

Story Structure

What is Story Structure?

Stories contain parts. The way that these parts are arranged creates the structure of the story. These structures shape both the audiences' expectations and how the author will tell the story. When readers analyze the structure of a story, they look at the story as a mechanic might look at a car engine: readers identify the parts and see how they are working. Though not every story follows a predictable pattern, most do.

Exposition

The exposition "exposes" readers to world of the story. In the exposition, readers are introduced to the setting (time and place of the story) and some or all of the characters. The exposition ends when the conflict or problem is introduced.

Inciting Incident

The inciting incident ends the exposition. This is the moment when the conflict is introduced. A story isn't much of a story if it doesn't have a conflict; it's more of a rambling, so most stories have a conflict. When the conflict enters the narrative, the exposition ends and the rising action begins. This moment is called the *inciting incident*. It's the "incident" or "event" that introduces the conflict.

Rising Action

Any event that occurs after the exposition but before the climax or turning point of the story is called *rising action*. During the rising action, the main character or protagonist of the story may struggle with the conflict but are unable to resolve it. The rising action(s) are often a series of unfortunate events for the main character as he/she attempts to resolve the conflict (but fails—sometimes repeatedly).

Climax

The climax is the turning point of the story. It is a common misconception that the climax is the most exciting part of a story, but this is not always the case. Rather, the climax is the moment in the story when the momentum or feeling of the narrative shifts. The main character usually is involved in a big event or makes a big decision. He/She may change, learn a lesson, or meet an important person, and this change will prepare the main character to resolve the conflict in the story (and most often, their situation will begin to improve). **Identifying the climax or turning point is the first thing that you should do when identifying the structure of a story.** Doing so will allow you to separate all of the events into two columns: rising action and falling action. To find the climax, look for **changes** in the main character that may indicate a turn in the narrative direction.

Falling Action

Falling actions are events that occur after the climax or turning point of the story. The falling action will simply “wind-down” to the end of the story. To put it more simply, **falling action** refers to any event after the climax right up until the end of the story.

Resolution

The terms resolution refers to how the story ends—it contains the final moments of the story.

