

Legend^{fire}
writing community

presents

The
Writers Guide
Working with Plots

About this Book

Welcome to LegendFire's Writers Guide. This is a mini-book, one that is meant to be as short as possible, yet get the point across. Near the end of the book, there's a short list of helpful resources so you can continue your research if you wish.

We encourage you to contact us if you come across any typos. Also, any suggestions, or general messages of appreciation are most welcome (they are a boost to moral!).

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- ✦ Released: March, 2009
- ✦ Version: Third Edition
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Intro to using Plots

The definition of a plot is: the main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work, devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence. Thus, the plot is simply your line of events within the story. It is the beginning, middle, and end, - ultimately, it is what you want it to be and can be very flexible.

Everyone wants something different to help set their story apart from another. However, quite often, you'll find your words mimicking the last good book you read or even a movie you've recently seen.

When you plot a story, your mimicking of other great stories will go away. Plotting allows you to sit back and see the whole story. From this point of view you can compare your story to others for similarities and easily make changes.

Story line plots can be very unique. They contain many different templates of how the story will flow. Following the template you've created will help you be more creative within a restricted area.

The more you plan your plot, the easier it will be to write the story. This approach also helps you maintain a direct scene-to-scene flow so that you do not get lost within your words or imagination. However, you are the creator of the plot and the one that is in direct control. You may string your plot so that it is very specific, or you can leave it open.

Now that we understand the gist of a plot, let's go over a basic plot line. The majority of plots will have something that covers each of the following:

- ✦ Beginning (Change)
- ✦ Main Goal (Question)
- ✦ Middle
- ✦ Goal Confrontation
- ✦ Climax
- ✦ End

These points are the backbone of a story, and thus, are the basic template of a story-line plot. The next six chapters will go over the basics of a plot and detail how you can use them for the best results.

Enjoy!

Chapter^{One} Beginning / Change

Beginning with change

Have you ever picked up a book and within the first two pages, decided it wasn't going to be good? I have and I'm definitely not alone here. It's not something to be proud of, though as a writer you must write for the majority. It is crucial to make your story interesting at the beginning, or your readers will not stick around to find out how good it actually is.

How do you hook the reader to insure they continue reading? It's fairly simple actually, you need to incorporate and understand change.

Change

Within the beginning of every book there should be some sort of change. A change is something that is different than before, and in often times, threatening. First day of school is a change and sometimes people can feel threatened by it. For a fantasy story, being sucked into another world is obviously a large change, one that employs a lot of threat.

We start with a change because it is interesting. No one wants to read about an uneventful story. A change tells us about the past, the present, and gives the reader some kind of glimpse into the future.

Main Character

While planning out how your book is going to play out, you need to know who the protagonist is. What are her traits, purposes, and desires in life? You need to know the protagonist by what she looks like, smells like, acts like, etc. The more you know about your protagonist, the easier it will be to write about her.

Tip box

You can find character building questionnaires off the Internet for free. Load up your favorite browser and search for character questionnaires. Also, flash cards work great for planning out all your characters (and plots). It's nice to have an overview of your characters and see how they interact with each other.

First Paragraphs

It is within the first few paragraphs that you should hook your reader; this is critical so that your reader does not become bored while reading through the building of the foundation stage of your book. After you excite the reader to want to read on, you can build more on the foundation (the necessary and often times boring information) of the story. This is because they have been given a taste of what is to come and are not so prone to drop the book.

Quick Recap

- ✦ Something has changed
- ✦ The protagonist is threatened
- ✦ The protagonist vows to struggle

Chapter^{Two}

Main Goal / Question

What is the story about?

What is the main reason someone wants to read your story? What attaches them to your story and keeps them reading through the sometimes not-so-exciting parts? It is the unanswered question. What does that mean? Every fiction story that is known to exist has a question developed at the beginning and answered at the end.

The Question

The question is merely stating whether or not the protagonist will achieve her goal. Usually no one truly thinks about the question or perhaps the answer, though by recognizing it as you write, it will surely help you stay on target.

Goal

The reason of the story is based entirely off of the protagonist's goal. How you develop the goal is merely stating what the story is about. The story is about what the protagonist wants to achieve.

