



Story Architecture

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Story structure vs. Story Architecture

- In order to have solid story structure, you must first create the underlying framework. Otherwise it's like trying to put clothes on a jellyfish.
- Structure is the foundation, girders, support beams that allows a building to stand upright.
- But structure is bland without art.
- Architecture describes the artful aesthetic of a building.

Story structure vs. Story Architecture

- Structure = your local DMV



Story structure vs. Story Architecture

- Architecture = Art = Falling Water by Frank Lloyd Wright, Taj Mahal or Zaha Hadid.



Basic Four Part Model

Part 1 The Setup/Orphan	Part 2 The Response/ Wanderer
Part 3 The Attack/Warrior	Part 4 The Resolution/ Martyr

Definitions

- **Plot Point:** A plot point, often called a reversal, is a significant event within a plot that spins the action around in another direction.
- **First Plot Point:** The moment the hero takes on the problem. I
- **Pinch Point:** is meant to show your readers the powerful forces pushing against your hero.
- **Midpoint:** This is where your character moves from being reactionary to "proactionary."
- **Second Plot Point:** This is where the character knows what needs to be done and then sets out to finish it.
- **Resolution:** This is where all the strands of your story's plot should come together.

Part 1 – The Setup/Orphan

- The **opening hook** must pose a question. You must pique your readers' curiosity.
- The mission of Part 1 is to **set up** the plot by creating stakes, backstory, and character empathy while foreshadowing the forthcoming conflict.
- In Part 1 the hero is an **orphan** unsure of what will happen next. We feel for him, we empathize with him..
- Part 1 ends when the hero is made aware of the arrival of something new in his life that is very challenging or scary. This is the **First Plot Point. Everything changes for your character.**
- The character's reaction to the First Plot Point marks the beginning of Part 2.

1. The Most Important Moment: The First Plot Point

- Something enters the story in a manner that alters the hero's status, plans and beliefs.
- What the hero does in response becomes the story's conflict.
- This is the moment when everything changes.
- What the hero thought was true may not be as advertised. The stakes are now on the table.
- Everything that happens before the first plot point is a setup for it.
- This is the most important moment in your story.
- It happens 20 to 25% into the story.

Part 2 – The Response/Wanderer

- In the beginning of Part 2, your character is **forced into irreversible action**.
- Your character is trying to regain his balance, trying to figure out what happens next. **The antagonistic force responds**, and he is forced to react.
- Whatever the hero needs, there must be something opposing the hero's quest to achieve it. **No opposition, no story**.
- The context to **every scene** in Part 2 is **response**.
- In Part 2, the hero is a wanderer. **His purpose or quest is just beginning**.
- Everything in part 2 focuses on the hero's reaction to the new journey, which includes **his reluctance to accept it**.

2. The First Pinch Point

- Definition of a Pinch Point: An example of the power of the **antagonistic force** that is not filtered by the hero's experience. The reader sees it herself in direct form.
- The First Pinch Point comes **halfway through Part 2**.
- The reader needs a reminder of the **unseen monster we know is under the bed**.
- Sooner or later **the reader—not the hero—needs to meet the antagonist again**, to look in its eyes and understand what it wants and the power of that desire.

2. The Midpoint Scene

- The Midpoint Scene is at the **end of Part 2: new information** changes the experience and understanding of either the reader or the hero or both.
- Everything changes all over again. In many ways, the Midpoint is the second Inciting Incident. The largest difference is that the character's response is no longer just a reaction. This is where he begins to **take charge of the story and act out against the antagonistic force**.
- This can be previously **hidden information or completely new information**.
- At the end of Part 2, just when the hero thinks he has figured it out, when he has a plan, **everything changes**.

Part 3 – The Attack/Warrior

- In Part 3, the hero tries to fix things. Your character stops reacting and starts acting. **As of the midpoint, your character has become someone new**.
- The hero **starts to conquer inner demons**.
- Be on guard against your character's reacting to similar situations in the same way over and over again. If he does, you've allowed him to slide into stagnation.
- Something—new information, new awareness—needs to enter the story to serve as a catalyst for the hero's evolution from the wanderer/responder in Part 2 toward attacking warrior ways.
- Every story doesn't have a villain, but it must have opposition to what the hero wants.

3 – The Second Pinch Point

- The Second Pinch Point occurs in the **middle of Part 3**.
- **The second Pinch Point can be experienced through the hero.** This serves most of the same purposes as the First Pinch Point, including ramping up the stakes and foreshadowing the final battle between the protagonist and the antagonist.
- It's **more frightening and unwavering** than ever.
- And like the hero, **the antagonist has evolved**, too. He's learned how the hero is fighting back. The tension and pacing increase.

