

Elements of Plot

Exposition – the information needed to understand a story

- Introduces characters and setting
- Background information
- Sets the scene

Rising Action – major conflict in the story

- Characters encounter challenges and complications
- Suspense and excitement build

Climax – the turning point in the story

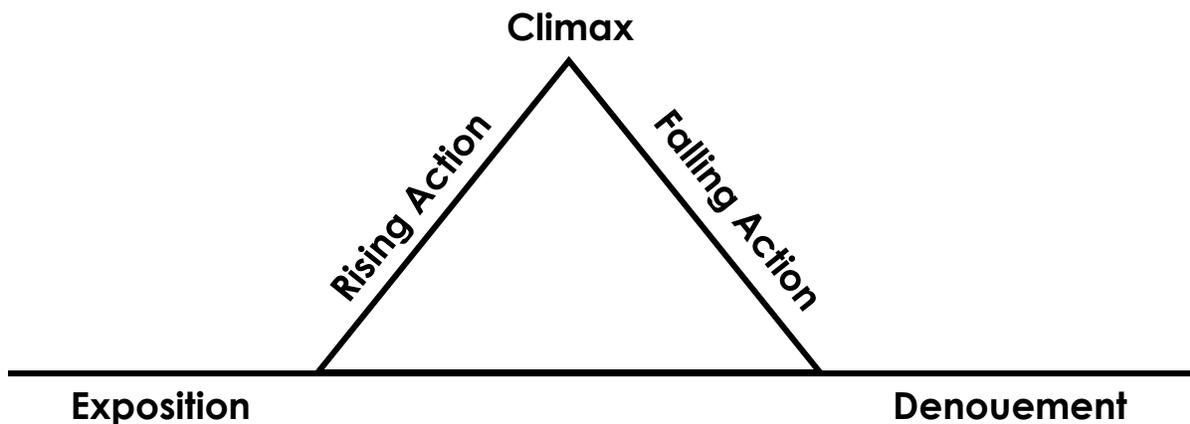
- Moment of greatest tension in a story
- Occurs when the conflict is resolved
- Often the most exciting event in a story

Falling Action – set of events that bring the story to a close

- Loose ends are tied
- Events that happen as a result of the climax

Denouement – the resolution of the story

- The story comes to a close
- Final outcome and explanation of the story
- Closing thought or statements
- Sometimes a lesson is learned



Point of View

Who tells the story and how it is told are critical issues for an author to decide. The tone and feel of the story, and even its meaning, can change radically depending on who is telling the story. Consider the following situation:

A car accident occurs between two cars. A couple witnessed the accident while walking down the street. Another man happened to video the accident on his phone. There was also a helicopter flying overhead at the time.

In this situation, there are 8 different points of view. There are 8 different perspectives and descriptions of the accident. This angle of vision is important to consider when reading a story.

Types of Point of View

Objective

The narrator is not a character in the story and does not give an opinion on the story. The narrator can be trusted.

First Person

The narration is from the perspective of a character who participates in the action of the story. The narrator is not always reliable and cannot always be trusted. The perspective is narrow.

Third Person

The narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know how the characters feel. The perspective is broad.

Omniscient and Limited Omniscient

Omniscient – the narrator knows everything about all the characters, including their thoughts.
Limited – the narrator's knowledge is limited to one character.

WRITING A BETTER SHORT STORY

Adapted from "5 Secret Tips To Writing A Successful Short Story" and "How to Write Better Short Stories"

Pro Tips

1. Focus on just one conflict that drives the characters.
2. Give your main character motivation. Actions without motivation feel random. What does your protagonist want? Eliminate fluff by focusing only on scenes that help the protagonist achieve his/her goals.
3. Consider writing a catchy first paragraph. Add something unusual, unexpected, an action, or the conflict. Begin with tension and immediacy.
4. Show, don't tell. Rather than feed your readers information about the weather, population statistics, or how far it is to the grocery store, substitute descriptive details so your reader can experience the location the way your characters do.
 - (Not so good) I saw my neighbor's dog attack a squirrel.
 - (Better) The squirrel's frantic movements ceased as the dog's jaw clamped around it.
5. Incorporate sensory detail (using the 5 senses). Consider multiple senses when developing your setting.
 - (Not so good) The pie on the table looked delicious.
 - (Better) The warm smell of apples and cinnamon filled the small kitchen.
6. Write meaningful dialogue. Again, show, don't tell.
 - (Not so good)
 - John sat up and took a deep breath, knowing that his confrontation with Mary had to come now, or it would never come at all. "Wh- where are you going?" he stammered nervously, staring at his feet.
 - (Better)
Deep breath. Now or never. "Wh- where are you going?" John stammered, staring at his feet.
7. Create conflict. Conflict produces tension that makes the story begin. Tension is created by opposition between the character and the conflict.
 - Present a universal struggle that readers can find meaningful.
 - Convince readers the outcome matters because someone they care about could lose something precious.
 - Make sure your conflict has a genuine purpose. Conflict moves your story along.

Rookie Mistakes

1. Too many characters
2. Too heavy on exposition and backstory. There is no mystery in your story. You explain too much too early. Use only details from the setting, dialogue, and tone to *help you tell the story*.
3. Creating a main character that the reader does not care about. Engage the reader's emotions. Don't just write about emotional characters. Write characters that create emotions in the reader.
4. Your main character lacks complexity. They are, in fact, boring. Your character should have depth. People are complicated! Develop a living, breathing, multi-faceted character.
5. Your story lacks direction because it is padded with fluff. If you over-stuff your plot by including too many distractions, your story will feel overloaded and underdeveloped. Shorter Is Sweeter. Resist the urge to go on and on. Make every sentence count.
6. You didn't spend time on the title.