The protagonist may have many goals, though what is the main goal? What does she want to accomplish over all? Does she want to ace her mathematics test or cast a magical spell? Perhaps she wants to learn how to fly with feathered wings of wax or save the queen of the fairies from ogres.

There are as many unique goals as there are stars in the sky. From this vastness, you only have to come up with one main goal. Take some time with this. Try to make your goal something that you want to spend a lot of thought and time on. If your goal doesn't excite you, then why would you spend so much time writing about it? Scrap it immediately and come up with something you want to write about!

Quick Recap

- ✦ Creating a question creates a reason for the reader to want to read
- ✦ The main question states whether or not the main goal will be achieved
- ✦ Make sure your goal excites you, if not, scrap it immediately!

Your main goal is very important. However, do not think you are off the hook after you come up with one. In chapter 8 we'll go over subplots and their goals.

Chapter^{Three}

Middle / New Question

The new question

Now that you have reached the middle of your story, there are a few new questions that need to be asked. What has come of your main character? She has been introduced, the reader knows her well by now, the goal has been developed, and you have your foundation built.

Though is that all? What purpose does the middle of your plot line serve? The middle section of your book proves to hold many things. It is the time to bring out other goals (chapter 8 subplots). You simply need more to write about.

The middle helps you see the end. It is the top of the hill. From here, everything should be an easy run with your words and imagination. You are so close to answering the main story question that it thrives through the reader as they read page to page. What happens when they realize that their answer is farther than it appeared? They may get discouraged.

It is at this point that you may want to come up with a subplot with an answer that may appear far closer than the main answer. In doing this, the reader is now thinking more of the subplot answer. Therefore your reader continues to move excitedly through your book, page to page as before.

Tip box

As you are writing your story it is crucial that you do not make any large changes to the beginning of the story. A lot of writers make the mistake of finding inspiration, a desire of change, that they start toying with the beginning. Do not touch the beginning! A few markups here-and-there is fine, though major changes are one of the biggest reasons why new authors don't finish their stories.

Quick Recap

- ✦ Your foundation is built
- ✦ Your end is in sight
- ✦ New questions are boiling to the surface

Once you get to the middle of the story, you need to start preparing for the goal confrontation that we will discuss in the next chapter. Please remember that there is still a huge gap in time and pages before the goal confrontation.

Chapter^{Four} Goal Confrontation

Goal confrontation with struggle

Creating your goal confrontation takes a lot of planning and organizing in order to do it right. I would suggest you wait until your half way done with your story before you start planning anything in detail. Your reader thrives for the goal confrontation and the climax right after. Why? Because this entire time your story has been working up to this specific point.

Creating your Goal Confrontation

Whatever your main characters goal is, she will soon get her chance to come face to face with it. If my story were written about a mathematics test, then my goal confrontation would be the test. What makes your goal confrontation exciting? It is the amount of struggle your character puts forth. It is unexpected events that could change the possibilities of the main plot answer.

If you simply had the protagonist walk into the testing center and easily ace the test, that would be boring! Perhaps, to make it more interesting, she would sit down, look at the test and notice a bunch of questions that were not given to her to study. You need to create a worry for the character. Make doubt in a happy ending.

What's Next?

Your main character has confronted her goal and showed struggle. She was introduced to new information that created doubt for a happy ending. Now it is time to move on to the climax of the story.

Quick Recap

- ✦ Confronted goal
- ✦ Showed struggle
- ✦ Introduced new information
- ✦ Create doubt in a happy ending

Some writers are confused on how goal confrontation is different to the climax. Our next chapter will discuss what a climax is and what it should do within your story.

Chapter ^{Five} Climax

All questions answered

A climax is the most intense, exciting, or important point of something. It comes about at the end of your story, which answers all of the unanswered, reader binding, questions.

The climax is probably one of the easiest yet most refrained areas in which you will plot. Starting from the beginning of your story you have been creating questions that the reader has been wanting to know the answer to. All of the questions that you have not previously answered, the climax will answer.

Have you read a book where, once you were near the end of it, it became really exciting and you did not want to put the book down? The bit that you were reading is first goal confrontation and then story climax. Goal confrontation and climax work hand in hand with each other. One starts it and the other finishes it. During this time your readers will be more excited than ever, don't let them down!

