E-Stories

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Story Elements and Structure

For teachers

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Story Elements and Structure

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Story Elements and Structure

1. Introduction

Story elements are the foundational components that make up a narrative, providing structure and coherence to the plot.

These elements include plot, set-up, confrontation, climax, resolution, character, setting and plot points all of which work together to create a compelling story.



“It is crucial because storytelling is the activity through which the meaning of the world and the social world itself are created.” (Stocchetti, 2016, p. 13)

Story Elements and Structure

2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

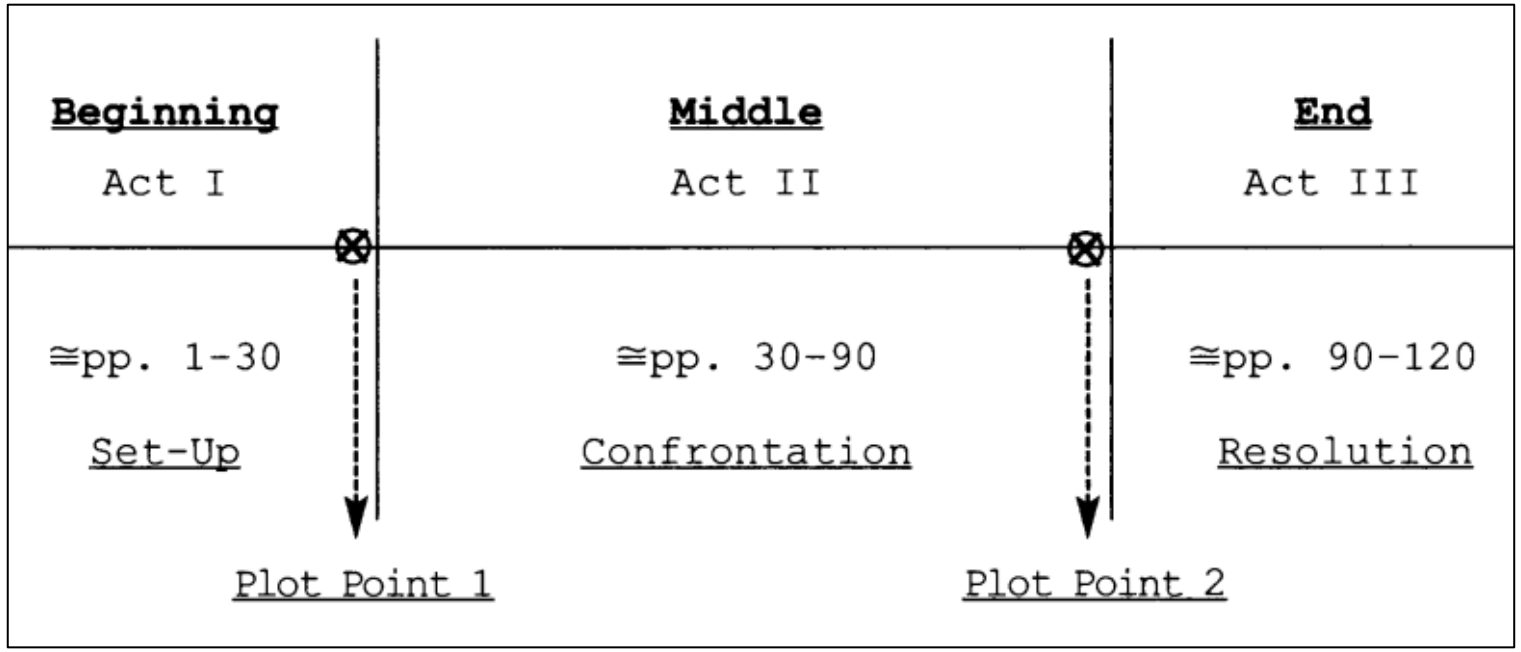
According to the author and screenplay writer Syd Field (2005), a story has these basic elements:

Plot (beginning, middle, end)	Set-up	Confrontation (conflict)	Climax
Resolution	Character	Setting	Plot Point

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2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

- Putting these elements together, you can see the **paradigm of a screenplay** by Syd Field (2005, p. 21) also referred to as the **Three-Act-Structure**



Story Elements and Structure

2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

Plot (beginning, middle, end)

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- The **plot** is defined as the sequence of events and actions that transpire within a narrative. A common practice is to divide the plot into three sections.
  - The initial segment of the narrative is entitled the "**beginning/Act I** ". It is characterised by the introduction to the fictional universe in which the narrative is set, the presentation of the primary characters, and the establishment of the primary conflict.
  - The second section is referred to as the "**middle/Act II**", and is characterised by the development of the plot, the deepening of the conflicts, and the progression of the characters through challenges, turning points, and significant events.
  - Finally, the "**end/Act III**": The resolution of the plot and the clarification of the conflicts, often combined with a climax and a final resolution, mark the culmination of the narrative.

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2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

Set-up

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- Effective **set-up** involves introducing the characters and their circumstances, creating a clear narrative through line that guides the audience through the screenplay.
  - The story must be established visually from the very first words, ensuring the reader understands the **main character, dramatic premise, and situation** within the first ten pages. This is crucial for maintaining the story's momentum.
  - The initial pages should be treated as a cohesive unit of dramatic action, designed to engage the reader and **set the stage for the unfolding story**.
  - The set-up is essential for **establishing the structure of the screenplay**, which includes a beginning, middle, and end, and is integral to the overall storytelling process.

