, this simple tome can get you from chapter one to "the end" in 40 scenes. Best wishes on your writing journey. Metaphors be with you, and may you always plot with character.

## Chapter One

**Breaking Down Plot** Plot in its simplest form follows the three act structure. Act I, Act II, Act III. Beginning, Middle, End. Three Acts. However, when you consider how your plot is spent, your book has four parts, of roughly equal length, because Act II is a two-parter. Now, your story may not hit a mark exactly, but the guideline breakdown looks like this: ACT I | ACT II first

half | ACT II second half | ACT III 25% | 25% |  
25% | 25%

Or Plot Looks Like This:

THE SWEET SIXTEEN-- There are 16 vital pieces/scenes to nail, 4 per Act.

**Act I** 1. Opening Image 2. Hook 3. Inciting Incident 4. Plot Point One **Act II**

5. Response to Plot Point One 6. Pinch Point One 7. Response to the Pinch

Point 8. Midpoint 9. Response to the Midpoint 10. Pinch Point Two 11.

Response to the Pinch Point 12. All Hope Is Lost **Act III** 13. Plot Point Two 14.

Response to Plot Point Two 15. Resolution 16. Closing Image

IN DETAIL: ACT I--SETUP

PART 1, SETUP

1. Opening Image (first page) This image can offer theme, symbol, metaphor. It pertains to the story at hand. Can foreshadow what will follow.



2. Hook (within first few scenes/pages) This is something that makes us want to read on to find out what is going on. Raises questions, intrigues, keeps us there for more.

Introduce character, get back story, details, see the everyday world.

3. Inciting Incident (should occur within the first few chapters) Starts the story ball rolling. Hero gets a call to action.

He refuses (optional), meets with an advisor, considers, then accepts that he is committed to the new goal of the quest presented.

4. Plot Point One (Happens at the 25% mark, at 1/4 of the way into the story). This scene is a game changer. It alters the story and the hero's quest. New quest starts.

## ACT II--CONFRONTATION

### PART 2, CONFRONTATION AS REACTION

1. Hero Reacts to Plot Point One He can cry, freak out, walk around trying to get out of it, avoid it, try to plan, find friends, *etc.*

2. Pinch Point One About halfway into Part 2 we get to see the opposing force (antagonist) in all its glory. Feel the power and understand the trouble coming.

3. Hero reacts to Pinch Point.

4. Midpoint (happens in the middle of the book/story, at 50% mark) Another plot point milestone that changes things again in the story. This one is contextually significant--alters the story trajectory. It has a lasting effect on the character's

inner journey.

## ACT II--CONFRONTATION

### PART 3, CONFRONTATION AS ACTION

1. Hero Reacts to Midpoint 2. Pinch Point Two About halfway into Part 3 another reminder of the opposing force's nature and ability to annihilate the hero needs to occur. Shows how evil, how big, how difficult to overcome.

3. Hero reacts to Pinch Point 4. All Hope Is Lost This is the moment that the character experiences a black moment of defeat. Nothing is good. He gives up.

(In romance, literally The Black Moment.) ACT III--RESOLUTION

## **PART 4--RESOLUTION**

1. Plot Point Two (occurs at the 75% mark) Another big event of change. Last piece of puzzle/information enters the story and gives us a final understanding of what is and what is not and what will be. Game changer for the last time.
2. Hero reacts to Plot Point Two 3. Resolution The rest of the story is the hero taking on the antagonist, solving the problem one way or another.
4. Closing Image This image is the mirror image of the Opening Image. It almost re-hooks the reader. It can, and probably should, be a hook if you are planning a sequel. Otherwise, it reinforces the theme of the book and makes readers want another story. One hopes.

These are the crucial scenes within your novel. To properly flesh out a 50,000 word + novel, you need connective tissue, connective scenes in between these pillar scenes (pillars of scenes) that I've listed. That's where the worksheet(s) comes in. In CHAPTER FIVE I filled in the blanks for you in the worksheet with possible scenes. You must have the vital scenes above for your story to make sense. You need about 40 scenes total to have a viable novel that tells a complete and engaging story. You can go shorter, but in today's market, 50k is cutting it short. Speaking to the reverse of that, more than 120,000 words is difficult to sell as well.

Now, further breakdown of the novel.

Act I is roughly 1/4 of your story and is the set-up part. Here you need to start strong with a great opening image, a juicy hook, and a peppered-in back story. This is Part I, where you introduce the character, his everyday life, goals, dreams, *etc.*

At about 10-15% in, there can be an inciting incident that gets the story moving. (I prefer an inciting incident and a plot point one.) Then at the 25% mark (25% of the manuscript--ie page 50 of 200), you throw a cog in the wheel of the character's life. This is the first major plot point, or Plot Point One. It happens roughly at that 25% marker.

A plot point is an event that changes everything for the character. Goals, dreams, life, motivation. It creates a new story question, a new quest, new goal, new motivations. Will the character do x, get the girl/boy, overcome x, *etc.* It begins the real journey/quest of the story. Plot Point One transitions us to Act II.

Act II comprises roughly 1/2 of the entire story. It's your biggest Act.

The middle often sags. It's twice as heavy as the other two pieces of the pie. But, take it in smaller pieces. Break it down into two parts, each roughly, you guessed it, 25% of the story.

Act II then is made up of two pieces, Parts 2 and 3. This is the confrontation. The hero confronts the antagonist/opposing force.

