

Shakespeare's 5 Act Structure

Act I: Exposition or Introduction

- Introduces characters and setting
- Introduces any/all thematic elements (issues/topics) that are going to resonate throughout the story
- Introduces any problems or goals your protagonist is facing (i.e. the conflict).

Act II: Rising Action

- During the Rising Action, the basic conflict introduced in Act I is complicated by secondary conflicts and obstacles to keep our protagonist from reaching his or her goal
- An antagonist is not always a living being. Substance abuse, hunger, disease, and flaming space rocks are all examples of antagonists that can shape your character along his journey.

Act III: Climax

- Also known as the turning point
- The Climax marks a notable change, for better or worse, in the protagonist's journey towards their goal.
- This point begins Act III, accelerating the roller coaster ride of events your character must experience before her story is resolved. With tragedy, the protagonist begins the story on top of world before everything begins to unravel,
- This is where the bulk of the drama or action takes place.

Act IV: Falling Action

- During the Falling Action, the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist finally comes to a head, and a clear winner and loser are determined.
- Oftentimes, the main character experiences a 'False Victory' or 'False Defeat'. As you may have deduced, a 'False Victory' is punished with a final defeat, while the 'False Defeat' is rewarded with a true victory. This is readily apparent in tragedies, action, and romantic films.
- May also contain a final moment of suspense, in which one or more possible outcomes are in doubt until the Resolution.

Act V: Dénouement or Resolution

- The Dénouement or Resolution ties up all the loose ends and concludes the story.
- All of the conflicts are resolved, the characters return to normalcy
- The viewer experiences an emotional release (catharsis).
- Traditional tragedies end in a catastrophe that leaves the protagonist a shell of his former self. Much like life, your story must be a roller coaster ride of action and emotion.
- Usually, for every positive event your protagonist experiences, it must immediately be followed up by a negative event.