Creating a Climax

Creating your climax for your story should be easy if you have been keeping track of your questions. You have to know what the questions are in order to answer them.

Create a scene where the protagonist receives answers to all the story questions. You can answer question in many different ways:

- ✦ Protagonist figuring them out on her own
- ✦ Someone telling the protagonist
- ✦ Reading them in a book, etc.

Every book is different when it comes to answering question. Ask yourself what the best way the protagonist should answer the story questions and proceed from there.

Quick Recap

- ✦ The climax answers your unanswered questions
- ✦ Write your story questions down as you come up with them.
- ✦ Now that there is nothing binding the reader, end

After answering your questions, the story is now less exciting, there is nothing holding the reader to the book rather than just the ending of the book. This leads us to our next chapter!

Chapter ^{Six} End

Your story is done - now end

Welcome to the end of your plot line! After you finish coming up with how you would like your story to end, you get to jump on that long road of actually writing the story, which can be very difficult.

The end of your book is just as important as the beginning. Have you ever seen a movie that was great though then ended horribly? Let's just say, it doesn't make the reader too happy. Put as much time and thought into how you are ending the story as you would for the beginning of the story.

There are several ways to end the story, and they can be either good or bad. Here are three general ways to end your story:

Lingering End

The lingering end normally consists of a chapter or two. These endings are usually good for long books that expect to release another book as a sequel. After the climax the story will close up all open ends and explain what goes on from there preparing for the next book.

Question

This ending is specifically designed to leave your reader frantically turning the blank pages at the back of the book. This way is not the best way to end your story unless you are planning to release a sequel. A question ending is more to the point; it does not linger all too much.

Straight to the point

This is like ending the book as a question, though without the question. Your climax is done and your answers have been given, now you end

your book as soon as possible. Although you are trying to end the book quickly, don't forget to provide enough closure for the reader. Readers often want to know what happens to the characters after the story is over. Wrap it up and refrain from lingering too much.

Quick Recap

- ✦ Your ending is just as important as the beginning!
- ✦ There are several different ways to end your story
- ✦ Choose an ending that suits your story. (Will there be another book?)

As stated before, there are many ways to end your book, these are just examples of what you can do. These last 6 chapters are only the basics of creating a plot line. These chapters are not meant to be rules or conclusive in any way. You are completely free to do as you wish with your plot.

One Notch Further

As stated in the last chapter, chapters 1 through chapter 6 only cover the basics of the plot line. You will learn from this section that there are several other things to keep in mind as you are plotting your story.

I will only be going over a few additional points, though in reality, there are many. Go to your local library and look up books concerning plot. I'm sure you'll find them very fascinating!

The following chapters will explain a few general terms and how to use them to make your plot line and story run smoother and be more interesting.

Chapter^{Seven} Peaks & Valleys

Where is your wavy line?

When plotting your stories, there is this wavy line that shows the high points and low points of your story. The high points are mini-climaxes, struggles, events, and everything else that makes your story move at a quick pace. These high points are called peaks. The low points within the story shows when the story is moving at a slower pace. These points are called valleys. Having too many of one is bad.

Peak

There is a common mistake with peaks that many writers overlook. What happens when your story is just a bunch of peaks and there are no valleys? The story moves too fast for the reader and becomes confusing.

After the struggle, the fast and exciting part within the story, it is important to create a valley in order to slow the story and allow the reader and character to think about what has happened. The lack of doing this will be the end of your story and no one will want to read it.

Peak Disaster

How do you keep your reader involved in your story? Create a question, right? Though what is better than just a question? A bad answer. Would you like to read a book where everything is great and the protagonist goes through no hardships? I personally don't. To intrigue your reader, you need to create a disaster for her.

Let's say we make our peak where the main character gets in a fight with the school bully. There is a question that is automatically formed, "will he win the fight?" If this was a peak disaster created in order to bring the reader into the book more, then

what would the answer be?

Raising his fists, Josh looks at the large bully. The bully, clearly amused, laughs outs and points his stubby finger at Josh. "Is this joke?"

At this point, the reader wants the protagonist to teach the bully a lesson (achieve his goal). And as much as you would like that, this is a peak disaster.