Part 2 covers the storyline where the character figures out what to do,

wonders around a bit, trains for the upcoming conflict, takes a journey of discovery, makes friends and enemies, gets advice, gets into trouble, explores his options, *etc.*

Somewhere near the middle of Part 2, the character is faced with the antagonist's power at a pinch point, a scene that reminds us of the conflict and the powerful force the character is going up against. This can be a revelation of the antagonist or reinforce its power.

Then, a few scenes later, near the 50% mark, halfway through the story (page 100 of 200), the Midpoint occurs and throws the character for another loop.

A Midpoint marks the middle of the story and is a plot point that is a game-changer. It alters the character's quest, knowledge, understanding, *etc.* Basically, a new plot twist occurs. The Midpoint kicks off Part 3, the second half of Act II.

Part 3 covers the part of the story where the character gets his stuff together and gets proactive. He initiates action and starts to solve the problem/conflict at hand. He will work harder, have more and more difficult obstacles, try and fail, and then have a crisis point before we get to the major climax.

Again, in the middle or so of Part 3, there is a pinch point again, a scene to reinforce that the opposing force is evil (or powerful or determined--the

antagonist isn't always "evil," but always offers powerful opposition), just how powerful it is, and to make us realize how difficult this fight will be for the hero. Act III ends with an All Hope Is Lost scene where the character feels that the fight is over and he can't go on. Things look the bleakest.

Act III is last 1/4 of the story and is the resolution. It kicks off with the Second Plot Point. The Second Plot Point occurs at the 75% mark. The Second Plot Point is the scene that again, for the final time, changes the character's journey, knowledge, plan going forward. From that point on the hero steps up and solves the problem, fights the good fight, and faces the greatest challenge against the antagonist/opposing force.

Once the conflict is resolved, the hero responds to what just happened. All, or most of, the story threads are tied off, questions answered. And we end with a closing image to juxtapose or reflect the opposite of the opening image in some way. It's almost a hook . . . to your next book. It can be an actual hook to a sequel or just a clever way to end that makes the reader want more from you the author.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Character Who Takes Your Plot Journey**

Your character should match your story, which is why the plot outline I created in Chapter Five combines both the story outline and the characterization elements necessary to build a solid story foundation.

The character needs to be believable in actions throughout the story. Don't give a character one set of values and then change them halfway through without showing a character arc, character growth, reasons. When you put your character in the conflict, his true inner nature will come out. Character is a choice, not just for us as individuals, but for our story's hero too. Testing him or her will make character shine through.

Before you begin, you need to know some vital information about your character.

To start, you need to know the character's backstory. What did s/he do before the story starts? What happened to make the character the person s/he is?

Everyone has a story, a history, a past. Everyone has moments in his/her life that contribute to who s/he is today. Your character is the same. Make him/her real. Breathe life into him/her by knowing him/her inside out.

Give your character a goal, a desire, a yearning, a need. Give the character a wound that makes him/her who s/he is. Give your character a special

talent or skill. We like to read about people who are competent and also who are special, people who excel at something. Make the character special. But not perfect. Never perfect.

Also make the character sympathetic. We need to root for him/her. Show us why we would. Give us a reason to care what happens. Or we won't read.

Give the character a tailored appearance, a voice, dialogue, dialogue tags (things he says frequently), name, nickname, favorite shoes, affectations, *etc.*

Then get in the character's head. A good way to start is to know the following:

What does the character want at the beginning of the story? After the quest begins? Goals? Internal and External goals.

What motivates the character ? Internally? Externally?

What/Who opposes the character? External Conflict.

How does the character oppose him/herself? How does the character get in his/her own way? Internal Conflict.

Give your character obstacles. Let him choose how to handle them. As for us, so for your characters: character is a choice. It's what happens when we have to react and act. It is who we are in action after all else is stripped away.

Story needs both events that are linked causally and character which is



revealed through actions. Inseparable. Plot and Character = Story.

A basic story is made thus: A character wants something because he is motivated, but he faces conflict and must resolve it one way or another, win or lose.

Beefed up version: A sympathetic character must overcome a series of more and more difficult and problematic situations until they appear insurmountable to his achieving his compelling desire that has motivated him throughout the story. He wins or loses.

Plot and character. Story.

## Chapter Three

### A Brief Review of Story Elements

Other than plot and character, there are several elements and skills to consider when creating a story. Dialogue, setting, description, conflict itself, suspense and/or tension, pacing, scene execution, genre, style, voice, literary devices, point of view. All important, all significant, all irrefutably necessary and vital. Sorry, forgot, no verbosity. You need them all, however, and you must execute and use them well to survive the slush pile. You will need to juggle all these things to get past the first page.

And you can.

It's a matter of talent which is a gift. A gift that cannot be taught. BUT, big but, it's also a matter of skill. And skill is learned. Talent, however dormant, meager, or underwhelming, can be developed, honed, activated. Everyone has some amount of talent for writing. On a scale. One hopes that one resides somewhere past average, but average is good enough. Take your talent and add skill. Hone, develop, work hard at achieving that writing dream.

Here's where reading and classes and independent study and practice (oh my) come into their own. There are books and classes devoted entirely to specific areas for strengthening. And there are classes that take a writer at good and work on getting better. And from better to . . . better. I don't think there's a

best. Writing is rewriting. Writing is revising. Writing is resetting your writer's brain each and every day to do better, write better, know better this craft, this art, this life's work of storytelling. You can get better. We all can. It's like pi,  $\pi$ , in that it has no end, no last number. Like infinity-- there is no being beyond infinity. It just keeps going . . .

