**Understanding Plot Structure**

Many short stories (and, indeed, novels and films) follow the structure outlined in the diagram below.



**TASK: Read the information below – it is from an interesting website for budding authors! (**<https://www.authorlearningcenter.com/>) **– which tells you what each section entails. Now read ‘Worms’ again and see if you can fit it into the plot structure. For example, what bit of the story is the climax – the most exciting bit to which the action builds up?**

What is a Plot?

To put it simply: you cannot have a story without a plot.

It doesn’t matter if you have a strong concept, an incredible cast of characters, an important message, or all three. If you don’t have a plot, you don’t have a story.

So how do you ensure you not only have a plot, but a good one? Let’s start from the beginning.

**Plot point -** An event or scene in your story.

**Plot -**The chain of events that make up your story, or the combination of your plot points.

**Narrative arc -**The order of plot points in your story.

Imagine you’ve written out all the scenes that make up your story on [individual note cards](https://www.authorlearningcenter.com/writing/i-have-an-idea/w/outlining-your-story/7295/how-to-outline-a-book-in-7-easy-steps). Each note card is a plot point. The stack of note cards as a whole is your plot. The order in which you organize these note cards is your narrative arc.

As you write multiple plot points or events that lead the reader from beginning to middle to end, you’re creating a plot.

It’s important to remember that the plot points in your story have to be intentional, not random. They must connect together and lead the story in a specific direction. For example, *a dog sees a squirrel, a boy crashes his bike, and a little girl falls over* is not a plot.

However, *a dog sees a squirrel, and then its owner loses hold of its leash, causing the dog to run free, knocking over a little girl and causing a boy to crash his bike* is a plot because the events connect together in a way that builds a story.

If the events do not connect and build upon each other, then why would a reader keep turning the page?

As you create your plot points—and therefore build your plot—you should start with the five elements of a plot. It’s a simple structure that works as a good starting point for building a story. Once you have your five plot points, it will be much easier to start filling in the blanks, building your narrative structure, and organizing your story as a whole.

The 5 Elements of Plot

1. Exposition

This is your book’s introduction, where you introduce your characters, establish the setting, and begin to introduce the primary conflict of your story.

Often, the exposition of a story only lasts for a few chapters because readers are eager to dive into the conflict of the story. Don’t wait too long to introduce your inciting incident and get the ball rolling! Many authors make the mistake of having their exposition be full of interesting but ultimately unnecessary information about the world in their book. Don’t do this!

As much as you’ll want to make sure your reader knows all the background information, it’s not enjoyable to read pages and pages of non-action. You should immediately place the reader within the action of your story and try to weave background information in as organically as you can here.

2. Rising Action

The rising action normally begins with an inciting incident, or a moment that sets your story into action. As it progresses, you’ll have multiple moments of conflict that escalate and create tension as the story moves toward the climax.

Think of it as the portion of a roller coaster where you’re climbing up to the peak. You want to continue to build your story until the reader is ready to reach the point where everything comes crashing down.

This section will take up the largest chunk of your book and can make or break your story—so be sure to make every moment of conflict more interesting than the last. Don’t be afraid to raise some questions that won’t get answered until the end of your book.

3. Climax

The climax is the peak of tension, plot, and character in your story. It’s the moment that your reader has been waiting for—so make it exciting!

Often, this is the point in the story that everything changes, or where your main character is forced to make a life-altering decision. It should be the point where the reader is unsure where your story is going to go next. To use our roller coaster analogy, imagine you’re at the top of the peak and everything stops: what’s going to happen? A great climax will leave the readers with this feeling, forcing them to keep reading until the end.

4. Falling Action

Now that you’ve reached the peak of your story, it’s time to start moving toward a more satisfying conclusion. This is the time to start resolving conflicts and subplots so your story doesn’t feel rushed in the last few chapters. This is also where any conflicts that arose as a result of the climax can start being resolved.

5. Resolution/Denouement

Finally, the resolution is the end of your story where you can tie up the final loose ends and bring your story to its happy or tragic ending. Or, if you’re writing a series, now would be the time to write a cliff hanger and leave them eager for the next instalment!