3 – The Second Plot Point

- The second plot point **separates Part 3 from Part 4**.
- **The hero learns something** that will bring take him one step closer toward doing whatever needs to be done in Part 4 to bring the story to a satisfactory closure.
- **New information** is unleashed. It's the missing piece of the puzzle.
- There is an **all-hope-is-lost** lull right before the second Plot Point occurs.

Part 4 – The Resolution/Martyr

- **Pace will pick up** here. All characters must be assembled. Subplots must be satisfactorily tied off. Foreshadowing must be fulfilled.
- Both hero and antagonist (if there is one) must have time to put into play the final aspects of their plans. The hero must **face his inner demons** and **complete his character arc** in concert with the final conflict with the antagonistic force.
- The thing about Part 4 is that **no new information** can enter the story. From the second plot point on, everything the hero has to know needs to have already been put into play.

4. The Third Plot Point

- The Third Plot Point must be **another life changing event** that will lead right into your character's dark moment.
- The thing he wants most in the world will be almost within his grasp only to be **dashed away**.
- What event **shatters** the protagonist's seeming moment of victory?
- After the Third Plot Point the story is all about **character and change**. We take a person and force him into a journey that will change him forever.
- Ask: How is my character different than he was in the first part of the story?
- Because the Third Plot Point is a symbolic representation of your protagonist's death and rebirth, this plot point often features either literal or figurative death.

4. The Climax

- The Climax (the **last 10%** of the story) is a moment of revelation for the main character. The character will come to a **life-changing epiphany** directly before, during or after the Climax.
- The Climax will be the period in which he **risers from the ashes**, ready to do battle from a place of inner wholeness.
- Part 4 shows how the hero **summons the courage and growth** to come forward with a solution to the problem.
- The hero needs to be the **primary catalyst** in the resolution of the story.
- That's why the orphan, then the wanderer, and then the warrior now becomes either **figuratively or literally the martyr**.

4. The Resolution

- The Resolution is at the **98% mark** of the story. After all the emotional stress of the Climax, readers want a moment to relax.
- They want to see the character rising, dusting off his pants, and moving on with life.
- And, if you've done your job right, they'll want to spend a little more time with these characters they've grown to love. The shorter the better. Your story is essentially over.
- Closing lines: their memorability isn't nearly as important as the feeling with which they leave readers. There should be a sense that your characters' lives will continue after the story.

4. The Final Act

- **No new expositional information** can enter the story. If anything appears it needs to have been foreshadowed, referenced or already in play. The same applies to characters.
- The hero should demonstrate that he has **conquered the inner demons** that have stood in his way in the past.
- The more the reader feels the character's **heroism**, the more effective the ending will be.

Three Tent Poles

- **The First Plot Point**, at approximately 20 to 25 percent through the story.
- **A context-shifting Midpoint**, at precisely the middle of the story.
- **The Second Plot point** at about 75 percent through the story.

Everything else in your story is connective tissue. Once you know your milestones, those scenes practically write themselves.

Story Milestones – Three Tent Poles in Red

- The **opening scene** or sequence of your story.
- A **hooking moment** in the first 20 pages.
- A setup **inciting incident**
- **The First Plot Point**, at approximately 20 to 25 percent through the story.
- The **First Pinch Point** in the middle of Part 2.
- **A context-shifting Midpoint**, at precisely the middle of the story.
- A **Second Pinch Point** in the middle of Part 3.
- **The Second Plot point** at about 75 percent through the story.
- The final **resolution**.

Story Analysis – Gone Girl

- **First plot point:** Amy (the wife) confesses from within her diary that she believes Nick, (her husband) may be capable of – indeed, intending to – kill her. This concludes a setup in which the police, and the readers, have been led to believe he is somehow involved with her disappearance.
- Amy's diary will soon surface as part of the evidence exposing Nick's complicity. In writing this, in telling us about it at precisely this point, she is defining and launching the hero's story quest, because Nick is about to get nailed for his wife's disappearance and, presumably, her death.

Story Analysis – Gone Girl

- **Midpoint:** Amy has planned to frame Nick for what will not only be her disappearance, but her murder. Because she intends to kill herself as the grand crown jewel of her frame-up scheme, which she also explains to the viewer, piece by diabolical piece.
- In effect, the story transforms from a mystery (discovering what really happened) to a thriller (sticking around to see what will happen).
- The fun of the second half of the story is seeing how Nick will discover the truth, and what happens to everyone when he does.