In the context of this brief book, you cannot achieve all that life's work. But you can get better. You can learn or review a little morsel about a few more of the important elements and skills that make up a story.

### **Setting:**

When and where we are in time and space. When you begin a story, as you go along, when you start a new chapter, a new scene, you need to ground us in the story world. There is no need to go overboard with detail. A few well-placed and well-thought-out details can orient the reader to when and where the story is taking place as well as serve the double duty of adding symbol, metaphor, or thematic significance to the story.

### **Dialogue:**

Dialogue in a story is not like "real" dialogue. But it must sound natural to the ear of the reader. This comes mainly from reading well and often and from practice. Avoid information dump in your dialogue. Ie No "I'm your brother

Alfred who left for war three years ago and has a deep need to rival you, Brother Billy." Um, no.

Dialogue can be a great tool for other elements. It can be used in characterization. How a character talks, tags, when a character talks, the syntax (structure) of the dialogue, diction (word choice), volume, *etc.* Dialogue can also aid in conflict and creating suspense and tension. Terse, short sentences, no attributing phrases, can go fast, show how tense, excited, angry, volatile, the speakers are. Artful Dialogue can say much without saying it. It can lay bare what is unspoken between the lines. Again, practice.

### **Pacing:**

This is the speed of the scenes, how fast your prose moves, how you cut your scenes. To slow pace, use longer sentences with embedded clauses and modifiers and participles and whatever you need to make the reader stop, pause, think, process, wait.

Then be brief. For speed.

Use fragments. Like this. They go fast.

And space.

White space. It moves.

Gets the eye down the page.

Faster. And Faster.

When it comes to scenes, genre may dictate the norm. Usually a scene occurs with a time limit and transitions to the next scene when time or place or character point of view changes. Ending scenes on a suspenseful note will help with pacing and encourage a page turn.

Chapters need the same kind of consideration as scenes, though several scenes may constitute one chapter, they need to have a purpose or goal that links them together to create a chapter. Use cliff-hangers, questions, tension, surprise, etc to end a chapter. Goal always = turn the page.

For all pacing concerns, note that when nothing is happening, cut to the action. Pace that slows for a reason other than achieving a desired goal is filler that kills. You don't want slow pace and a reader that puts your book down.

### **Point of View:**

1st Person-- I, we, me, us, our, my. When the character is "I."

ie I hated that car. It reminded me of all the good times we once had.

2nd Person--You.

ie You enter the room, turn on the light. To your right you see a red table.

3rd Person--He, she , it, they, him, her, them, The boy, Rebecca.

ie. Sadie touched the cold hand, her own suddenly numb with fear.

Third person also breaks down into 3rd omniscient in which the narrator

knows all in everyone's head. 3rd limited, limited access to inner thoughts, usually one character. And what is called Close 3rd or deep POV, which is like 1st person thoughts in a 3rd person narrative.

ie Jane glared at Kevin. That jerk knew how to push her buttons.

Choosing a point of view for your story calls for knowing the genre and the market. Close 3rd, deep POV, and first person are usually the go-to choices in today's market and most genres.

### **Description:**

This is how you paint with words. Description is a matter of choosing the right details and then painting them well. It isn't about how many adjectives and adverbs you add. Less is more there. No, it's about style and fresh writing.

ie instead of

Crazy Danny ate the pink frosting, and I felt thoroughly disgusted even though I struggled to be polite.

try

Danny Bigelow from downstairs was holding onto that tub of icing like it was his pot of gold. His good eye was fixed on me and the other was mostly ping-ponging around and landing nowhere.

He dipped the end of one dread lock in the pink confection and brought it to his cracked lips."Want some?"

"No. Um, no thank you."

I was pretty sure I'd never eat again.

### **Conflict, suspense, tension:**

A story is not a story without conflict. Without a problem to overcome, the story is just a grocery list. And about as interesting. It's not even a recipe yet.

Create conflict by putting obstacles in the character's way, internal and external. And by adding suspense and tension, the story has forward movement.

Conflict is any of the following ideas played out:

man versus man

man versus nature

man versus society

man versus supernatural

man versus machine

man versus God

man versus whatever antagonistic force (opponent) you can specify.

And conflict can also be internal, man versus self in some way.

Add suspense and tension and conflict by making things hard and harder for the character. Have things, places, people, the elements oppose his

goals, get in the way, wreak havoc. Have the character be offered two equally crappy choices as the only choices to get from point a to point b. Throw in a ticking clock, give the character less time than originally planned. Take out something that is helping the character. Kill off another significant character. Put the character in mortal jeopardy. Endanger his loved ones. Threaten his morality, identity, profession, reason for living. Pile on the trouble. Cliffhang. Do whatever it takes to be mean to your character.

### **Style and Voice:**

These are developed solely by you and your experiences. Adaptive too. From one novel or story to the next. One persona to the next. Cultivate these by varied reading of the masters of story craft. Practice.

### **Literary Devices:**

Several rhetorical and literary devices/elements go into creating a story. Of the many, and yes, there are so many (you can find books on rhetorical and terms/devices/elements), I am listing the faithful few--easy to recognize and employ. And many elements pull double duty.

Some common ones to note/use/implement are:

**metaphor**--a comparison in which one thing is said to be another.

ie I am the wind. I howl at the night and rush to your eaves. (extended



here since the wind howls. Also personified wind--Do note that personification is a type of metaphor.)

or

Her eyes were pools. (also cliché--an overused literary device/expression.)

