

The Structure of a Plot

If you are interested in bettering your abilities to tell a story, if you are interested in achieving success as a writer, one of the more fundamental elements that you must master is structuring the plot of any story or book you are working to create in an appropriate – and readable – manner. This article has been prepared to assist you the process of coming to a better understanding of how you can best structure a plot.

Chronological Plot

If you are new to writing, if you are just now learning the ropes of story telling, you should consider using the most basic type of plot formulation. The chronological plot remains the most common way to develop a story. Moreover, most authors and writing experts agree that it is the easiest plot device to utilize.

The chronological plot is one in which the writer tells the story in the “order in which it occurred.” In other words, the writer lays out the story itself in chronological fashion, from start to finish.

Once again, the use of a chronological plot is a very simply way to tell a story; however, you can present a very complicated story (or novel) through the use of a chronological plot.

Flashbacks

Another manner in which you can structure a plot is through the use of flashbacks. In other words, the narrator of the story will be speaking in the present day (for example) and the underlying story or plot itself will unfold through the use of flashbacks. The flashbacks themselves do not have to be in any particular order per se. Rather, the flashbacks can be used to develop the tension and drama of the story itself as desired and as necessary to make for the most interesting and entertaining tale.

Using flashbacks can be a bit more complicated as a plot management technique because you need to pay particularly attention to consistence and continuity. In other words, it is easier to “get lost” and to confuse the story by using flashback techniques than is the case when presenting a story in strict chronological fashion. However, and with that said, in many instances the use of the flashback technique actually makes the overall story more compelling, interesting and entertaining for a reader.

If you have at least some experience in fiction writing, and if you have spent at least some time telling a story using a chronological plot, you should consider advancing onward to utilizing flashbacks in the telling of a tale.

As a final note, you need to understand that the various plot techniques that are presented for your



consideration in this article are not mutually exclusive. Rather, you can naturally blend and mix different plot techniques as you hone your abilities as a writer.

Point of View

Another element that you must come to understand when it comes to the structure of a plot is the matter of point of view. In the end, the point of view of the story plays a very significant role in the manner in which the plot can be structured and in the manner in which the story can be told and unfold. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to have a basic understanding of the vital interrelationship between plot structure and point of view.

There are two common points of view that frequently are used when it comes to fictional writing and the structure and development of a plot. One point of view that is commonly utilized is “first person.” In other words, the story is told and the plot is developed and created from the point of view of a single narrator that essentially is telling his or her own story.

Another commonly used point of view that impacts plot structure and development is third person omniscient. In this type of narrative and plot structure, the story is presented; the plot unfolds and is structured, as if the story itself is being told by an invisible narrator that knows all.

You need to keep in mind that the plot itself is limited by the type of point of view that is utilized in the story itself. For example, if a first person narrative is utilized, the plot must be constructed only around what that narrator or individual can perceive and understand his or her self. The plot structure and development cannot go beyond what that individual narrator is able to see, feel, taste, understand and so forth.

On the other hand, if a plot is structured from a third person omniscient point of view, literally anything goes as to what can be included in the story. The plot does not have to be derived solely from what one individual narrator is able to access.

The Structure of a Plot and the Outlining Process

If a writer wants to make certain that a plot is structured appropriately, that writer is going to want to make sure that time is spent in the outlining process. The outline really does become the skeleton upon which the skin of the plot will be placed.

Depending on your own preferences as a writer – and your experience as well – you will want to gauge how detailed you will want to make your outline. However, in most instances, when it comes to the issue of plot structure, it is unwise to abandon the outlining process all together.



Continuity and the Plot

Another issue that you need to keep in mind when it comes to the development of a plot is continuity. Continuity is the technique that insures that the plot progresses in a realistic manner. Even if the story itself is fanciful, it is important that the plot progresses in a manner that is believable.

An example can be useful when it comes to plot structure and continuity. For example, if in one scene a character lacks a right hand, you simply cannot have that character picking up an ale bottle with his right hand. Of course, this might sound basic and obvious. However, the number of times in which the rules of continuity are violated due to carelessness is significant.

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