

Novel Writing 101: the first draft

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YouTube Course: Novel Writing 101 — [watch here](#)

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Section: A **Week: 3** **Topic:** Outlining: Plot Structures / Pantser vs. Plotter

Plot Structures Worksheet

Your plot is the most important part of your story. It is your path through the writing process and how your premise becomes something greater than a lone idea. And, it's up to you how you tackle this responsibility.

Whether you mean to influence it or not, how you approach your plot will significantly impact the flow of your story. For example, choosing to immediately thrust your character into danger will set a fast-paced tone. On the other hand, opening the book with thorough exposition will acclimate the reader and give them an idea of what to expect. Over time, certain patterns in storytelling have developed, giving us roadmaps to progress the narrative, keep readers engaged, and deliver on expectations. These are our plot structures.

While there are many different ways to structure your plot, we'll discuss a few common examples that persist through classic and modern media.

In the following pages, we'll be discussing the following plot structures:

- *The Fichtean Curve*
- *The Three Act Structure*
- *The Hero's Journey*
- *The Seven Point Story Structure*

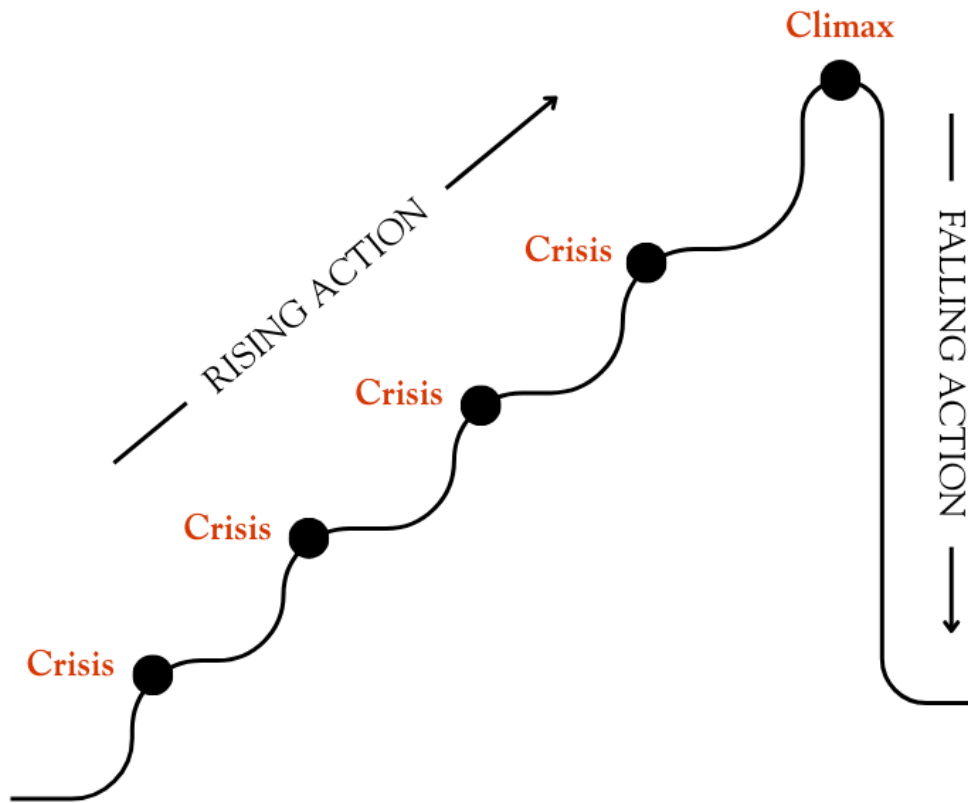
A plot structure is only as good as it is useful. You may read through our examples and find that you're drawn to none of them. Or you may whole-heartedly choose one now, only to later learn that it feels stifling and overcomplicated. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to picking (or ignoring) certain plot structures. The most important thing is that you experiment and find what works for you.