**simile**--a comparison between things using like or as or than or seemed, *etc.*

ie He was as high as a kite. (also hyperbole--exaggerated expression. And cliché.)

**personification**-- a type of metaphor which gives inanimate objects human characteristics.

ie The chair trembled on its uneven legs.

**symbol**--when an object is both itself and represents something else greater than its being

ie The bowl was empty. Gone were the mementos of our love, gone were his house key, his lucky penny, my third best set of dentures. : )

The bowl is more than a bowl here. It represents their relationship, his/her life. It's empty, *etc.*

**allusion**--reference to something well known

ie. I sat down on the sidewalk, one Jimmy Choo lost, one broken in my hand. The night was a disaster.

The allusion is to Cinderella.

## **Chapter Four**

## **Making a Scene**

A scene is a building block to your novel. The 40 or so scenes you will need to complete your novel (a novel of 50-80K words) need to have a purpose. They need to move your story forward at all times.

Scenes are constructed to tell a piece of the story puzzle. Scenes always reveal character, but that is not all they do nor should do. A scene needs to do more than contribute to characterization. It must be a working scene and do its job: move the plot toward its resolution.

To create a scene, you need to know where your story is headed and what you must accomplish along the way. In chapter one, I listed 16 key scenes to a successful novel. You can argue there are 12 or 9 or 8 or 3 that are absolutely necessary. However you add it up, there will eventually be more than just those major milestone scenes. All your scenes need to be workhorses. Not ponies that are brushed and allowed to simply prance around because they're pretty. Pretty doesn't get the job done. It's nice if pretty is a bonus, great if you can do both, but your scenes must work first and foremost. Your scenes gotta pay the bills.

Scenes, like the greater scope of the novel, have structure. They have a three act structure same as the overall story. A beginning, a middle, and an end. A scene starts out with a purpose. What needs to be accomplished? Do you need to have the hero figure out something about the villain? Do you need to reveal a

key clue? That should be your scene goal. Don't lose sight of it. Write it down on your **Scene Elements** worksheet.

You begin your scene by letting the reader know what we are after, what must be accomplished. The middle is comprised of the actions the character takes to get there, how he goes about addressing the problem of the scene, how he reacts to obstacles, what he does that either accomplishes the goal or fails. And that has us arriving at the end, the success or failure of the character in achieving the scene goal with which we started.

The **Scene Elements** worksheet that follows the novel outlining worksheet can be printed off for each scene and used to structure and complete the scene. While you are always revealing the character, you are also trying to address things like theme and setting. The worksheet will keep all that information organized and easily accessible.

Scene:

Goal --->Actions taken to reach the goal --->Result

Then the next scene will address how the character feels about the previous one, perhaps only briefly or in an implied way, and then restart a new goal, *etc.*

## **Chapter Five**

## Worksheets to Write By

The following worksheets are designed to streamline your plotting and character needs. You can flesh out an entire novel by filling out these pages.

These worksheets are the result of years of study, reading many novels, studying many masters, and teaching writing and structure to other writers. They reflect the generic and some specific elements required to form a novel and can be used to plot any type of novel-- but speak best to novels that follow a sequential format. To see structure applied to specific genres, check out my other short books on writing that offer helpful worksheets that breakdown the structure. If you are writing romance, you may find [The Love Plot: How to Plot Your Romance Novel](#) helpful (ebook and paperback). It offers detailed plot structure outlines for romance in general and one for category romance in particular--the two protagonist per chapter format with specific scene needs. If you are writing fantasy, you may want to read [The Plot Fantastic: How to Plot a Fantasy Novel in 40 Scenes](#). It specifically addresses the hero's journey and elements particular to the fantasy genre.

The worksheets included here can get you from zero to draft in thirty days or perhaps less. Fill them out. There are many options listed within the scene breakdown. Spend time mulling over your options, fill in the blanks, then write a novel that does what you need it to do. Work.

If you spend 3 days filling this out and then 28 more writing the story at

1800 words per day, you will have structured and written a novel in a month. One that could be a polish or two away from being ready for submission. You don't have to make your novel fit the worksheet exactly. Make it your own. I repeat some tension elements within the worksheet. Those are there for suggestions. Use your writer's discretion. Move things around if necessary. See where the story takes you. And write.

Go on, amaze yourself.



## THE STORY--BUILDING PLOT AND CHARACTER

### ACT ONE-- Part 1, SETTING UP THE STORY WORLD AND NEEDS

What do we need to know in the way of back story and setup?

1. OPENING IMAGE--Symbolic of the quest/theme of novel. Paint, detail, imagery, symbol, metaphor, allusion. Do something to anchor the reader in the time and place also.

2. HOOK--Something interesting to pull in/draw in the reader. Needs to be something that grabs reader emotionally, can be experienced sensually, makes reader react vicariously, creates a question to be answered, promise something later as payoff for reading.

- What will ask the story question?

3. Introduce the character and illustrate just what his life is like prior to facing problems. Show us the ordinary world of the hero. Show love interest/lack thereof. Give the character some charisma, some appeal. Show some surface stuff, affectations, appearance, dialogue, dialect, mannerisms, movements,

actions and a few under the surface traits. HERE YOUR ARC BEGINS.

