

NaNoWriMo 2015: Narrative Structure

There are a number of ways in which to look at story structure- the bare bones of it is that all stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The 8 point story arc (May and Watts, 2012) described below will help you to plan out your novel in manageable steps.

The stages of the arc include: stasis, trigger, quest, surprise, critical choice, climax, reversal and resolution.

Stasis: establish 'normality' by creating a baseline for the everyday life of your protagonist within their world. Depending on the genre and style you are writing in, this may be anything from a paragraph to a chapter in length.

* A long stasis section can result in the reader losing interest. You could break up your back story and share it later in the narrative by using flashbacks

Trigger: create a stimulating event that breaks the state established in **stasis** and propels the characters into the main action. Triggers can be any major events such as deaths, births, crimes etc and they can be positive or negative. You're trigger does not have to be short and sudden, it can be more lengthy and gradual as you build your narrative. The key purpose of the trigger is to cause change.

Quest: develop the quest, i.e. the stated (or unstated) purpose given to the protagonist for the story to unfold (as a result of the trigger). This will take up a large portion of the novel and may focus on:

- Returning the protagonist to the stasis
- Defeating the antagonist
- A journey that transforms the protagonist in some way
- Conquests that steadily build and propel the protagonist to a 'saviour' or 'hero' status
- Survival

Surprise: introduce surprises that maintain interest and intrigue in the narrative, and provide opportunities for character development.

Critical choice: critical decisions build throughout the narrative and should be consistent with the character, although they can have a transformational effect on the character. It is important to highlight the struggle to make a decision and the influence of free will.

Climax: the quest builds through **surprises** and **critical choices** until it reaches its climax, a point at which tensions must be resolved. Minor climaxes can occur before this point. In sequencing climaxes, a story arc is built and the reader develops an attachment to reaching the end of the story.

* It is possible to include a number of small quests within the main quest, that each include their own surprises and critical choices

Reversal: in the reversal, the 'hero' incorporates all of their learning from their quest, though maintains many of their characteristics. Other characters may also change. Reversals are the result of the journey and transform the characters.

Resolution: a new stasis is found or the original stasis is re-established (though cannot be identical, as the characters have grown since then). It can also be a springboard for the next adventure within that world. You could also make hints at the next story by including a trigger at the end of the narrative