A Note on Plotting vs. Pantsing:

In the additional worksheet for this week, you'll find a fun exercise to help you figure out if you're a *Pantser* or a *Plotter*. Essentially, do you like coming up with ideas for your story in the moment? Or do you enjoy planning everything out? While learning about various plot structure in the following pages, keep in mind that you do not need to commit to one. Writing is personal, and your process should be unique to you. If you prefer to rely on spur-of-the-moment creativity while writing your novel, that's completely fine. Simply use the information I've provided as a helpful resource rather than a set of rules you must follow.

The Fichtean Curve:

This plotting structure is fairly simple and relies on constant, escalating action and crises to raise the stakes and lead to an inevitable boiling point (your climax).



Key Moments in the Fichtean Curve:

- Rising Action
- Climax
- Falling Action

Rising Action:

This is your series of crises—the constant barrage of catastrophes, dilemmas, and obstacles that raise the stakes.

Climax:

This is where the tension that's been brewing hits its peak.

Falling Action:

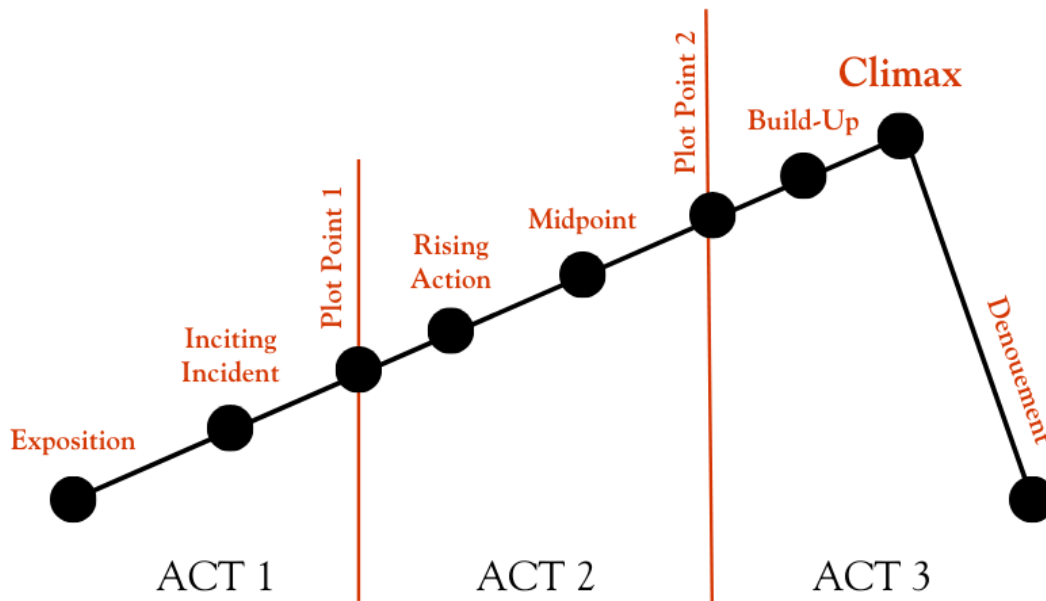
This is your resolution where the reader is introduced to the aftermath and loose ends may be tied up.

Why It's Great:

The Fichtean Curve is great for stories that are packed with action and tense moments. The “what now?” nature of the constant crisis structure helps move the story along quickly and with high stakes.

The Three Act Structure:

This is an extremely common plot structure. It is your quintessential beginning, middle, and end.



Key Moments in the Three Act Structure:

Act 1: Setup

- Exposition
- Inciting Incident
- Plot Point 1

Act 2: Confrontation

- Rising Action
- Midpoint
- Plot Point 2

Act 3: Resolution

- Build-Up
- Climax
- Denouement

Exposition:

Establish your world and set the scene for the ordinary.

Inciting Incident:

The event that sets the whole story into motion.

Plot Point 1:

The main character faces a challenge and makes a decision that moves everything forward.

Rising Action:

The stakes are raised. The main character faces obstacles, threats, and dilemmas.

Midpoint:

An event happens that upends everything.

