

# Build the World—Set in Motion

## Character arc:

- Longing/Need/Desire:
- Wound:
- Belief:
- Fear:
- Identity:
- Essence:

**Act 1: Opening, Incitement, Problem:** problems and flaws about the character—their life is screwed up—how to fix it:

## Outline:

Chapter #:

Chapter #:

Etc:

## Act Two: Challenges

The protagonist leaves what's familiar to them and undergoes a series of challenges that will allow them to get what they want. They struggle and fail repeatedly, learning the valuable lessons they'll need to defeat the antagonist.

Good middles show this struggle and growth, and braids together the plot and subplots, smacking the conflicts against each other. Each clue, discovery, and action brings them closer to the Act Two disaster that sends them hurtling toward the climax and resolution of the novel. They'll start off with some level of confidence, sure of their plans, but as things spiral out of control they'll become more and more uncertain and filled with self-doubt until they're forced to consider giving up entirely.

Chapter #:

Chapter #:

Etc:

## Act Two: Choice

The act two choice is a transitional moment, linking the beginning and the middle. The protagonist embraces whatever problem they're confronted with, and accepts the opportunity it offers to resolve that problem. How they decide to deal with that problem establishes how the plot is going to unfold until the next step on the plot path.

This problem is going to be a big one, because it's what's going to drive your plot for the next 25% of the book until the midpoint. It'll be the first major piece of the core conflict puzzle. In most cases, it ends in failure, because the protagonist hasn't yet learned the things they need to learn to be victorious.

The Act Two choice frequently launches the protagonist's character arc as well, because their flaw will be their weakness during the middle of the novel. They'll struggle and fail, not seeing what they need to do to become the person they want to be.

Chapter #:

Chapter #:

Etc:

## Midpoint Reversal

The midpoint reversal occurs in the middle of the novel. Something unexpected happens and changes the worldview the protagonist has had all along. Their plan no longer works or is no longer viable, and things have to change. This choice and new plan is what sends the plot into the second half of the middle.

A good midpoint reversal will also raise the stakes, even if they were high to begin with. It often adds a level of **personal consequence** that wasn't there before, or reveals a secret (or problem) that was hidden. Sometimes it requires a sacrifice, be it a personal belief or an ally. Sometimes it's all of these things at the same time.

This moment will also be large enough that it can carry the plot from the middle to the beginning of the climax.

Chapter #:

Chapter #:

Etc:

## **Act Three: The End**

The ending is the last 25% of the novel. The protagonist decides to take the problem to the antagonist. They'll use all the things they've learned over the course of the novel to outwit and defeat that antagonist. They battle it out, and the protagonist will win (usually), then the plot wraps up and readers see the new world the protagonist lives in, and the new person they've become after undergoing these experiences.

The final battle with the antagonist doesn't have to be an *actual* battle, just two conflicted sides trying to win. The protagonist and their allies gather and challenge the antagonist. There is often a journey involved, either metaphorical or literal, as a final test.

Chapter #:

Chapter #:

Etc:

**Act Three typically contains three key plot moments:**

### **Plan**

After digging deep down and finding the emotional strength to continue, the protagonist puts a new plan into action, using everything they've learned over the course of the novel. They finally know who they are and what they're supposed to do, and they set off to accomplish that.

The plan is usually ambitious, clever, and unexpected, even though it also feels inevitable. This is what the protagonist and the supporting characters were meant to do all along. The plan may or may not be revealed to readers at this point. Often the actual details are kept secret, even though the general idea is mentioned to help drive the plot forward. The plan doesn't *have* to be something that will actually work if you want to surprise the protagonist in the climax and force them to think on the run. What's important is that the protagonist thinks it'll work. Once the climax starts, plans can fail and the protagonist may have to revise in a hurry to win.

## **Climax**

The climax is the final showdown with the antagonist. The protagonist faces whomever or whatever has been making their life miserable for 400 pages, and because they've learned XYZ over the course of the novel, they win (or lose spectacularly if that's the type of book you're writing). This realization is also what was missing in their life all along. Whatever happens, the core conflict problem is resolved.

The climax often has one last increase in stakes, making this final battle matter on a bigger scale. Look at what the protagonist has at stake on a personal level. Look at how that ties into the story from a thematic aspect, so the ending has more poignancy. It's not uncommon for this rise in stakes to happen after a twist or surprise.

## **Wrap Up**

The wrap up is the happily ever after, or the burning apocalypse if that's how you prefer it. What the protagonist is going to do now that they've resolved their problem. In essence, the final scene says, "Yes, there was a point to this novel and here it is." It gives readers a sense of closure and reassurance that the novel was worth their time.

What makes any plotting structure so valuable as a tool is that these elements can be anything you want them to be. The structure is just a frame to hang the story on, and knowing solid, proven turning points can help you decide what events need to happen to get the most out of your own plot.

They also help you find holes in your plot and places where the stakes might need to be raised. If you notice the protagonist never fails, that's a red flag that you might not have enough at stake or enough conflict driving the plot. Or you might not have a solid character arc that allows your protagonist to grow. It's a map, a guide, but the scenes and problems encountered are all up to you.