

Week 2, Introduction to Story Structure

Welcome to Week 2 of ***30 Days to Craft Your Novel!*** By now, you should have a pretty good handle on the characters populating your story. It is a given that more will present themselves as you plot, and as you write, you may even introduce others.

Writing is an organic process, and while you can plot and plan like crazy, you will inevitably stumble upon some surprises along the way. For me, that is part of the fun.

This week, we will be talking about story structure—that is how you construct your plot and tell your story.

An overview of what we'll cover in this section:

- Plot vs. Story
- What is Story Structure?
- The Three-Act Structure and The Hero's Journey
- Skeleton Plot

Story structure is the framework by which a story is told. It is the way the story is organized. It can also be called the narrative structure or the plot line. Think of it like a map your mind can follow as you write.

There are four traditional ways in which a story is structured--the Three-Act Structure, the Hero's Journey, the Freytag's pyramid (which is what is the narrative structure often taught to elementary school kids), and the Snowflake method. There is also Blake Snyder's 16 Beats from his book *Save the Cat*, which is based on writing screenplays but can be applied to novels, as well.

The narrative framework, or story structure, keeps you, the writer, grounded in the story. It stops you from veering off-track. It makes the story advance in a logical, relatable manner.

For our ***30 Day to Craft Your Novel!***, we are looking at the two most common structures: the **Three-Act Structure** and the **Hero's Journey**.

Here's a quick overview of them.

First, the Three Act Structure.

1. In this traditional framework, there is a clear beginning, middle, and end, which happen in sequence.
 1. **Act I** is the setup of the story. It is the reader's first introduction to the hero, the world in which he/she lives, the theme is implied, and reader expectation is set. The stakes are set. At the end of Act I, an inciting incident drives the hero forward

and into Act II.

2. **Act II** is the developmental part of the story. This is the series of trials and challenges the hero faces, and his/her reaction to those trials and challenges.
3. **Act III** is the climax and resolution to the story. It is the highest point of action... the moment everything has been building up to. Act II has built up an abundance of pressure, that now, in Act III, is released. The story is wrapped up and the hero has changed in some way.

The Three Act Structure is the most common structure for screenwriting. The 16 Beats fit into this structure. In an hour and a half movie, for example, you have 15 minutes for Act I, 60 minutes for Act II, and 15 minutes for Act III.

The other structure we'll be discussing is The Hero's Journey.

2. **The Hero's Journey, or the Monomyth**, is a template defined by Joseph Campbell in which a hero goes on an adventure, faces obstacles, and returns home victorious.

Joseph Campbell defined the hero's journey in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). He took the term 'monomyth' from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, applying it to what he viewed as the narrative archetype.

During the Hero's Journey, the hero experiences 12 steps. Like the **Three Act Structure**, the twelve steps are broken into three parts.

Essentially, it takes the **Three Act Structure** and clearly defines the steps the hero takes during each act.

Here's a quick overview:

Act I:

The hero begins in his/her **Ordinary World**. There is **Call to Adventure**, followed by a **Refusal of the Call**, the **Meeting the Mentor**, and a Turning Point* or inciting incident, which forces the hero to **Cross the Threshold** into the new world. This is the point of no return. They have crossed into the unknown.

Act II:

The hero faces **Tests, Allies, and Enemies** in the new world. During this time, the hero **Approaches the Inmost Cave**, and then faces **The Ordeal**. He or she has earned success, and **Seizes the Sword (Reward)**.

Act III:

During the third part of the story, or Act III, the hero takes **The Road Back** and undergoes a **Resurrection**--he/she is a changed person. Finally, the hero **Returns with the Elixir**. He/she is now the **Master of Two Worlds**.

We're going to go in depth into these two story structures, we'll look at how they work together, and at the end of the week you'll choose the one you feel most comfortable with, and you will map out the skeleton plot for your book.

So. Much. Fun!

I hope you're excited! I love talking about story structure, especially the Hero's Journey, which is my Go To narrative structure. I hope you're as excited as I am!

I'll see you in the next lesson!