

Structuring and Outlining Your Novel, with K.M. Weiland Worksheet

This is the worksheet for February's seminar, which you can find in audio and transcript forms at: <http://www.writershuddle.com/seminars/feb2015>.

Why Structure Matters

Even if you don't plot out your novels, you'll probably find they conform pretty well to standard story structure: we pick this up from books and movies. Like you, your readers will have certain expectations about structure, and if your story doesn't fit well with these, it won't read well.

You don't necessarily need to plan everything out in advance – you can use story structure as a checklist when revising your work.

Ten Key Structural Moments in Your Novel

Novels have a three act structure, divided into the First Act (roughly 0% - 25% of the novel), Second Act (25% - 75%) and Third Act (75% - 100%). Within these, you'll find:

#1: The Hook – the opening scene or chapter; the key question, concept or premise that draws readers in.

#2: The Inciting Incident – an event that starts the plot (note this is different from the Key Event, which is what engages your protagonist with the plot).

#3: The Key Event – generally happens at your first Plot Point, 25% of the way into your story. This is a point where everything changes for the protagonist.

#4: The First Half of the Second Act – the protagonist is in reactive mode, trying to fight against the antagonist / antagonistic forces, ineffectively.

#5: The First Pinch Point – at around the 37.5% mark, there's some reminder of the antagonist's power: this foreshadows the midpoint and climax.

#6: The Midpoint – at the 50% mark, the Midpoint or Second Plot Point, is a moment of truth leading the protagonist to become more active and effective.

#7: The Second Pinch Point – at around 62.5%, there's a reminder of the antagonist's strength, setting up the third plot point and the climax.

#8: The Third Plot Point – the protagonist's success so far is revealed to be a false victory; everything seems lost, and they have to recommit to their goal.

#9: The Climax – a battle or showdown between the protagonist and antagonist, ending in the climactic moment when the goal is achieved.

#10: The Resolution – a short chapter tying off loose ends; don't let it drag on.

Structuring verses Outlining

The outlining process involves more than just structure, and would include working on your characters and theme, not just your plot. Structure will happen whether or not you outline! If you structure your story ahead of time, though, you have essentially outlined the plot.

Exercise:

Look at a novel you've read recently, or one you know well. Can you identify any of the above ten plot points? Katie's book *Structuring Your Novel* has examples from two novels and two movies throughout, to help illustrate the different key structural moments.

Further Reading:

Structuring Your Novel, by K.M. Weiland

Outlining Your Novel, by K.M. Weiland

"Story Structure" chapter in *Story Engineering*, by Larry Brooks