- Show character's life, what his stakes are. Family, fortune, friends, world. What are his dreams and what is he pursuing?
- READER EMPATHY MOMENTS-- Make us care and root for hero.
- CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT--Make the hero have some good qualities and some observable and understood weaknesses. Choose dependable, modest, level-headed, street smart, even tempered, vulnerable, victim, not whining or whiny, plays fair, has a strong ethic or moral code, not arrogant, helpful (saves the dog or hamster), sense of humor, courageous, sympathetic goals, honest, kind, *etc.*

- Hero is both ordinary and extraordinary. Has a great skill or ability. He's a bit unhappy, though. Not a perfect life. Lonely, bereaved, heartbroken somewhere. Give us a hero with a wound of some sort. Show him dealing. Show him coping with life, with his hero's wound. (He will somehow overcome or come to accept something later.) WHO IS HE?
  
- Show character wanting something. External and Internal. He needs to be working towards something, wanting it badly, and also have some internal need, like belonging, love, *etc.* A goal and motivation for living.

- What flaw does hero have that he will overcome? How will the story make him overcome that flaw? This should be answered in the character arc and in the story's external journey.

- TENSION ADDED--Put the character in a pickle--something reader fears, relates to, recognizes, dreams of .. .. get empathy, get the reader to root for hero.

4. INCITING INCIDENT--Present hero with a call to adventure, present a problem, a dilemma, make something dramatic happen that gets the story ball rolling forward. Optional Beat can be combined with Plot Point One.

- Show how there is something out there to oppose the hero,

antagonistic/opposing force that will be the central conflict.

- ADDED TENSION--offer a moment of fear. Make the hero afraid. How does he react?

5. Hero realizes that there is an antagonistic/opposing force of some nature. The inciting incident introduced it. Hero possibly refuses the call of the inciting incident. Not committed, wants to turn back. Then he realizes he must. Realizes what is at stake. Sets up the pickle/predicament that will be the story conflict.

6. Meets with the mentor, wise old man or woman, who prepares hero for unknown. Gets advice, guidance, tools, magical equipment. Is opposed by a loved one--don't go, *etc.* How does the character feel at this point? Show an internal reaction.

7. Hero hesitantly steps into the fray or on the path. Reveal another aspect of the hero.

- Show him do something good or kind that makes us like that part of him. Perhaps something to use later.

8. Hero is told to turn back, stop, don't go forward, don't continue this journey, stay away. Perhaps by mentor, friend, love interest. Or the Antagonist can send a message. How does he react? What do you want to illustrate by how the character responds?

9. Hero faces the danger, the dark, the evil, some antagonistic force, the opposition. BIG DANGER, BAD THING, PROBLEM, EVIL, DARKNESS falls onto the shoulders and into the life of the hero. Everything about his ordinary life changes. Nothing will ever be the same.

- Show a spark of the hero's charisma.
  
- TENSION ADDED-- Hero faces danger. Or parallel injury/harm to a loved one.

10. PLOT POINT ONE A big twist occurs, new game-changing information.

Hero commits to the journey/adventure, crosses the threshold of no turning back. He is committed to that story problem/ pickle/predicament for good. No escaping.

- TENSION--Make stakes worse. The hero stands to lose even more.

## **NOTES ON ACT I**

Things to add, authenticity, details . . .



ACT TWO-- Part 2, THE CONFRONTATION, AS REACTION. HERO REACTS TO THE BIG DEAL OF THE PLOT POINT AND GOES FORWARD AS BEST HE CAN

What are you setting out to accomplish as the hero reacts to what just happened to him and goes forward? What elements must you include?

1. Hero reacts to the first plot point. Show that if the hero can attain this goal, all will be right again, at least in his mind.

2. Hero retreats and tries to regroup. Hero faces the first obstacle on the journey.

- ADDED TENSION--Take away something important, now it will be even harder to figure out how to respond. Loses an ally, a tool, information, a way out, *etc.*

3. Hero starts to plan, does regroup, takes stock of options.

4. Hero makes allies, learns special rules for operating and/or belonging in the new "special" world. Love interest comes into play more.

- ADDED TENSION-- An ally or love interest has a conflicting goal and opposes the character's goal-- ally becomes opposition.

5. Hero's moral character is tested; hero is tested for skills, abilities, new

learning.

6. PINCH POINT ONE--Revelation of the Antagonist. Antagonist/opposing force makes itself known. Its opposition is made real to the hero. Things are worse than thought, perhaps. Stakes are greater.

7. Hero responds to the pinch point, deals with his fear, perhaps fails at an

attempt to be a hero and must face inner demons and take stock of strengths and weaknesses.

- ADDED TENSION--A personal threat to hero or a loved one.

8. Hero comes to a black moment in looking for help to face antagonist/opposing force. May be deserted by his allies. Stakes raised again/more.

- ADDED TENSION-- show that if hero gives up now, he will get the goal he wanted before the first plot point came into his life. He can achieve a selfish goal if he leaves the quest, stops the journey, surrenders. Show hero split, at war with himself to decide. This will

beef up the internal conflict.

9. Hero takes a swing and a miss. Tries to attack, but he fails. His attempt to reach the goal ends badly and makes matters worse, a new setback occurs. Journey to the scene at the midpoint.

10. MIDPOINT--Big story quest shift. Everything changes again. New information enters the story. See what has been going on all along for the first time. Changes hero's understanding. Changes hero's course of action if he gets this info. Info gained here will form how hero responds in Part 3. Whatever hero finds out at the midpoint empowers him to be able to attack the problem now that he knows more. This is a crisis point--could parallel what happens at the climax (resolution). Low point for hero.

## NOTES ON ACT II, Part 1

ACT TWO--Part 3, CONFRONTATION AS ACTION. HERO TAKES ON THE PROBLEM, GETS PROACTIVE AND GOES AFTER GOAL.

