

CREATE A COMPELLING PLOT FOR YOUR NEXT NOVEL

The first thing that will probably come into your mind when you see the topic of this article is ***what the hell is a plot?*** Hold on, I will be telling you real quick.

According to [literary devices](#), a plot can be defined as follows:

Plot is a literary term used to describe the events that make up a story or the main part of a story. These events relate to each other in a pattern or a sequence. The structure of a novel depends on the organization of events in the plot of the story.

Plot is known as the foundation of a novel or story which the characters and settings are built around. It is meant to organize information and events in a logical manner.

The second question that you will be asking yourself now that you know what the term plot means is **Why the hell is a plot important?**

IMPORTANCE OF A PLOT

1. IT HELPS YOU IN FOCUSING ON THE IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE CHARACTERS' LIVES

The story that you want to tell in your novel should never be boring, or otherwise, there is no need of ever writing the Novel. That means that the boring parts of a character's life should never ever make it to the novel.

You know that you character woke up late on a Monday morning. But does the reader care about that?

Hell no.

The reader wants to know what implications that led to it and what consequences to the waking up late are.

He got too drunk last Sunday night and forgot to set the alarm. It is also his first day at his new job and oh shit! He is gonna get late and make a bad first impression.

Yes, that should go on the plot. Those are the important parts of the characters' life.

Feel me?

2. IT HELPS YOU FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

It will help you in focusing on the characters that the novel revolves around.

That cab driver opened the door for our main character and drove him or her to the hotel only once in the life time of your novel? Well, he is a character yes, but not an important one. Thus, when [you are writing](#) your novel, the information you give about the character should be as minimal as possible.

The hero though? Give as much information about him or her. That is the character that the readers will identify with.

3. PLOT WILL MOTIVATE CHARACTERS TO ACT IN THE STORY

A plot will function as an [activating agent](#).

Activating agents will interact with **characters** psychology and hence cause them to take action.

4. PLOT WILL CONNECT EVENTS FOR THE READER

Once again, what is a plot?

Am not answering this again.

Read the definition above if need be.

A plot will give the flow of events in a story and also the purpose of the story. It gives a sense of continuity.

This allows the reader to feel that the events are connected.

5. THE PLOT HELPS THE WRITER VISUALIZE THE BEST CLIMAX

The climax is the point where the conflicting forces meet and promise to release the tension for the reader. It is the story's emotional high point. The point to which the reader intends for the readers to climb to while experiencing the story along the way.

The flow of events as they are outlined on a plot will help the **writer** get to visualize the best climax for the novel that can keep the reader hooked.

HOW DO I CREATE A PERFECT PLOT FOR MY NEXT BADASS NOVEL?

First a quote for a writer you possibly know:

"Every scene in your story is connected, and how you connect them will determine whether or not they're moving the story or just showing stuff happening. If you can say "and then" between the scenes, they're not advancing the story. If you can say "but" or "therefore" then something happens that forces a conflict or a decision and the story advances." - [Cheryl Kline](#)

STEP #1: SET THE STORY GOAL

The first element to include in your plot outline is the [Story Goal](#). To summarize, the plot of any story is a sequence of events that revolve around an attempt to solve a problem or attain a goal. The Story Goal is, generally speaking, what your protagonist wants to achieve or the problem he/she wants to resolve. It is also the goal/problem that involves or affects most, if not all the other characters in the story. It is "what the story is all about."

Get what a story goal is all about?

Good.

I love it when my students get to understand things I am teaching so first.

For instance, let's say we want to write a story about a 20 something average height and average build man who has a baby face and diabetes who wants to join the CIA and become a spy. This man faces a lot of pressure due to his looks that do not at all resemble what the CIA is looking for. Then there is the diabetes. In this case, we might choose to make the Story Goal for him to make the best spy ever with all his looks that point him towards a career as a scholar.

There are many ways we could involve other characters in this goal. For instance, we could give our protagonist ...

... a mother who does not want her son to join such a dangerous career taking into consideration his health status.

... friends and colleagues that discourage him and tell him that he would never make a spy (so that his success might inspire them).

... a jealous friend who tries to sabotage his career as it is starting out.

... a father who was working as a police detective before him and got shot such that he lost both his legs and is strictly confined to a wheel chair. (Forcing the protagonist to work out whether his father's experience should stop him or he will proceed taking his father's experience as just bad luck.)

We will build a world around our protagonist that includes many perspectives on the problem and makes the goal important to everyone in that world. That's why choosing the Story Goal is the most important first step in building a plot outline.

STEP #2: CREATE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ACHIEVING THE GOAL

Once you have decided on a Story Goal, your next step is to ask yourself, "What disaster will happen if the goal is not achieved? What is my protagonist afraid will happen if he/she doesn't achieve the goal or solve the problem?"

The answer to these questions is the Consequence of the story. The Consequence is the negative situation or event that will result if the Goal is not achieved. Avoiding the Consequence justifies the effort required in pursuing the Story Goal, both to the characters in your novel and the reader, and that makes it an important part of your plot outline.

The combination of goal and consequence creates the main dramatic tension in your plot.

In some stories, the protagonist may begin by deciding to resolve a problem or pursue a goal. Later, that goal becomes more meaningful when he discovers that a terrible consequence will occur if he fails. Other times, the protagonist may start off threatened by a terrible event, which thus motivates him/her to find way to avoid it.

