

Plotting in a Pinch: A Handy, Quick Start Guide to Plotting Your Novel



ACT ONE

Glimpse of Regular Life: Your story begins *in media res*, establishing the average life of your main character. This can be a chapter or simply a paragraph introducing your character before their life forever changes.

Trigger / Inciting Incident: The moment where everything goes wrong. Something changes for your character, the antagonist appears, the main conflict arises, *something* happens to upset the status quo of their life.

The Point of No Return: Act One closes with your character deciding to throw themselves into the conflict. They make a decision, open a door, kiss that person (or kill them!) — the metaphorical Rubicon is crossed and your character cannot go back to their comfortable, regular life. They're In This now.



ACT TWO

The Struggle: Employ peaks and valleys (successes and failures) as your character tries to achieve their end goal, a process hampered by increasingly difficult obstacles. Remember that in the Struggle, your character is trying to perpetuate their False Belief — the lie they stubbornly cling to and which their character arc is designed around.

Pinch Point: This is a moment where the story's antagonist rears their ugly head. Your character, and your readers, are reminded of the conflict they should *really* be worried about.

Mini Climax: The peaks and valleys of Act Two should build to a mini-climax. The action reaches a dramatic peak with a confrontation with the antagonistic forces — a conflict which has lasting, story-changing consequences.

Midpoint Mirror Moment: The mini-climax has thrown your character into a state of turmoil and upheaval. At this moment, halfway through the story, halfway through their emotional arc, your character figuratively looks in the mirror and asks themselves the following questions: *Who I am? Who am I supposed to be? What have I done? What am I supposed to do now?*

The Charge: That moment of self-reflection has lit a fire under your character's heels. They're not going to take it anymore! There's no more time to be reactionary — they're going to ACT. They stop being reactionary to the ups and downs of the plot and start making their own — possibly bullheaded, possibly reckless — decisions.

Dark Night Of The Soul: The character's actions as they tried to Take Control of their life wound up causing their life to fall fantastically apart. (Oops.) This is the darkest moment, where the character retreats back into the comfort of their false belief, thinks everything is lost, and that they'll never make it out of this mess they have made for themselves. The night is darkest, they say, before the dawn.



ACT THREE

Aftermath: Your character emerges from the Dark Night of the Soul with the necessary vigor to prepare for the final confrontation. Use this time to move your pieces into place.

Climax: The big moment! This is what your story has been ramping up to. The protagonist faces off with the antagonist in an Epic Showdown that ties all your story threads, carefully laid clues, character arcs, all of it, together in a payoff that's exciting and satisfying for the reader. (SO, NO PRESSURE.)

Resolution: The final threads are tied up tidily, and we see how the story has affected all its key players. Your character emerges changed in some way, having thrown away their false belief and accepted their new reality.