Plot Point 2:

The main character faces a major setback or suffers a failure.

Build-Up:

The main character progresses forward and prepares for conflict.

Climax:

The height of the story where the main character faces their major obstacle or threat.

Denouement:

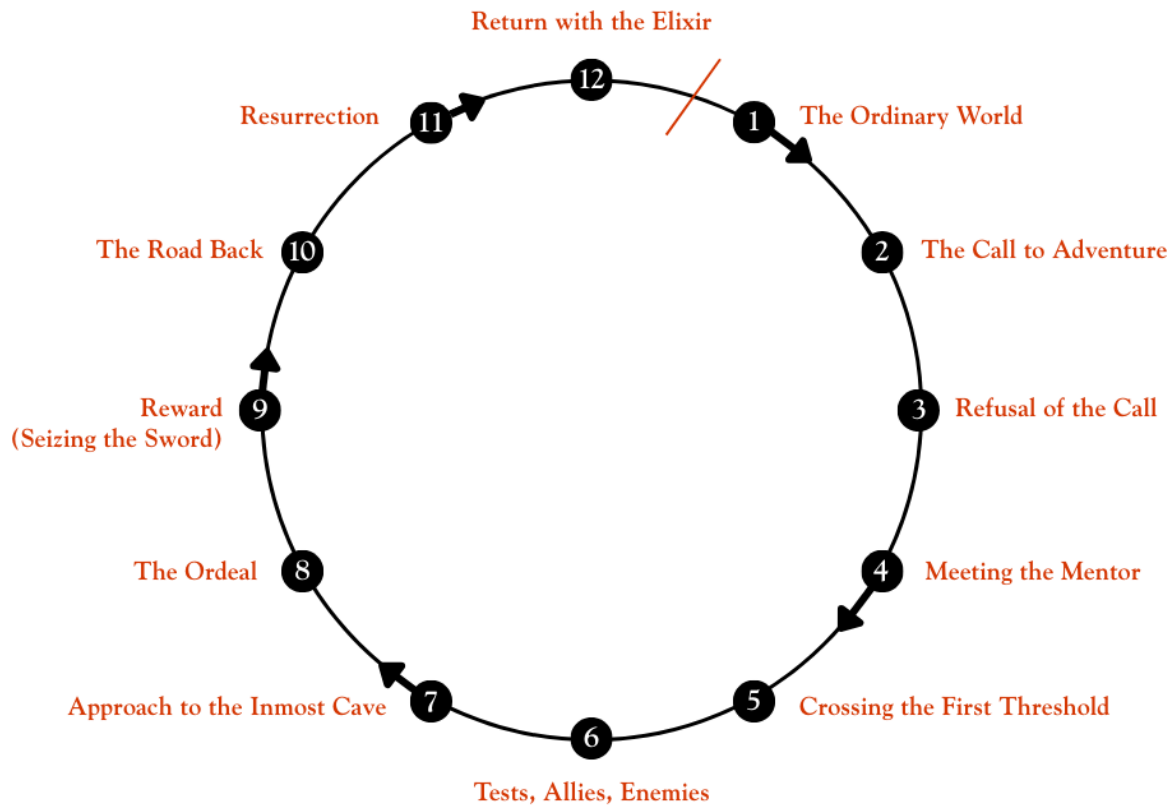
The resolution where the outcome is revealed and loose ends are potentially addressed.

Why It's Great:

The Three Act Structure is a popular plotting method that works well across most genres. It is easily adaptable and sets a straightforward pace.

The Hero's Journey:

This 12-step structure is based on mythology and common in the fantasy genre.



Key Moments in the Hero's Journey:

Act I

- The Ordinary World
- The Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the Call
- Meeting the Mentor

Act 2

- Crossing the First Threshold
- Tests, Allies, Enemies
- Approach to the Inmost Cave
- The Ordeal
- Reward (Seizing the Sword)

Act 3

- The Road Back
- Resurrection
- Return with the Elixir

The Ordinary World:

The story begins with everyday, normal circumstances.