For example, in the novel about the guy that wants to make a spy in the CIA, one consequence might be the fact that if he fails, he might live all his life in regret. His jealous friend who is always trying to sabotage his career will emerge the champion and our guy does not want that happening. If he fails, he may be forced to go back to college and he hates college.

STEP #3: CREATE THE REQUIREMENTS

These describe what must be accomplished in order to achieve the goal. You can think of this as a checklist of one or more events. As the Requirements are met in the course of the novel, the reader will feel the characters are getting closer to the attainment of the goal.

Requirements create a state of excited anticipation in the reader's mind, as he looks forward to the protagonist's success.

What could the Requirements be in our executive story? Well, if the goal is for our protagonist to become a spy, he will need to start working out to develop the body and the look of a spy. Perhaps he will need to find a better way of managing his diabetes since his new career will involve a lot of dangerous activities. He may need to sign up with a martial arts school to learn self-defense techniques.

STEP #4: DEVELOP THE FOREWARNINGS

Forewarnings are the counterpart to requirements. While requirements show that the story is progressing towards the achievement of the goal, forewarnings are events that show the consequence is getting closer. Forewarnings make the reader anxious that the consequence will occur before the protagonist can succeed.

In the plot outline for our story, events that could constitute Forewarnings might be...

- The CIA gets a new boss who is very strict about the selection of new CIA recruits.
- The guy gets a hypoglycemia occurrence during one of the training sessions which make the head of the CIA start reconsidering the choice of allowing him into the CIA.
- Several CIA spies get shot while spying in a foreign country which makes the protagonist start reconsidering his choice of ever joining the CIA.

While the Story Goal and Consequences create dramatic tension, Requirements and Forewarnings take the reader through an emotional roller coaster that oscillates between hope and fear. There will be places in the plot where it seems the protagonist is making progress, and others where it seems that everything is going wrong. Structure these well, and you will keep your reader turning pages non-stop.

STEP #5: DETERMINE THE COSTS THAT MUST BE PAID TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL

One sign that a problem or goal matters to the protagonist is that he/she is willing to make sacrifices or suffer pain in order to achieve it. Such sacrifices are called Costs.

Classic examples of Costs include the hard-boiled detective who gets beaten up at some point in his investigation, or the heroic tales in which the hero must suffer pain or injury or give up a cherished possession to reach his goal. Costs can come in many other ways. Protagonists can be asked to give up their pride, self-respect, money, security, an attitude, an idealized memory, the life of a friend, or anything else they hold dear.

If you make the costs steep and illustrate how hard the sacrifice is for the protagonist, the reader will feel that the protagonist deserves to achieve the goal.

For the case of our spy wannabe, he must give up his comfortable lifestyle and start living out in the cold while posted on spy missions.

STEP #6: IDENTIFY THE DIVIDENDS

The element that balances Costs in your plot outline is Dividends. Dividends are rewards that characters receive along the journey towards the Story Goal. Unlike Requirements, Dividends are not necessary for the goal to be achieved. They may be unrelated to the goal entirely. But they are something that would never have occurred if the characters hadn't made the effort to achieve the goal.

In case of the spy wannabe novel, the guy develops a ripped body as he works out in order to get in shape and have the body that spies are required to have. A thing that helps him in better managing his diabetes such that his doctor tells him that he will not be needing to use insulin any more. His ripped body also helps him pick up girls everywhere he goes quite easily.

STEP #7: IDENTIFY THE PRE-REQUISITES

Prerequisites are events that must happen in order for the Requirements to happen. They are an added layer of challenges to your plot outline.

Like Requirements, as Prerequisites are met, the reader feels progress is being made towards the goal.

For instance, in order to free the Princess, the hero must recover the key from its hiding place, but first (Prerequisite) he must defeat the dragon guarding it.

In order to win the maiden's hand, the gallant suitor must show he would not risk losing her for anything. But before he has a chance to do that, he must show he is willing to risk everything to win her (Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*).

HOW DO I ORGANIZE MY PLOT?

Once you have chosen your seven elements, the next step is to arrange them into a brief plot summary. It doesn't matter what order you put them in, so long as all eight are included. Most of the elements can be repeated or included in more than one way.

For example, here's how we might put together all 7 elements for our executive story together into a one-paragraph plot outline:

“A female executive in her late 30s has been married to her job. But she has a wake-up call when her elderly, spinster aunt dies alone and neglected (consequence). The executive decides that she needs to have a family before she suffers the same fate (goal). So, she buys a new wardrobe and signs on with a dating service (prerequisites). Her boss offers her a promotion that would involve a lot of travel, but she turns it down, so that she will have time to meet some men (cost). She goes on several dates (requirements). But each one ends in disaster (forewarnings). On top of that, because the agency arranges all her dates for Friday nights, she ends up arriving tired and late for the company's mandatory 6AM Saturday morning meetings (preconditions). Along the way, however, she starts to realize how the company's policies are very unfair to people with families or social lives outside work, and she begins to develop compassion for some of her co-workers that leads to improved relationships in the office (dividend).”

WRAPPING UP...

So that is it.

Everything that you need to create that plot that your **next awesome novel** has been waiting for in order to get started.

Are you going to read this and let the information just slip off?

I guess you are better than that and next time we talk, you will be telling me about that [awesome novel you wrote](#).

Got something to add or just a comment to tell me something and the readers something that you think that they deserve to hear?

Tell me about it in the comments section below.

PS: If you enjoyed reading this post, please use the share buttons below to spread the word about it. You might think that sharing is not important, but that is not true, it means the world to me. Help me build an audience of writers one share at a time. Thanks!