How will you illustrate the hero becoming heroic? What scenes, details, and character actions must be in place to show the final preparation for the battle/climax? How will you have the hero face himself, his weaknesses, and his need?

1. Hero responds to the midpoint revelation. Still learning. He doesn't have it all together.

- ADDED TENSION-- Hero has many options. Show him have A and B, but if he chooses, A, he can't do B and vice versa. Both are equal.

2. Hero begins to attack the problem, solve things. Hero works on relationships. Hero recruits assistance. Hero steps up, still learning.

3. Hero reacts under stress, comes to a dangerous place, event. Has help from allies. Hero fights his internal conflict, inner demon.

- ADDED TENSION-- Have hero worry about something unknown. He's sent for help or is counting on something. Have him worry that it may not arrive, or an ally is really enemy, or an important message never made it and his attack will fail and kill innocents, *etc.*



4. Hero comes to the place where the quest's object/need is--approaches enemy's home turf. Looks for an object. Where the antagonist/opposing force resides, *etc.* The most dangerous place in this new world of the hero's quest.

- ADDED TENSION-- Have the dangerous place or anything hero has known be worse than he thought. There are more obstacles, more problems, problem is bigger, villain is bigger, more evil, info has been lost forever, *etc.* IE Not only has ally lost powers/object they needed, the piece of evidence, she remembers nothing and no one, or she gives up, *etc.*

5. Hero pauses here at the "gate" to the antagonistic force's center/residence/lair/office. Hero plans, prepares, outwits whatever minions and obstacles are in his way. FACES MINIONS.

6. PINCH POINT TWO--Antagonist/opposing force reminder. Show its force and nature and how difficult or evil it is. See and feel the antagonistic force. Powerful antagonistic force. Fully see it.

- ADDED TENSION-- have a minor character come into contact with danger, makes a wrong choice and is killed, badly wounded, stripped of something, *etc.* to parallel hero and what would have happened to him, what may happen if he doesn't learn something, *etc.*

7. Hero responds to the pinch point. Hero confronts a type of death, fights inner demons. Adjusts to his flaws and demons. Overcomes a bit. HIS ARC IS MOVING TOWARD INNER CHANGE. IS HE STILL THE SAME PERSON WE FIRST MET? Be sure to illustrate even slight changes.

- ADD TENSION--A betrayal by a close friend/ally/mentor. Or seeming betrayal.

8. LULL--ALL IS LOST MOMENT. Hero's fortunes hit rock bottom. Faces possible death. Brought to the brink of battle with a hostile force. Hero and goals are in mortal jeopardy.

9. **BOOTSTRAP MOMENT.** Hero pulls himself up and prepares for what is to come. Having survived "death" (overcome something that would have destroyed the quest, him, his career, love life, etc), the hero celebrates, takes possession of something in the quest, a small victory. Finds something that will be meaningful to take back from the journey. **PART OF YOUR CHARACTER'S ARC IS THE BOOTSTRAP MOMENT.** Hero will have changed.

10. Hero is reconciled to his/her love interest. (Perhaps another subplot thread is picked up.)

## NOTES ON ACT II Part 2

ACT THREE--Part 4, RESOLUTION/DENOUMENT. THE HERO FIGHTS THE MAJOR BATTLE AND WINS OR LOSES. EITHER WAY HE REVEALS HIS PROFOUND TRUTH.

How will the hero change right before the climax/battle? How will the battle change him? How will he react and grow and change as a result of the climax/battle? How has he learned his own truth of who he is, what he needs, and where he is headed?

1. SECOND PLOT POINT-- A twist. Hero learns something that changes everything one last time. So this is the last stand. This is where the road back home starts. Hero is chased. Hero is heroic now, out to defeat the antagonist/opposing force.

2. Hero confronts the antagonist/opposing force and is pursued by the forces he has disturbed.

3. Hero is tested. Falls down, gets back up. MORE CHANGE AS HE GROWS.

- ADD TENSION--Something hangs over the hero's head.
- ADD TENSION--ticking clock, time frame shortens, now hero has less time than thought.

4. Hero overcomes his inner demon, attacks the exterior conflict. BIG ARC MOMENT. THE INTERNAL CONFLICT IS ADDRESSED. WHO AM I? WHO HAVE I BECOME? Hero looks inside for strength. Isn't quite sure he can win or face the antagonist.

5. CLIMAX. Ultimate resolution to the story problem. Hero gets validation, victory and/or resolution/satisfaction. Hero confronts an ordeal, a life and death moment, where he must defeat death/darkness/antagonistic force with the lessons he's learned. He saves the day. HERO MOMENT. What he has learned is applied here. His moment of ultimate truth is here. WHO IS HE NOW? IS HE THE MAN HE HOPED OR FEARED?



6. Hero is transformed from the "death" and is reborn with new insight. Deal with his hero's wound. How does it come into play now? HOW IS HE FINALLY IN HIS OWN SKIN? HOW HAS HE CHANGED FROM THE FIRST INTRO? DRIVE HOME HIS EIPHANIES AND HIS NEW SELF.

7. The hero leaves the new world of the quest behind. Illustrate his feelings. Setting can reflect his mindset/emotion.

8. Hero reconciles with lovers, friends, parent/mentor figures, GOD. Hero has an object from the quest. Something symbolic. He ponders.

9. Hero takes what he has learned and applies it to the old world he once knew. He is changed. Life is no longer the same for him there. HE HAS SATISFACTION/CLOSURE/RESOLUTION. The final resonance of story goal. Ties off threads of story.