Story Analysis – Gone Girl

- **The Second Plot Point:** Nick is being interviewed on television about the disappearance of his wife. It's a strategy cooked up by his lawyer, who knows that in the face of all the planted evidence Nick would benefit from some sympathetic public exposure.
- At the end of this interview he looks directly into the camera, and promising to take care of her, he tells Amy that he loves her.
- **Resolution:** She wins. A few pages later she slits the throat of her lover (an obsessed old boyfriend) to cement a story that has him kidnapping and holding her, until she took advantage of a weak moment and killed him in her escape.

Six Core Competencies: Concept

- An idea is a *seed*.
- Without planting, nourishment and watering, they are nothing more than little buds.
- Sometimes we aren't sure what seed we hold in our hands. So we plant it, nourish it, and soon it begins to show itself for what it is. What it *should* become.
- If you stare at the seed long enough, you begin to ask it questions. Who are you? What can you do?
- You play with the seed until the questions – the *what if?* questions – begin to possess you. When one of them quickens your pulse, you know your seed has just become a *concept*.

Six Core Competencies: Character

- Love her or hate her, she's complicated, multi-dimensional.
- She has a backstory. She has character arc. And she's full of inner demons, all of which she denies.
- We can relate to her, or at least empathize with her, and she is full of sub-text.
- The ending is where true, third-dimension character emerges.
- The character is never the story. The character is our window *into* the story. It's the character that draws us in, and it's *what happens* to the character that provides the stage for us to see who he is.

Six Core Competencies: Theme

- Theme is what your story *means*. How it *relates* to reality and life in general.
- It can be a principle or an inevitable stage of growing up. It can be subtle or it can be on the nose. It can be contextual, or it can be the centerpiece of the story.
- Theme is the *relevance* of your story to life—to reality, as reflected in your fiction. Theme is love and hate, the folly of youth, the treachery of commerce, the minefield of marriage, betrayal, friendship, loyalty, wealth and poverty, wisdom and greed, lust and laughter.
- The story has to pierce the heart of the reader. A great story is always entertaining... and always relevant to life on a personal level.
- The theme may not emerge until after you've written your first draft.

Six Core Competencies: Structure/Plot

4 Part Model:

Part 1 The Setup/Orphan	Part 2 The Response/ Wanderer
Part 3 The Attack/Warrior	Part 4 The Resolution/ Martyr

Six Core Competencies: Structure/Plot

- Let's talk about sex. Stage setting. Foreplay. Anticipation.
- Sex has structure to it, when it comes to what happens when.
- And if you doubt that, when was the last time you began with an orgasm and ended it by undressing your partner and pouring a glass of wine?
- You know how it ends before you begin. Getting there is the real story.
- You discover structure in storytelling by looking beneath and beyond the concept and characters, and discover the sequence of the story's architecture.

Six Core Competencies: Scene Execution

- This scene has a succinctly defined mission. You know precisely what needs to be put into play, the manner in which it changes the story going forward. Now it's a question of *how* to make it happen.
- Every scene has:
 - Objective
 - Opposition
 - Outcome
 - Something unexpected

Six Core Competencies: Writing Voice

- It's all about the story... until the voice detracts from it. In that case it's a deal killer.
- Voice is not only a unique way of putting words together, but a unique sensibility, a distinctive way of looking at the world. We want to read an author who is like no other. An original. A standout. A voice.
- How can you develop your voice? To some extent it happens all by itself. Stories come from the subconscious. What drives you to write, to some extent, are your own unresolved inner conflicts.
- You can facilitate voice by giving yourself the freedom to say things in your own unique way. You do not talk exactly like anyone else, right? Why should you write like everyone else?

For Pantsers:

You can continue to write your stories organically, but keep in mind the five moments on which your story depends:

- The opening hook
- The First Plot Point
- The Midpoint (context-shifting transition)
- The Second Plot Point
- The ending

Conclusion:

- Successful storytellers put it all together with a value-added panache and intuitive insight that defies definition or description.
- They *get it*, and they deliver with a distinctive narrative sensibility that exceeds the sum of its parts.
- These writers seize the moment in a way that is beyond emulation.

Inspiration:

The elusive magic that brings it all together is instinct.

If you're a writer and you actually write, you're already living the dream.

We are alive in a way that others are not.

Bibliography

- ***Story Engineering* by Larry Brooks**
- *Story Fix* by Larry Brooks
- *Story Structure* by Victoria Lynn Schmidt
- *Super Structure – The Key to Unleashing the Power of Story* by James Scott Bell

Thank you!

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