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Confrontation (conflict)

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- **Confrontation (conflict)** is the driving force of drama; without it, there is no action, character development, or story progression. It is essential for creating a compelling screenplay.
  - Screenwriters must decide between **internal conflict** (such as fears and emotions) and **external conflict** (like physical injury or survival challenges) to shape their narrative. This choice influences the character's journey and the overall plot.
  - The **key incident** often serves as a pivotal moment that propels the character into conflict, marking a transformation in their emotional journey. This incident is crucial for connecting the story's elements and driving the narrative forward.
  - Understanding the **nature of the conflict** helps in constructing the storyline, as it determines how characters interact and evolve throughout the screenplay.

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Climax

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- The **climax** is the turning point of the story, where the main conflict reaches its peak intensity, leading to a decisive moment for the protagonist. This is where the stakes are highest, and the outcome of the story hangs in the balance.
  - It typically **occurs towards the end** of the screenplay, following the build-up of tension and conflict, and serves as the culmination of the character's journey. The protagonist must confront their greatest challenge, which often results in significant character development.
  - The climax is crucial for providing **emotional payoff** to the audience, as it **resolves the central conflict** and **answers the story's primary questions**. This moment often **leads to a resolution**, where the consequences of the climax unfold.
  - Effective climaxes are characterized by their ability to surprise the audience while remaining consistent with the story's established themes and character arcs, ensuring a satisfying narrative experience.

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Resolution

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- The **resolution** is the final act of the screenplay, where the story's conflicts are resolved, and the characters' arcs reach a conclusion. It provides closure to the narrative and answers the central questions posed throughout the story.
  - In this phase, the main character's journey culminates in a **solution to the primary conflict**, determining their fate—whether they succeed or fail, live or die. This moment is crucial for the audience's emotional satisfaction.
  - The resolution is not merely an ending; it is a solution that **ties together the narrative threads** established earlier in the screenplay, ensuring that the audience understands the implications of the climax.
  - It often reflects the **themes of the story**, showcasing the **growth or change in the protagonist** and providing insight into the **overall message** of the screenplay.
  - The resolution also sets the stage for **potential future developments**, leaving the audience with a sense of completion while hinting at the characters' lives beyond the story.

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2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

Character

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- **Characters** are the driving force of a screenplay, serving as the focal point through which the story unfolds. They embody the themes and conflicts, making the narrative relatable and engaging for the audience.
  - Each character should have **distinct traits, motivations, and arcs** that contribute to their development throughout the story. This depth allows audiences to connect emotionally with the characters and invest in their journeys.
  - The **protagonist**, often the central character, faces challenges that test their values and beliefs, leading to growth or transformation by the story's end. This character evolution is essential for a compelling narrative.
  - **Supporting characters** play crucial roles in shaping the protagonist's journey, providing conflict, assistance, or obstacles that enrich the storyline and enhance character dynamics.
  - Well-crafted characters contribute to the overall impact of the screenplay, as **their interactions and decisions drive the plot forward** and resonate with the audience on multiple levels.

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2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

Setting

- The **setting** establishes the time and place where the story unfolds, providing context for the characters' actions and the narrative's events. It is crucial for immersing the audience in the story's world.
  - A well-defined setting **enhances the visual storytelling** aspect of a screenplay, allowing the audience to visualize the environment and atmosphere that influence the characters and plot.
  - The setting can also reflect the **emotional tone of the story**, with specific locations and time periods contributing to the overall mood and themes. For instance, a dark, rainy cityscape may evoke feelings of despair, while a bright, sunny landscape can suggest hope.
  - Additionally, the setting can serve as a character in itself, influencing the narrative and the characters' decisions. It can **create obstacles or opportunities** that drive the plot forward.
  - Effective use of setting involves integrating it seamlessly into the screenplay, ensuring that it **complements the character development and story progression** without overshadowing them.

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2. Overview of story elements and the structure of a story

Plot Point

Let’s have a closer look at the elements:

- **Plot points** are critical events or moments in a screenplay that propel the story forward and anchor the narrative structure. They serve as signposts that guide the audience through the plot.
  - Typically, there are **key plot points at the end of each act**, which help to maintain the momentum of the story and keep the audience engaged. These points are essential for establishing the stakes and driving character development.
  - The **first plot point often marks a significant change or decision for the protagonist**, setting the stage for the ensuing conflict and character journey. For example, in "The Matrix," Plot Point I occurs when Neo chooses the Red Pill, leading him into a new reality.
  - **Subsequent plot points** build upon the initial conflict, introducing new challenges and revelations that deepen the narrative. They are designed to create tension and keep the audience invested in the characters' arcs.
  - Ultimately, plot points are not just about action; they can also be quieter moments of decision or realization that **significantly impact the characters and the story's direction**.

Story Elements and Structure

3. Importance of a structured story

A structured story provides a **clear framework** that guides the narrative, ensuring that all elements are cohesively integrated. This organization helps the audience follow the plot and understand the relationships between characters and events.

It establishes a **logical progression of events**, typically following a beginning, middle, and end format. This structure allows for effective pacing and builds tension, keeping the audience engaged throughout the story.

A well-defined structure helps in **character development**, as it allows characters to face challenges and evolve in response to conflicts. This growth is essential for creating relatable and dynamic characters that resonate with the audience.

The use of plot points within a structured story serves to **push the narrative forward**, marking significant moments that shift the direction of the plot. These plot points maintain momentum and ensure that the story remains compelling.

Finally, a structured story **culminates in a resolution** that ties up loose ends and addresses the central conflict, providing closure for the audience. This resolution reinforces the story's themes and leaves a lasting impact.

Story Elements and Structure

4. Summary

- All story elements must work together cohesively. The relationship between these parts and the whole is crucial for a compelling narrative.
- A structured story provides a clear framework that guides the narrative, ensuring that all elements are cohesively integrated. This organization helps the audience follow the plot and understand the relationships between characters and events.



Sources

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