The Call to Adventure:

This is the inciting incident that disrupts the hero's world.

Refusal of the Call:

The hero is hesitant and refuses the call to action.

Meeting the Mentor:

The hero meets someone who prepares them for or advises them on the journey.

Crossing the First Threshold:

The hero embarks into the unknown.

Tests, Allies, Enemies:

The hero faces challenges, makes alliances, and gain foes.

Approach to the Inmost Cave:

The hero nears their goal but faces obstacles or uncertainty.

The Ordeal:

The hero is forced to face a deadly situation or threat.

Reward (Seizing the Sword):

The hero acquires something that will help them achieve their goal.

The Road Back:

The hero begins the journey back to the known world but there are still challenges to overcome.

Resurrection:

The hero faces a final, climactic challenge or obstacle.

Return with the Elixir:

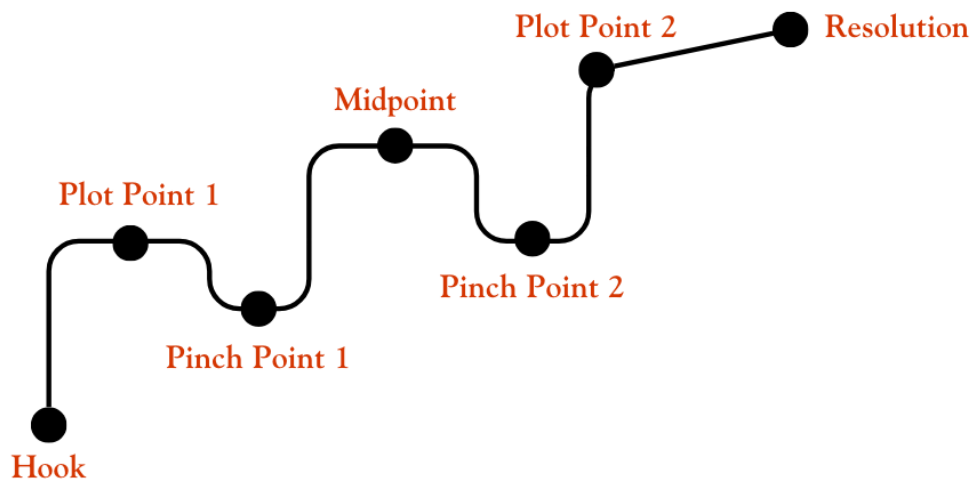
The hero returns to the known world, forever changed.

Why It's Great:

The Hero's Journey is great for main characters who have to embark on a quest and stories where the focus is on overcoming obstacles to learn a greater lesson.

The Seven Point Story Structure:

This loose framework focuses on turning points and milestones that move the story forward.



Key Moments in the Seven Point Story Structure:

- Hook
- Plot Point One
- Pinch Point One
- Midpoint
- Pinch Point Two
- Plot Point Two
- Resolution

Hook

Draw the readers in by setting the scene.

Plot Point 1

This is your inciting incident that sets the story into motion.

Pinch Point 1

An obstacle, threat, or conflict arises.

Midpoint

This is the turning point where the main character begins to approach their situation actively instead of passively.

Pinch Point 2

The obstacles, threats, and conflicts continue to deliver a major setback to the main character.

Plot Point 2

The main character has a breakthrough and now knows how to be victorious.

Resolution

This is the climax of your conflict and resulting conclusion.

Why It's Great:

The Seven Point Story Structure is perfect for those who lean more toward discovery writing (aka *pansting*) and want a vague outline that they can build out with story beats as they're writing.

Committing To Your Story's Structure

Now that you've learned about a few different plot structures, think about how you'd like to approach your story. Remember: the best framework for your story is the one that caters to your personal needs and creativity.

Plot Structure: (circle one)

Fichtean Curve

Three Act Structure

Hero's Journey

Seven Point Story Structure

Other: _____

None of the above

Please use the below space to make any notes on which plot structure you will or will not be using:

[illegible]