The group around them was fairly silent. Josh couldn't tell if they wanted him to win or not, though it didn't matter any more. Springing forward, Josh threw his fist as hard as he could. It was like slow motion. He watched his fist glide through the air, aimed perfectly for Albert's nose, though it didn't hit. Instead, pain seared through Josh's left temple and he fell to the ground.

Of course, your story would want to include more detail about who this bully was and why the protagonist hated him. Having the character face a peak disaster makes the reader want the character to succeed even more.

Valley

Your valley comes right after the peak, which helps the reader and character think about what just happened. Within a valley there are three main things that usually happen. You can include all of these, add to them, or take some away. The three main points are emotion, thought, and decision.

After a peak disaster your character should show some emotion. Emotion is what makes a character seem real to the reader. The more emotion the protagonist shows, the more your reader will become attached to him. Though don't overdo it - too much of a good thing isn't always better. Try to include different emotions, don't limit yourself to anger or hate.

Your character can only show emotion for so long before the reader will either get the point or get sick of it. After or during the emotional stage, the protagonist need to show thought. Showing thought helps the protagonist define his goals within the story. The more thought and emotion that is shown, the more your reader will understand your character and actually care about what happens to him.

The last point is decision. At some point within emotion and thought, your character needs to make a decision that shows he is willing to struggle for his goal. He wants to achieve his goal and is willing to do what is needed. These points help build the story up for the next peak or peak disaster.

Quick Recap:

- ✦ Balance your peaks and valleys
- ✦ After a peak disaster comes your valley
- ✦ Your valley includes emotion, thought, and decision
- ✦ When a character has no hardships, they are not interesting!

By simply seeing the overview of peaks and valleys, it should help make your story line plot exciting. Also, peaks and valleys work very close in hand with subplots, which is next!

Chapter ^{Eight} Subplots

Your additional questions

Just as you have your main plot, there are subplots that you can use as well. There are many points within the story that a subplot can come to exist. These subplots serve a great purpose within your story. For one, they make writing the story easier. They also help make your story more enjoyable.

Usually when planning your subplots, you plan them to interact with the main plot. Whenever you create a subplot, you are creating another question. The more questions you have, the easier it is to write, for what you have to write about is broader. However, the more questions you create, the more confusing your story will become.

Subplots work hand in hand with our last chapter. Whenever you are at a peak within the story it is usually related to a subplot or the main plot being acted upon. Not all plots or subplots end happily, that is where your peak disaster comes from. Though don't think you have to end a plot to create a peak disaster, this is but one way a subplot can be used.

Relative and Non-Relative

When plotting your subplots you should think about how relative the subplot is to its original plot. Not all subplots have to be relative to the main plot, though the majority of subplots should be relative. Personally I like subplots that interact with the main plot secretly. When I say secretly I mean the reader does not see the connection until later within the story. This is great for planning plot twists.

Moving Forward

A subplot should move the story forward, or bring excitement to the story. When a subplot pushes the story forward it does it by giving hints to the answer of the main question or a question within the story. Anything that gives information that is pertinent to the story is a good subplot. Try to find a way to hint at story answers while pushing the story forward and creating an exciting scene.

Quick Recap

- ✦ Subplots are additional questions within your main plot
- ✦ The majority of subplots should be relative to the main plot
- ✦ All subplots should move the story forward and be exciting
- ✦ Always answer your questions!

A good subplot always belongs within a story. If writers never used subplots, stories would either be too short or long and boring. Feel free to experiment with subplots!

Chapter^{Nine} Patterns & Mirrors

Buried but not hidden connections.

This chapter may have a few people guessing how patterns and mirrors work within writing. I would just like to say, don't be afraid of new writing terminologies. These will help your story gain unity and diversity.

As you plot your story and begin to write, you start creating patterns. This is nothing bad, as long as you know you are doing it. By understanding what you are doing, you may control how the patterns and mirrors affects your story.

Patterns

A pattern will soon develop within your story as you create scenes and characters. By knowing where your patterns are, you can reword them slightly so that they help your readers understand certain points that you wish to make clear.

