

Plot Structure: Building the Framework to your Story

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The Big Question

What does this do for my story?

– In everything you learn in this industry, always test it before you change your entire manuscript. Even if something works for another writer, it does not mean it will work for you! Remember, creativity is subjective.

Plot Structure

“Inspiration is wonderful when it happens, but the writer must develop an approach for the rest of the time... The wait is simply too long.”

- Leonard Bernstein 1918 - 1990

“I only write when I’m inspired, and I make sure I’m inspired every morning at 9 a.m.”

- Peter DeVries 1910 - 1993

It’s all about being able to write, even if you don’t feel like it.

Writing, and especially writing for a career, is not what Hollywood has glorified it to be. It is not snapping awake at 2 a.m. with an amazing idea and rushing to your computer to get it down. It can be, occasionally. But, to do it successfully consistently, you must follow some type of systematic approach.

The definition of Plot – *noun*

Also called a **storyline**. It is the plan, scheme, or main story of a literary or dramatic work, such as a play, a novel, or a short story.

Drake’s Definition: The plot is a series of events that drive my characters and story forward. Hopefully reaching a conclusion at some point.

The definition of Structure – *noun*

A mode of building, construction, or organization; an arrangement of parts or elements.

Drake’s Definition: A system to keep me organized and focused on what I am doing. Hopefully allowing me to reach a conclusion at some point.

My definition of a Plot Structure

A system I can use to organize the events of my story and keep me focused until I write the end of the book.

That is all this stuff is. Tools to help you organize the beats of your story.

Don’t underestimate the power of structure. This is how you speak to your readers on a primal level.

Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell was a literary researcher who studied myth from all across the world.

He found that, “Regardless of time or geographic location, there are commonalities to all the greatest stories. Basic stages and structures designed into them that speak to all people from all times because they represent the commonality of Human experience and understanding.”

That is the key to understanding Plot Structure!

Creating a story that speaks to your reader on a primal level. This is the difference between a story that stays around forever, and one that fades away.

Why? Because there is something in the story that speaks to us “as Humans.”

Tools

Plotting tools help us keep track of where we are in the story, where we are going with the story, and what we need to do to get there.

The Three Act Play combined with a Tension Ramp-up Graph is a great starting point.

(see attached handout - **Tension Ramp Graph Handout.pdf**)

Tension Ramp-up Graph

This is simply a visual representation of tension building to help you keep the idea top of mind that you need to continue to ramp-up the tension of your story from start to finish.

The Three Act Play – Act One

Setup – The goal here is to have the reader say, “Hey, I could be that guy.”

The Change – The foreshadowing time. That time when we tell the readers, “Buckle up Dorothy, ‘cuz Kansas is going bye-bye.”

The Three Act Play – Act Two

Biggest section of the story

- It is the point in the story where we really have left Kansas
- Hero Gains what he will need to defeat the bad guy
 - Information
 - Boons
 - Confidence

The Three Act Play – Act Three

All hope is lost – We want our heroes to succeed, but not until someone kicks the living crap out of them. They have to earn their victory.

Overcome – The part where the audience stands up and cheers

The Return – Our hero needs to go home. So the readers can see how the world has changed, how the hero has changed, and how the hero’s view of the world has changed. Gives the reader closure.

What does this do for my story?

Gives me a general guideline to follow while dreaming up my story.

I do not plot on this chart. I keep this top of mind, and I use it to help me drop things into my story, but I do not plot on it. Many writers do, however, so feel free to do so yourself.

I use a three-step process.

The Plot Board

(see attached handout - **The Plot Board & The Beat Chart Handout.pdf**)

Draw out your plot.

Helps with time as well as movement flow.

Start with the endings.

Add beats, things that need to happen, and golden dialog like, "Luke, I am your father."

The Beat List

Transferring from board to a manageable list

Adding detail and continue to fine-tune the story

Chapter Breakdown Sheet

(see attached handout - **Drakes Chapter Breakdown Sheet.pdf**)

The Nitty-Gritty

List my POV character (I am very POV)

Basic Name – Just for me

Main Idea – Overarching Theme

Characters in Scene – Who is here?

Location Start/End – Where do we start, where do we end?

Reader Gains – Most important section. If you can't put something here, don't write the chapter!

Story is Moved – Why am I, the writer, writing this?

Notes – Anything I missed

The back of this sheet is a great place to draw rooms/cities/maps/etc.

What does this do for my story?

Allows me to place notes and ideas for my story and then fine-tune them down into detailed chapters. Once I have a detailed chapter for each chapter in the book, writing is a breeze!

End

Also with this handout, you should have separate copies of the following...

- 1) A ramp-up graph and three act play breakdown
- 2) A sample Plot Board and sample Beat List
- 3) A Blank Chapter Breakdown Sheet

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you found it informative.

If you would not mind, please visit <http://www.meetup.com/Las-Vegas-Creative-Writing-Class/> and review my teaching and this class. It would be a tremendous help to me.

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