10. CLOSING IMAGE--an opposite image in some way from the OPENING IMAGE that illustrates the story's theme. What you want the reader to take away.

## **NOTES ON ACT III**

Scene Elements Worksheet Print this for all scenes as needed.

What do you need to accomplish in this scene? What needs to happen to move the story forward?

Where is this scene happening?

When does it happen?

Who is involved?

What does the setting include/look like? What do the characters see?

What sounds do the characters hear?

What do they smell? Or sometimes taste?

What do they feel physically? temp, texture, *etc.*

What do they feel emotionally?

What details do you want to emphasize? List them and use them. Symbols, metaphors, thematic images.

How does the character feel in this scene at the beginning?

How does s/he feel at the end?

How can you make things worse in this scene? Pile on the trouble?

## CREATE A CHARACTER WORKSHEET-- BASICS

**NAME** What does the name mean and why does it fit?

**AGE** Does the age have bearing on hero's journey?

**OCCUPATION** How can the occupation aid in the conflict coming up or the wound the hero has to be healed?

**WOUND** What from the character's past has broken, injured, stifled, stopped, or otherwise kept the hero down and unable to achieve fulfilment of self?

**BACKSTORY** What has happened to the hero prior to page one that is relevant to the story and the character arc?

**APPEARANCE** What does the character look like, sound like, seem like, etc.

**YEARNING** What does the hero want, has always wanted, that is an unmet need or desire or wish? How might that manifest in this story/conflict?

FOR THIS SPECIFIC STORY WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S

**-GOAL**

**-MOTIVATION**

**-CONFLICT**

HOW WILL YOUR CHARACTER CHANGE? CHARACTER ARC

FROM \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_ ie from weak to strong WHY? WHAT MAKES HIM CHANGE?

**SPECIAL SKILL OR TALENT**

**WEAKNESSES**

**STRENGTHS**

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHOM THE CHARACTER LOVES**

**WHOM THE CHARACTER HATES**

**WHAT THE CHARACTER LOVES**

**WHAT THE CHARACTER HATES**

HOW THE CHARACTER EXPRESSES LOVE

**HOW THE CHARACTER EXPRESSES HATRED**

WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER STAND TO LOSE?

WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER STAND TO GAIN?

HOW DOES YOUR CHARACTER VIEW OTHERS (ie IS HE JADED, REALISTIC, NAIVE?) WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER NEED TO LEARN OR REALIZE OR ACCOMPLISH?

AT THE END, THE CHARACTER SHOULD BE \_\_\_\_\_ AND FEEL \_\_\_\_\_ AND WE SHOULD FEEL \_\_\_\_\_ ABOUT HIS CHANGE.

ONE WORD TO DEFINE YOUR CHARACTER

ONE WORD TO DEFINE THE THEME OF THE STORY



# ODDS AND ENDS WORKSHEET

## SUMMARY FILL-IN-THE-BLANK--

THIS STORY IS ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_(CHARACTER) WHO WANTS  
\_\_\_\_\_ (GOAL) BECAUSE \_\_\_\_\_  
(MOTIVATION) SO HE MUST  
\_\_\_\_\_ (ACTION) BUT  
\_\_\_\_\_ (CONFLICT, OBSTACLES) HAPPENS SO  
\_\_\_\_\_ (ACTION) WHICH CAUSES  
\_\_\_\_\_ (REACTION) BUT  
\_\_\_\_\_ (MORE CONFLICT,  
OBSTACLES) SO THEN CHARACTER  
\_\_\_\_\_ (ACTION) AND THUS  
\_\_\_\_\_ HAPPENS (SAVES THE DAY OR  
LOSES).

ADD ALL THE BUTS AND SOS AND ACTIONS AND CONFLICTS UNTIL  
YOU'VE TOLD YOUR STORY. CLEAN IT UP AND MAKE IT PRETTY  
AND YOU HAVE A SUMMARY.

## SWEET SIXTEEN

Fill these in and use them to create a brief outline, to help write your synopsis, and to aid in creating a query letter.

### **Act I**

1. Opening Image 2. Hook

3. Inciting Incident 4. Plot Point One

### **Act II**

5. Response to Plot Point One 6. Pinch Point One 7. Response to the Pinch Point 8. Midpoint

9. Response to the Midpoint

**10. Pinch Point Two**

**11. Response to the Pinch Point**

## **12. All Hope Is Lost**

**Act III**

## **13. Plot Point Two**

## **14. Response to Plot Point Two**

## **15. Resolution**

## **16. Closing Image**

## NOTES FOR SUMMARY

Flesh out the SWEET SIXTEEN into a summary of two to three paragraphs that will build your body of the query. Then expand for synopsis (roughly a paragraph to each point, usually combining the opening and closing images into the beginning and ending paragraphs, respectively).

ie YOUR BOOK TITLE opens with \_\_\_\_\_ where MAIN CHARACTER . . . .HOOK is . . . . and then INCITING INCIDENT occurs which . . . . MAIN CHARACTER's journey toward . . . .(character arc stuff) begins when PLOT POINT ONE and so on . . .

## GOAL, CONFLICT, MOTIVATION

Set up your hero and antagonist to face off with conflict always. Use opposite qualities and attributes, or the same only with different goals, to create a crucible of conflict for the hero and villain.