Certain similarities within your story helps your reader think of what is going on. It redefines your main question and restates who the good and bad guys are. Patterns are used to help the flow of your story and to remind the reader of things that may have been forgotten. In creating a pattern, simply include similarities when describing scenes, characters, and etc. within your story.

Mirrors

When you think of a mirror you think of two points. A mirror takes one side and reflects it to act as the other. Setting your story to use mirrors to reflect events is a good way to bring thought and good flow to the story. Mirrors are scenes that have buried but not hidden connections.

In creating your mirror with two events, you

try to write the second event using thoughts and actions of the first. A mirrored scene should repeat the subject and terms of the first event. Repeating dialogue, thoughts, smells, actions, and visuals will help you achieve a good mirror.

Don't limit yourself just to mirroring events. You can mirror many things, characters, objects, places, etc. A mirror is most commonly found within long fiction. This means that it is over a long period of time within the story that a mirror could then come out and be most effective.

Quick Recap:

- ✦ Patterns redefines points within the story
- ✦ Mirrors brings back memories or thoughts of previous things
- ✦ Using these two terms will help story flow

Patterns and Mirrors will come in handy. They are the points within the story that brings back memories and help the reader understand new points and scenes without abusively over wording them.

Plot Recap

All Chapters

Chapter 1 - Beginning - Change

- ✦ Beginning with change and threat
- ✦ Something has changed
- ✦ The main character is threatened
- ✦ The main character vows to struggle

Chapter 2 - Main Goal - Question

- ✦ What is the story about?
- ✦ Creating a question creates a reason for the reader to want to read
- ✦ The main question states whether or not the main goal will be achieved or not
- ✦ Make sure your goal excites you, if not, scrap it immediately!

Chapter 3 - Middle

- ✦ The new question
- ✦ Your foundation is built
- ✦ Your end is in sight
- ✦ New questions are boiling to the surface

Chapter 4 - Goal Confrontation

- ✦ Goal confrontation with struggle
- ✦ Confronted goal
- ✦ Showed struggle

- ✦ Introduced new information
- ✦ Create doubt in a happy ending

Chapter 5 - Climax

- ✦ All questions answered
- ✦ The climax answers your unanswered questions
- ✦ Whatever questions your story comes up with, write them down!
- ✦ Write your story questions down as you come up with them.

Chapter 6 - End

- ✦ Your story is done now end
- ✦ Your ending is just as important as the beginning!
- ✦ There are several different ways to end your story
- ✦ Choose an ending that suits your story "Will there be another book?"

Chapter 7 - Peak & Valleys

- ✦ Where is your wavy line?
- ✦ Balance your peaks and valleys
- ✦ After a peak disaster comes your valley
- ✦ Your valley includes emotion, thought, and decision
- ✦ When a character has no hardships, they are not interesting!

Chapter 8 - Sub-Plots

- ✦ Your additional questions
- ✦ Subplots are additional questions within your main question
- ✦ The majority of subplots should be relative to the main plot
- ✦ All subplots should move the story forward and be exciting
- ✦ Always answer your questions!

Chapter 9 – Patterns & Mirrors

- ✦ Buried but not hidden - connections
- ✦ Patterns redefines points within the story
- ✦ Mirrors brings back memories or thoughts of previous things
- ✦ Using these two terms will help story flow

Books References

Doing, in and of itself, is the best way to learn whatever you wish to learn. A book can only take you so far. However, the book I used quite a bit when writing this mini-book was quite helpful. If you found the information here useful, then you'll probably be interested in, "Elements of Writing Fiction - Plot," by Ansen Dibell.

Another good book I used quite a bit was, "The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes," by Jack M. Bickham.

There are tons of information online and in books that can really help your writing. However, don't get stuck on the learning curve! Just as I said above, you need to 'do' to become better. What you get from a book can't replace long years of experience. So, once you think you have a decent idea as to what is good and bad in writing, write up a storm!

Legend^{fire} writing community

You have reached the end! I hope this mini-book has been helpful and it influences your writing for the better. If you have not done so already, please join the LegendFire Writing Community.

LegendFire is a free, author driven, online creative writing community. Our purpose is to provide a place where authors can go to exchange feedback, make friends, and have fun!

<http://www.legendfire.com>