<b>HERO</b>		<b>ANTAGONIST</b>	
<b>GOALS</b>	<b>INNER</b>	<b>GOALS</b>	<b>INNER</b>
	<b>OUTER</b>		<b>OUTER</b>
<b>CONFLICTS</b>	<b>INNER</b>	<b>CONFLICTS</b>	<b>INNER</b>
	<b>OUTER</b>		<b>OUTER</b>
<b>MOTIVATIONS</b>	<b>INNER</b>	<b>MOTIVATIONS</b>	<b>INNER</b>
	<b>OUTER</b>		<b>OUTER</b>

<b>CHARACTER ARC</b>		<b>CHARACTER ARC</b>	
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>		<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	
<b>STRENGTHS</b>		<b>STRENGTHS</b>	

WRITER'S HOMEWORK-- A CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO DO TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER.

1. READ--READ WHAT YOU WANT TO WRITE, READ OFTEN, AND READ AS A STUDENT AND FOR FUN. AS A STUDENT, TAKE NOTES, NOTE THE PLOT POINTS, THE CHANGES, THE WAY THEME GETS INTRODUCED. AS A RECREATIONAL READER, ENJOY, GET IMMERSSED. IF YOU CAN'T JUST GET SUCKED IN, WONDER WHY (BECOME A STUDENT AGAIN). IF YOU CAN, ENJOY.
2. WATCH MOVIES--AS A STUDENT AND A RECREATIONAL VIEWER. BUT ALWAYS WITH A PAPER AND PEN. TAKE NOTES. SAME AS ABOVE.
3. READ CRAFT BOOKS--START WITH THE ONES TOUTED AS BEST, THE ONES MOST OFTEN REFERENCED. CHECK PROFESSIONAL WRITERS' RECOMMENDATIONS.
4. PRACTICE PLOTTING--PRACTICE OFTEN.
5. SOMETIMES BE A PANTSTER--SIT DOWN AND JUST WRITE. YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT MIGHT STRIKE. LATER, USE IT IN CONTEXT TO A WELL-PLOTTED STORY.
6. WRITE. EVERY DARN DAY. WRITE AND GET IN THE ROUTINE OF WRITING EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A MUSE OR AN IDEA. PUT PEN TO PAPER AND FINGERS TO KEYS. EVEN IF IT'S JUST TO SAY "I CAN'T WRITE." OVER AND OVER UNTIL SOMETHING MORE COMES OUT.
7. LISTEN. LISTEN EVERYWHERE YOU GO. SOMEONE IS BOUND TO SAY SOMETHING INTERESTING OR STUPID. AND YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE IT.
8. CHECK NEWS. YOU CAN FIND IDEAS HERE.
9. GET A BOOK OF BABY NAMES.
10. TAKE CLASSES.
11. FIND A SPOT OUTSIDE OF YOUR HOME THAT CAN BE A PLACE TO WRITE. GO THERE. WRITE.
12. HAVE A SPACE IN YOUR HOME THAT IS YOUR WRITING SPACE. WRITE THERE.
13. CULTIVATE WRITING RELATIONSHIPS--YOU MAY NEED OTHER WRITERS, AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL.

14. CULTIVATE READER RELATIONSHIPS--YOU NEED A GROUP OF TRUSTED BETA READERS WHO WILL TELL YOU THE TRUTH. ESPECIALLY THE HARD TRUTH WHEN YOU REALLY DO SUCK.

15. BE THE HERO OF YOUR OWN LIFE. FOR PETE'S SAKE (ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE PETE), TAKE ACTION TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS.



## RESOURCES

### BOOKS

The resources I have read and absorbed and synthesized into my own plotting life are many. The best, brightest, and most beneficial, and the ones that most influence me, my books, my teaching, are listed below.

Some of the most valuable lessons I have learned regarding plot and character come from the following books. Allow me to credit these wonderful books as shaping what I know and teach and use every time I write: *Story* by Robert McKee *Screenplay* by Syd Field *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler *Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks *Please Understand Me II* by David Keirsey And my college psychology textbook. Picking up a psychology book is of paramount importance for fiction writers.

### WRITING CLASSES

You will often pay a large amount to take classes at a college or university. And you may find some great options. But . . . there are sometimes better, cheaper options available. I have three degrees and took several creative writing classes at the university level--my undergrad English degree included three concentrations, one in Creative Writing. None of my classes taught me what it really meant to write a novel. Sad, but true. I learned more from craft books, from reading and breaking down successful novels, and from taking a few key courses online.

There are many reputable creative writing classes and programs online. Joining a writing group may help you find classes that would best speak to you

and your writing needs. Forums are also helpful places. Just know what you are joining.

At times I teach a few online courses, including Synopsis Salvation and Structure Your Story. Go to [knockyourblockoff.com](http://knockyourblockoff.com) if you are interested.

## **EDITING**

From theses and dissertations to fiction manuscripts, editorial services can be invaluable.

You can find editors through college writing centers, through your writing friends, and online. A word of caution about selecting editors. Vet them before handing over cash. Know what you are getting. Ask around, see if there are reviews, know your market and what payment is expected. The Preditors and Editors site is a good place to find information about the writing market.

## WRAP UP

Writing is a lonely art, a craft of solitude. No one can write your novel for you. But you can get help. You can get feedback. You can get better. And nothing makes you a better writer than reading and writing. That is my final advice. READ. WRITE. REPEAT. Somewhere along the way PUBLISH just might get added if you keep at it long enough.

Happy Plotting.

Please visit my author page for more books. You can also find me at my website [here](#) and my soon-to-be-added-to blog [here](#). If you are interested in the courses I teach, check out [knockyourblockoff.com](http://knockyourblockoff.com).

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